

what she holds



# what she holds

*poems by d. ellis helps*

**d. ellis helps, publisher**

**Bulverde, Texas**

~ 3 ~

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*d. ellis phelps, Bulverde, Texas*

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*The reason this image is perfect for this book is the definition of akène: a small, dry, one-seeded fruit that does not open to release the seed. The writing of this volume of poetry was a transformative act and a central part of my effort to heal and reconcile a difficult relationship with my father, posthumously. The book's title refers to the need to let go of grief over the loss and many other traumas involved in this eons-long relationship, one I am sure has lasted lifetimes. The akène seed "cannot" let go in nature but as Chardet's image title suggests, one can let go metaphysically if one believes. This possibility is at the heart of this writing and thus, makes his art perfect for mine. Visit Philippe here: [www.philippechardet.com](http://www.philippechardet.com) & <https://www.flickr.com/photos/philippe-c>*

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for my father



*...She was the perfect seedbed  
for the demon lover.  
Every encounter with friends and flower  
released bolts of energy.*

*Determined to save her life,  
she wore only white,  
tended her garden  
and a few close friends,  
baked daily bread.*

*And in one year alone,  
wrote 366 poems.*

*~Marion Woodman, *Coming Home to Myself**



**alchemical fire**

## uninvited

born

my breath  
my body

into this:

*she left you  
in your crib*

*you know  
when you were two*

*she went down the road  
to see that man*

~

still  
i wanted

precious one  
cherished one

what is a child to do  
when what she holds

—is too much

~

on mother's day

this child  
of eight

chose~

the flowers

[in the car  
you wait]

carnelian rose

—french  
provincial

vase:

miniature  
polyurethane

molded

for life

~

later you  
hated

again

your voice  
my eyes

this vase

my mother

on the floor

~

still

i wanted

pretty one  
strong one

~

when i  
was twenty

there were parties  
& men

—no more

wanting

numb girl  
fun girl

~

forgetting

the day  
i came home

—a woman

my breasts  
my hips

full

you must have seen  
and called it betrayal

soft under-belly

becoming

me begging

him inside

my body

—mine

~

*you're getting fat*  
you say

your disgust  
my condemnation:

—alchemical fire

i do not know this  
but we are

making:

*transformative soup*

& i  
have left you

for another

man

~

is this the day

you turned  
away

—decided

i must be

like her

later my skin  
began to sting

~

one woman told me:

when evening  
comes her husband

ties knots

turquoise twine  
has consumed  
the yard

he is building  
a trellis

for a bean vine  
—transparent

wine veins

out of control

~

the plant she says  
has not produced

enough for even  
one small meal

yet he  
will not

cut it down

~

again  
i want

again  
i want

never mind  
what good it is  
or  
whether it will last

i want

—what lives

i want turquoise

i want twine

## after the roses

maybe it was  
mother's day

that made him hate

my love for her  
(special attention)

my fear of him

more than other days

*she left you  
in your crib*

*you know  
when you were two*

*went down the road  
to see that man*

my father's voice  
—intimate

whisper

~

he drove me to the florist shop  
—gave me a twenty

waited in the car

a child of eight  
i chose

my mother's gift  
alone

knowing i loved her  
knowing somehow

i shouldn't

~

at home:

my mother  
wearing blue

the outfit new

her round hips  
buxom breasts

brickhouse body  
—thinner now

than sometimes

~

her slim white  
fingers frying a hen

dipping drumsticks:

raw whipped egg

white flour  
oil heating  
in black iron

~

after we prayed

over the batter  
—crisp brown

after we prayed

over the white bread  
spread with sweet

cream butter

after i sopped up  
the last drop  
of brown gravy:

thick with pepper  
thick with grease

after i gave her  
the roses &

she held me:

her crooked smile  
her laugh liltng

my head on her chest  
her moist breath

~

( i cannot  
say it )

it is not happening

now my body

not knowing

the difference

## gut punching

i was thin

my pelvis  
caving in

ribs      like wires  
—corseting    my

barely-there body  
—a pale ballet

~

in the fall  
of my fourteenth

year

i shopped for shifts:

dresses    straight  
cloth sacks  
empire waist

i bought six  
& chose

one      i'd wear  
the first day  
of high-school:

navy blue  
& yellow

linen

yellow  
fish-net

hose

~

the first day  
the first week

came and went  
me bent over

bile coming up

letting go

~

my parent's bed  
my hot hot head

my mother  
her cool hand

my father  
kneeling

*please*  
*eat something*

he said

~

age eighteen  
with *freshman*

*fifteen* a  
carat diamond

on my left hand

my hips round  
my buxom breasts

substantial  
full of myself

not a waif

a woman

~

*you're getting fat*  
he said

—gut punching

~

there were days  
( for years )

when i

didn't

eat

a thing

~

maybe i looked  
too much like her

maybe i was  
splitting my jeans

maybe this had  
nothing at all

to do    with me

## **i needed to know**

i was older

after my own  
husband's

hand

after the corners  
after the plaster

cracked

i needed  
to know:

*mother*

*when did the  
hitting begin*

*before you were born*  
she said

~

i was older

after the  
intimate whisper

after the beast

after the flooding

~

i needed  
to know:

*mother*

*why didn't we leave*  
*why didn't you take us*

*away*

~

sometimes

an answer

singes

off

all

your

skin

## in the dream lodge

we hadn't spoken

for years—  
    fragmented

from a distance:

(construct

of time    illusion

    of space)

argument  
as usual

~

always    i wanted  
    to call  
    to come to you

one more time

(isn't this  
what i am doing  
now)

trying to reach you

passed    past

intervening  
long story

so many words

*my heart has hardened*

you said after telling me  
your version of the truth:

*you are not even mine*

~

maybe  
this was you

exacting punishment  
[deserved]

maybe  
it was the drugs

no matter

i couldn't bring  
myself to take

your beatings  
anymore

~

i left you  
to your son

not (a bastard)  
like me

maybe you'd  
work it out

man to man

~

the day he called  
to say this would be

your last

i drove

the road home

singing

hymns of a childhood

faith    praise

for a god

i hoped

could understand

~

in the room:

your wife    (my age)  
beside you    my brother

not me

out loud i spoke:  
to the elements  
to the ether

*i am coming to you  
no need to wait*

*we are in  
the dream lodge  
now*

nothing  
between us  
anymore

out loud i sent:  
angels  
jesus (even)

isn't faith facing doubt  
seeing beyond what is

~

maybe i heard you  
or  
maybe you (finally)

heard me

you  
restless

breathless

passing

past

nurse

leaning close

discerning

your last words:

it was a hymn

& you were

singing

## fragile folds

in the kitchen

by the door  
to the den

blue    cabinets

where you keep  
      whiskey

—decanted  
in cut crystal

its lid—a ball  
round & cool

in my small hand

~

before    you  
come in

my mother  
and i

sometimes    singing  
sometimes    silence

~

today        she is tired  
so i sit      having tea

with dolls

(white  
lace—worn

with time

tiny pearls  
holding

fragile folds)

~

the back door  
sucks open

*what will it be  
this time*

~

blue cabinets  
by the door

to the den

—reach in  
swig the brew

take the sip  
that changes

you

## for tea with dolls

november comes

a flush  
of cadmium &

sky

this month  
—you said

i do

the two of you  
certain of love

~

november comes

this sun  
—a low southern

slant  
warming age

spotted skin

& i  
am captive

of this  
stiletto:

the night  
you slammed  
her head

(it was  
something  
she said)

and would not  
stop the cabinets  
—clapboard—

slapped blue

dark brown hair  
—a wad  
in your hand

~

november comes

this scene  
—indelible:

a child's chair  
(for tea with dolls)

split in half  
flat

& i'm  
at your feet

on my knees

*please please*  
*daddy please*

**bookkeeper i am your daughter,**

*...believing that by loving I could hold what I loved,  
forgetting that I loved because I couldn't...*

~Kimberly Johnson

## **satisfaction of facts**

i worked

temp as a bank  
teller once

—an exacting  
position

counting back

change  
arranging

bills: back to back

face value  
showing

each coin  
dropped

—appointed slot

bottom line  
balancing

~

& i made a's:

eighth-grade

bookkeeping

columns

rows

rare

satisfaction

of facts

adding up

a relationship

of numbers

i envy

~

& here

i am

(again)

trying

to balance

the books

to prove

a solution

the answer:

i know

i cannot

show my

work

~

like the time  
you knelt

at my desk  
some algebraic  
function

—my nemesis  
you

prying my  
understanding

(crowbar  
of will)

you never

let me

fail

~

if not for  
early mornings

you taking me  
to school

before work

picking me up  
long after

if not for you  
my teacher  
my tutor

i would have

~

when i was  
grown

& we  
hadn't

spoken

i wrote  
for thirty days

in a row

notes trying

to align

my love  
my gratitude

for these  
simple things:

fool's gold  
in colorado  
streams

ballet lessons  
ball games

—sewing scissors  
engraved with my name

~

no matter

~

no matter  
how i tried

to reconcile

—too many  
lines blurred

between

you and your  
accounting

~

*please*

forgive this

[debt]

i cannot  
pay

## daddy watching

on this porch

—wooden slats  
i've nailed—

learning to use  
a hammer

(daddy watching)

~

—a child—

i sit  
(for hours  
sometimes)

once:  
i clipped each hair  
off my never-shaved

legs with  
sewing scissors

mamaw kept in the  
*singer* cabinet

~

i know supper  
is coming soon:

mashed potatoes

peas    sweet tea

iron skillet  
full of lard  
—heating

~

her voice  
—a raspy lilt—  
laughing

*chase that chicken  
bring it here*

~

sweat & giggles  
the running feet

—the prize

~

i don't remember

the crunch  
of egg batter

fried

but how the hen was  
—still warm

white feathers

& blood stuck  
on my thumbs

## **a fresh wound**

i have mown  
this lawn

& set sprinklers  
out—sentinels

stepping off  
each inch

this staccato stitch  
—banal bliss

~

sun slants across  
this clean cut

& satisfied  
i sit—cold

concrete blessing

my skin

~

in the kitchen  
—my mother

singing—

though hers  
is not

a fresh wound

the hen  
she fries

still bleeds

~

at the table:

sweet tea  
white bread

crisp    silence

~

is this  
the night

my lungs  
unplugged

her body    hurled  
her head

—a thud

~

& i    awake  
      a witness

unwilling

## **a number i should call**

i wake  
the night

screaming

in this house:

a man  
—my father—  
stands

where he  
should not  
be in

the door  
—a sheath  
—a sheet

covering

~

i wake  
the night

screaming

in this house:

he  
—coming—  
in the front

door

not locked  
not safe  
not sane

—memory  
exhumed

~

i wake

the night

screaming

in this house:

a child  
—myself—  
beside me

*get the poker*  
i say

*from the fire*  
*go!*

(because i  
know because  
i know)

~

but she

—an aqualung  
unplugged—

does not go

~

i wake  
the night

screaming

in this house:

my mother  
—a knife  
on the stand—

and me

in the bed  
by the wall

—a number  
i should call

## switch-back

—slit of morning—

& i  
hostage of this:

restless moon

dark  
sudden  
wave

~

this switch-back  
in my throat:

a man  
his gun

(as if i  
didn't believe  
him the first  
time)

~

persistent  
insistent

visiting again

my body  
this bed

spasm of disbelief

~

(no) i choose not

(no) i will not

(no) this cannot

be so



**neither flesh nor fleshless ....at the stillpoint,  
there the dance is...**

~T. S. Eliot.

## low tones

on the day  
of the dead

you visit

—formless  
not figure

but—figment only

scent:

thick & sweet  
hovering

~

what can i say  
that i

have not

said before:

do i speak  
of this

long  
love

sharp  
dissonant

~

should i sing  
the low tones

          try to touch  
you—      silk

without a loom

## **doubling back**

as if no time  
has passed

since the day  
you did

i sob

this grief  
—a solitary burden

this pain  
my stomach  
my skin

aching

my body  
your body

scattered

~

from the eaves  
a mockingbird sings  
—lone sentinel

watching

huge white

clouds  
billow

bloom

bringing breeze

~

a private plane  
circles overhead

doubling back  
returning

disappearing  
in the south

i think how you  
arranged yourself

without us

hired a pilot  
had your ashes

scattered

over the ocean's  
—emerald coast

~

how you loved to fly

*everything looks so  
peaceful*

*from up here*

you said  
the last time  
we went up

together

how you didn't want us

to make a fuss  
how your wife

bowed out

how we planned  
your funeral

on the fly

my brother's wife  
her mother

& i

how that night  
in the hotel bath

your loss became

—a drowning stone

~

mom left first

you waited:

twenty-nine days

maybe she came to get you  
maybe you followed

maybe it's coincidence  
you were married twenty-eight  
years maybe you

rounded up &

hate is love

amplified  
beyond recognition

~

after the divorce  
you wouldn't speak

family  
gatherings

split  
between you

even in death

nothing

has changed

~

the day after  
the priest blessed

my mother's ashes  
in a ceremony

she had planned  
chapter and verse

every song  
a favorite of hers

—a message

we laid  
mortuary grass  
beside the runway

your airplane hangar  
looking on

surrounded your  
photo with flowers

no priest attending

~

i told the one about flying  
with you over our house

you pointing the wing

*it's right there! see it!*

my mother  
my dog

miniatures running  
waving like fools

me gripping the seat

this was your big fun

~

how cold i was

how my body shook

trying to let you go

how as we finished  
the ceremony

—a plane left the runway

how i stood  
watching you

disappear

~

years later on the  
Pensacola coast

my feet found

the ground  
you had become

wading in  
emerald cool

saying hello  
& goodbye

tears falling

your salt  
my salt

—dissolving

**what the darkness hid**

## **weeding the surface**

if you ask  
i will tell you

what broke  
this hymen

i will show you  
a pregnant ocean

—swelling  
    passed

the point

of her remembering

the mid-wives  
have already come

—weeding the surface  
    habitat of mystery

you      turn your back  
but the seedy

details      remain

a stretch-marked mound  
maps the past

—producing

## the nights too long

you sit—slumped  
elbows at right  
angles your thick hands  
in folds across your broad chest

sock-hatted  
head nodding

~

these days you sleep  
in this chair

(the nights—  
too long)

*last night i paced  
the floor all night*

you say  
*all night*  
you say

again

as if my ears  
could ease

your pain  
i lean closer

whisper:  
*i'm sorry*

weak words that break  
in my mouth

*(i can't help you  
i wish i could)*

*you don't give a shit about me  
you say*

though i tell you  
i do

*i do love you*

you've snapped

& there is no  
going back

## singe

i walked away

but  
i did not

get away  
—without it

(how could such  
a fast hard

burn

not singe)

like whiskey  
going down

or

the first slap

*you are not*  
*mine* you say

i say

*show me*  
*one bone*

*you*  
*do not*

*know*

## archive

she let  
the white  
hot words  
    fly

the kindness  
she'd wanted

—spent  
in the wind

seeds

(she  
thought)

for the flip side

when surely  
    she'd see

~

what the darkness hid:

swirl  
sweep

archive  
of atoms

time unfolding

space

~

but now  
not grace

—grief

## rare flesh

some seeds    need:

forgiving

dust  
brush

soil  
& soon

—turnip  
—carrot

holding earth

~

we    are all  
here:

precious  
blue  
space

//measured//

vibration  
of sky

~

now    under

mud

[time before

time before]

dreams speak

each one  
becoming

the other:

father  
husband

lover

*do not*

*tell me*

*what to do...*

*I will  
tell you*

~

i am

( iridescent )

done.

~

rare flesh  
thin woman

consumed

—bones  
thrown

to dogs

~

seed of this:

beginning

~

call it amalgam  
—mining gold

call it trough  
—splintered wood

hand hewn  
open mouthed

holding out

~

the heavens:

arbitrary

falling

or

fate

will of fire

white

these veins

—color

preening

~

courage

challenge chest

threat

point

point

point:

this is not

a plaything

this is force  
formidable

~

lava burning

takes time  
& no is not

the answer

~

~faith

//interrupted//

~

upturned earth  
full of worms

show me

**not wandering —jettisoned**

pungent scent  
wakes me

stinging my eyes

skin veil

between the worlds  
—too thin

& you are here

again

~

you've arrived  
smelling of cedar

not wandering

—jettisoned  
from beyond

i do not  
now

know

why—

~

later today

two blocks south  
of my brother's house

in the town  
where you spent

your last hours

—tornadoes:  
level homes  
lift rooftops  
litter

(your son's lawn  
with his neighbor's

belongings)

take lives

~

you already know  
these winds &

you have come  
to warn us

~

he is the one  
who pressed his hand  
to your chest— you

taking your last breath

i am the one  
who hears you

now

(he will not listen)

~

but i am  
hours from him

hours i spent  
the day he called

to say it was  
your last

making my way  
to you

the road:

cold and gray

our lives

twisted  
upturned

years before

## first memory

i wear  
pink leggings

a black leotard  
tap shoes

my faux  
fur-collared

coat      thrown over my  
shoulders   shrugging

february air

i am three

~

we    visit  
this house:

—pink brick  
paved front walk  
st. augustine lawn

(not next door  
to cousins—

this worries me)

~

we are moving  
from the place

i was born

face to the floor  
i dig

chubby fingers    fishing  
floorboard barn

where i've hidden my  
small brown    farm cow

(you yelling  
or me    afraid

you will)

i cannot    quite

rescue this quiet  
companion from her safe

keeping place  
    in time

(i want what is mine

i want what is mine)

but    you say:  
*we have to go now*

so i leave her

~

later  
in this house:

we paint  
my new room

shade of spring  
me learning the value

of a good trim brush  
&  
drawing careful lines

we plant  
a plum  
a rose

a willow

—shades of spring

~

from my room  
down the hall

after dominoes clicking  
whiskey glasses clinking

(the past—your ammunition

the present  
your condemnation

you could never  
let things go))

—i hear  
my mother begging

~

once you leaning  
under the hood

oil soaked rag  
crescent wrench

twenty-one &  
full of myself

i say:  
*why don't you*  
*just go*

you say:  
*i've stayed for you*

~

what kind of sentence is this

~

how many years  
serving time

—enough.

here is the truth:

this house

these walls:

all belong

to you

you can have them

~

i know my place

it has no walls

& i know

how to keep

what is mine

**before the crushing**

## hold this

i want  
to know

who  
you were

before—

before    your father's  
hands    before

this    set up

and hardened

~

i want to know  
the boy

who loved  
wide open

plains  
cloudless  
sky

boy

~

who loved

to break a horse  
and ride

who let go  
of the reins  
& slept

knowing  
his horse

would carry him

home

~

i want to know  
the boy

who trusted  
like this

~

empty altar

(red candles  
— unlit)

hold this:

pecan shell  
cypress leaf

berries

—violet wine

before

the crushing

## red rag

driving to market

—a monarch

flies collides

head-on

orange blood  
on the bonnet

i think of you

~

we've been  
to the service station

—one of our weekly  
trips to town

just you  
& me

in the chrysler

metallic green  
soft cloth seats

programmable  
stereo radio

automatic windows  
buttons i love to push

*fill her up*  
you say

~

red rag  
mechanic's flag

dangles

from his pocket

he leans  
under the hood

~

we buy peanuts  
pick a coke:

(red box  
by the door

lift the lid

thin white  
fingers

sliding  
ice cold

glass

from the rack)

slide it out  
pop the top  
watch it fizz

miller moth  
june bug

grasshopper gut  
on the glass

squeegee cleaned  
—such an unceremonious

end & we  
head home

a few blocks later:

pecan trees  
concrete i walk  
to school  
to the public pool

*you wanna drive*  
you say

~

straight-faced  
twinkle in your eye

(i know this  
is not a question)

*come on take the wheel*

pony tail  
ivory skin

solid

muscle  
& bone

i slide over from the  
passenger's side sit

on your lap

barely able to see  
over the dash

*keep your eyes on the road*  
*hold her steady*

you work the pedals  
i hold my breath

my pulse  
becomes a drum  
in my chest  
up hill  
down hill

now a curve  
careen  
swerve

correct

*you've got it!*

*now put your  
foot on the pedal*

push easy does  
& I am driving

~

your grin: proud and wide  
in the rear-view mirror

*here comes a stop  
here comes a stop*

*hit the brake  
hit the brake*

senses fail

we sail passed the sign

half-way through the intersection

you save us

~

years later home  
for the weekend

i'm leaving  
going back to college

this time it's you  
under the hood

of another chrysler

black and gold  
rag top & mine

a gift from you

*dip the stick  
all the way in  
like this*

you say  
*wipe it clean  
do it again*

*check it every time  
before you take a trip*

*make sure the oil  
comes up to this line*

wiping your fingers  
grease in the creases

— red rag you pull  
from your pocket

(how many times  
have we said goodbye)

you pick a wing  
off the windshield

*i hate to hit a butterfly*

i say

you say

*you know  
when that happens*

*you're driving  
way too fast*

## congested

woodpeckers  
—a pair—

red-headed  
scallop the air

each

chuckle & cluck

creaking like

mother's chair

~

wooden & green  
we rock at mid-night

mother

holding my head  
rubbing my chest

this cough  
—unwanted alarm

awake  
alone

together

squeezed

sliced lemon  
burning my throat

*this will break  
the congestion*

you hope

~

sputter spew

this: not the only

bitter juice

i must swallow

~

after an hour

*let me have her*

says my father

kitchen light bright  
my eyes blinking

(i know  
what's coming)

~

on the cabinet  
by the door

to the den  
eye to eye

with him

teaspoon

full of sugar  
in my face

thick hand

decanted    amber

whiskey    poured  
down my throat

burning    just enough  
to cut      this phlegm

~

*try not to cough*  
my father says

placing me  
gently    in my

bed

laying his  
commanding

hand

on my chest

~

how many

nights

have i

awakened

since

congested:

our tangled love

your hand still

heavy

commanding

## the shaman said

it seems  
you want me

to tell  
this story:

about the time  
you rode

your horse  
for groceries

in the rain

how you  
leaned too far

over to  
open the gate

when you  
got home

slid off  
the saddle

how

*the damned*  
*old horse* fell

on top of you

crushing

your ankle

~

how trying  
not to drop

the eggs

(you would  
be whipped

if you did)

you failed  
to catch

your fall

how this

incident

shaped  
shifted

you

~

once

i found  
a letter

handwritten

from your father

said he'd see  
your baby girl

one day soon  
—too bad

she wasn't  
a boy

~

you never spoke

much

(about him  
or any other  
subject)

this is what  
i know:

he smoked  
so did you

so did i

you quit cigarettes  
the day he died

(lung cancer  
took him

before i turned  
three)

you took  
up cigars

you farmed  
together

this didn't  
end well

(neither

did

we)

~

i thought  
you loved

working with  
your hands

turned out

it's what you knew

that's all

had you  
been given

a chance:

college  
med school

he was cruel  
so were you

so was i

~

instead

you built  
our house

board  
by  
board

next door  
to your sister's

worked  
in her husband's

gas station  
after the war

you were a  
navy man

—machinist  
first class

those jobs  
—hard to find

but you did  
& by the end

you owned  
your own:

airplane

machine shop

second home

everything  
adding up

—except us

~

after the dreams  
after the scent

after your voice  
calling in the night

i went to see the shaman  
this is what he said:

*honor*  
*your ancestor*

*hold*

*—sacred*

*a shell*

*fill it*

*with cedar*

*tobacco*

*& sage*

*—an image*

*of him*

*light a fire*

*blow this*

*sweet smoke*

*pray*

~

to this day

the scent

of sweet

smoke

takes me

home

to you

& here  
you are

—black  
raven

telling me  
who you were

*nanih waiya*  
*nanih waiya*

heal  
us



## afterword

### *the costs of pretending not to be mad*

In April of 2016 I received a small scholarship which enabled me to attend a week-long writing residency at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (Mass MoCa) with Jeffrey Levine and Tupelo Press. I took along this manuscript as a work-in-progress.

During the first days, Jeffrey gave us two handouts. They were pages from *Psychoanalysis The Impossible Profession* by Janet Malcolm and *The Denial of Death* by Ernest Becker. He asked us to consider these papers and their relationship to our current work. I was pretty sure he was talking directly to me, as he had already read my manuscript.

What Malcolm and Becker had to say was spot on relevant to me and to *what she holds*. The following, written at Mass MoCa after ingesting these papers, elucidates these poems and the importance of unmasking "what the darkness hid." In what follows, the quoted lines and section titles in italics are from *The Denial of Death*.

### *shared madness*

*[her] insides are full of nightmarish  
memories...anxieties...darkness...desire*

—Ernest Becker

In 2009, each of my parents died within twenty-nine days of one another. They were married twenty-eight years and divorced for as many still. It was a tumultuous and abusive relationship. After their transitions from flesh to fleshless,

the night terrors I have experienced as an adult escalated to the point of waking my husband (and myself) nightly, me finding myself, out of my bed, in my closet or on the floor, escaping, the recurrent dream or psychosis of dreaming (Malcolm): the masculine archetypal dream character attacking and abducting the feminine archetypal dream character.

I began to break down emotionally, with grief over the obvious loss, but moreover, with grief over the ultimate loss: the fact that the trying to love-hate relationship with my father was finally over and there would be no way, now, to reconcile.

I was wrong.

My parents, indeed, especially my father were not, in fact, dead. They, especially my father, began to appear to me in dreams, sometimes, waking me from sleep by speaking my name and sometimes by pungent scent like cut cedar, like cedar oil. There were psychic attacks of the fiercest nature when I would awake shivering with cold, nausea and overwhelming anxiety. I began to sleep with the light on.

For years, I have kept a dream journal and have practiced active dreaming and dream-mining extensively. But now, I sought professional help from a Jungian trained psychotherapist and joined a dream group she facilitated. Further, I began seeing a Spiritual Companion and Reiki Practitioner weekly. It is she who gave me Marion Woodman's book, *Leaving My Father's House*.

As the sadness and depression began to lift, and because I now had the support I needed in order to see what was surfacing, I began to understand my relationship with my father in a new light. I began to see "what the darkness hid." Ms. Woodman calls it *psychic incest*.

In therapy, during hypnosis, I experienced a past life in which I was my father's wife, watching my then husband go into a burning house and never come out, me sobbing, promising him energetically that "I would always love him; that I would always be his wife." This particular session was an enormous relief to me as during my most recent incarnational relationship with my father, I had experienced the most uncomfortable sense that I was my father's wife, not his daughter. Though, to my conscious mind I was never sexually abused by my father, the sense that I was doing things all wrong by becoming a mature young woman with other men in my life overwhelmed me, twisting my natural instincts.

It was also during this time and in therapy that I "recalled" pre-birth trauma in which my father attacked my mother and me, in utero. This recall informed a recurrent dream in which I was being attacked by a man or abducted or there would be a man entering my room uninvited. I would wake screaming, kicking off this faceless attacker.

The incidents and memory of this history evoked writing as a transformational path, for "...what is a child to do when what she holds is too much?"

### **soma**

*man is a worm and food for worms*

In 2005, I began to experience an unexplained, profound fatigue that also made my skin hypersensitive to touch, so much so, that even slipping easily into my swimming pool or my back being brushed by my husband's hand was excruciatingly painful. After doctors were of no help and through bodywork and other therapies, I began to

understand the anatomy of this illness: “ ...my skin began to sting; all of this coming up. ”

These poems and the journal writing that preceded them, have led me through memories that, at once, confuse and counterbalance my experience of insanity (abuse, dysfunction) in the same way that living such a paradoxical reality did as a child, helping me to see very clearly the architecture of being *split in two*.

For example, two years before he died, my father told me (his belief) that I am not his child.

## **Spirit**

*infinite worth in a timeless scheme of things*

My personal theology holds that my father/myself/my husband/myself/the fathers/myself are not separate, that we are all mirrors for and to one another, that souls choose to incarnate and reincarnate, learning the chosen lesson about compassion, suffering, pain, or joy as the case may be. My work in this world, on this plane, as human-artist is to align with my soul's purpose on its journey. My understanding of my soul's purpose during this lifetime is to end the choice to suffer and or to cause suffering; to practice giving and receiving forgiveness; and to learn what it means to love.

The poems in *what she holds* give voice to my personal struggle to align with my soul's purpose, and with my struggle to balance my masculine and feminine energies by healing my relationship with my father/myself. They have served, in their writing, as record and rite of passage, as revelation and healing, as elucidation and declaration, as accusation and reconciliation.

Further, in the process of being present to them, these words have given voice to the dead, and I believe, given them (my father/myself) permission to rest.

d. ellis phelps

April 24, 2016



