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# IT'S DIFFERENT NOW

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in accordance with the requirements of the degree of  
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## *Declaration*

*This dissertation is the product of my own work and does not infringe the ethical principles set out in the University's Research Ethics Handbook. I agree that it may be made available for reference via any and all media by any and all means now known or developed in the future at the discretion of the university.*

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Suzanne Banay Santo

*Date:*

## Abstract

This dissertation consists of an extract from a novel in progress, *It's Different Now*, along with its companion, a critical examination of the doll as an agent of transformation.

Within the fiction, the reader enters an herbal apothecary where four women are at work, making dolls that change the world. Here is the story of how they began the journey together, the foes they outwitted, and the friends that helped them, both human and from the spirit world.

## Acknowledgements

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Section 2: Four years later, 2007

Thuna's

Helen googled 'natural antidepressants' to see what to add to her health food store shopping list. She had already written *chocolate*, meaning the extra-dark kind. Wasn't that good for your heart too, she wondered, feeling the ache in her chest and thinking of Chloe's empty place at the table. The sun hadn't come up, but Blaze and she had already been out for his first, arthritic walk of the day. There were no lice calls scheduled. School hadn't started yet.

It didn't help that it was her birthday and she hadn't heard from Chloe for exactly 3 and a half weeks, since Chloe had confirmed that her flight had arrived at Heathrow safely. Chloe was thrilled about her 'gap year' adventure, starting with Windy Hill Farm, a rescue animals operation in Ireland. Helen tried to visualize it beyond the brief WWOOF listing. It was probably a cold, smelly dump, pretending to be oh-so-cozy she thought, once again looking at the picture of the owner, whose vivid auburn hair was obviously coloured to hide the grey.

Helen went into the kitchen to get the St. Johnswort she'd tinctured from flowers growing as weeds, now that the old lady's bungalow was scheduled to be torn down. The potion was better than any you could get in a shop, because all the flowers had been picked at their peak, with Absolut Lemon vodka as the base. Patting Blaze on his blanket, Helen saw the older woman tending the climbing roses in front of her little house. They had always smiled at each other. Why hadn't they ever really spoken? It just wasn't done like that in Toronto, *it just isn't done*.

Google-ji advised to "try new hobbies", advising that single parents have the worst time with empty-nest syndrome. Well, Helen had the dog. What was she going to have for breakfast.

How about coffee. It has anti-oxidants. She'd take a shower. What was she going to wear? *How about trying something besides black for a change*, she asked herself. How about food.

The Big Carrot was fun. She liked the bags of sunflower sprouts and the heavy-as-a-ton organic rye bread. Then there was always Aroo Boutique. Maybe they'd have an end-of-summer sale. How about something linen? Not that she had cash flow—camps don't have the same rules as school when it comes to keeping out kids with lice. But her mother's voice said in a soothing tone, *a lovely piece you can wear forever*. OK, she'd put it on her credit card. The one with airline points.

Helen began to feel slightly better, now that she had a plan.

And there it was, a beautiful white linen blouse. A gift from *Maman*? Helen thought of a book she'd found just after her mother had died about how our loved ones dip into our lives—time has no meaning for them. She smelled roses and lavender, which they had in Thuna's Herb Store, and turned the corner.

A few steps later she entered the Harry Potter-like shop, with its pungent tang of dried roots and tiny lioness of an elderly shopkeeper.

Carefully emptying two scoops of pink rosebuds into a small brown paper sack, Helen slid the jar back exactly into place with the lid screwed closed just the right amount of tightness. She studied the jars of raw wild honey, and picked one up, along with a pound of fine pink Himalayan salt. She knew that in order to ask for advice, she should spend something.

Evelyn was watching, she knew, but the older woman did so discreetly and without approaching. Finally, the moment came. There was nobody else in the shop. “May I help you?” Evelyn asked.

“I feel upset. My daughter’s gone off, and I’m left alone,” Helen said, feeling ridiculous. She wasn’t sure how much to say.

Evelyn looked at her calmly.

“I’m upset,” Helen repeated, “I don’t like anything, It’s my birthday. My daughter hasn’t called.” Now Helen knew she was going too far. *She must think I’m an idiot.*

“Would you like a job?” Evelyn asked.

“Really?”

“Yes, really. Happy birthday. You have a nice touch. I like the way you shelved the rosebuds. I need a girl here to help me—I’m 82 years old. I don’t want to climb the ladder anymore.”

“I’d be extremely grateful. Thanks so much. Yes. Yes. When would you like me to start?”

Helen came through the door of the shop a few minutes before the arrival time of 8am.



Their first customer had her baby cocooned in a sling across the front of her body. It looked about six weeks old, Helen thought, past the newborn stage, and to her pleasure the young mother had its head in a hat. A baby's head should be protected from drafts.

“I don't have enough milk,” the woman told Evelyn, who opened the fridge and passed her a brown paper sack. Helen wanted to learn about that mixture, and for Evelyn to teach her to make it. She knew that a large amount of it was red raspberry leaves, but there was a lot more than that in it too, because she'd drunk it herself 18 years ago when she was pregnant with Chloe.

Then, “My wife has kidney stones,” a Greek man told Evelyn through a translator. The Danforth was a Greek neighbourhood, after all. Evelyn certainly wasn't Greek. Who knows where she came from? Was she Jewish?

She sold the man a bottle of *Chanca Piedra* and told him to make his wife strong hot lemonade with a little raw honey, and give it to her three times a day, with one of the handmade pills. She said that the plant was from the Amazon rainforest, where they called it ‘stone crusher’. He smiled, and they saw his golden tooth.

The next day the bell on the door announced a young woman, obviously in pain.

“What's wrong?” Evelyn asked, with real concern.

The girl pointed to her crotch. “I can't stand it!”

“Have you been eating sweets?” Evelyn asked with no accusation.

“Yes, I ate a box of cookies, and within a couple of hours!”

“Sit down.”

“I can’t!”

“Alright.”

Evelyn climbed the ladder nimbly, retrieved a jar of *Pau d’arco*, and using an ancient balance scale, weighed some of the shredded inner bark out.

“Make this into a decoction, drink it, and douche with it twice a day for three days. Stop eating sweets and fruit, and do not drink wine, beer or any liquor. Instead you are going to eat this special yogurt twice a day. Do you understand?”

She woman nodded. “What’s a decoction?”

“A gently boiled tea. Simmer it for 20 minutes and let it cool. Do you have a glass or enamel pot?”

“No.”

“Then buy this too.” Evelyn rummaged and retrieved an earthen pot. “Soak it first, or the pot will crack.”

The next customer wore a tie-dyed off-the-shoulder t-shirt with a pentagram medallion. Evelyn rolled her eyes and pointing with a movement of her head, instructed Helen to take the lead.

“How can I help?”

“Do you have any magical oils? I’m doing a compelling spell.”

“What did you have in mind?”

“I want my boyfriend to be faithful.”

Helen realized this was the kind of customer Evelyn spurned. Yet she needed the trade.

“We could take a couple of different approaches, so I’ll need to ask you a few more questions,” Helen waded in, visualizing transforming the dusty back room into her consulting chamber, lit by fairy lights. “Are you certain this man is the right one for you? Sometimes people stray because they know that their partner isn’t right for them, but they’re afraid to let go. We need to make you stronger in the best way.”

Helen waited cautiously, looking at the pulse in the woman’s neck, down at the pentagram again, then back up at her face. Helen gently touched her arm.

“What do you really love?” Helen asked. “What do you really love to do?”

“I love my cats,” the woman said. “I like to play with my cats.”

Catnip, Helen thought, sure some was here.

“How about cooking—baking?”

“Yes, I could bake something.” the woman looked curious.

“Vanilla beans, you’ve got to have them,” Helen told her thinking *Evelyn is watching this sale*. “Vanilla brings love,” Helen ventured. “Men love vanilla.”

Then, “How about touching? Massage?”

The woman looked interested.

“You could make some massage oil. Are you allergic to coconut?” The woman shook her head *no* and Helen continued, “How about anointing oil, with Balm of Gilead?” The woman nodded subtly.

“Heat up the coconut oil with the Balm of Gilead, until the resin comes out of the buds and goes into the fat—it will take a while, do it with patience, OK? It will be solid at room temperature but melt as soon as it touches your skin. It has a beautiful scent, and it will help you know if you are right for each other. It’s best to work with the grain of the heart.”

Hearing these words, the woman’s face softened. Evelyn rang it up with a look of satisfaction. The woman waved goodbye as two police officers entered.

“Evelyn Spitznogel?”

Evelyn and Helen looked at each other and then the men.

“You are under arrest for practicing medicine without a license.”

“Hi, I’m Norman,” the big, bushy man said to Helen, holding out his hand. “I was Evelyn’s late daughter Julia’s husband. I’m here to sort you girls out.”

Helen was so glad to be back that the use of ‘girl’ didn’t seem to be a problem.

“Now the first thing we need to know is why anyone would make a complaint about what’s going on in here. You’re not practicing *surgery* or anything like that,” he asked, glancing toward the back room.

“No, of course not,” Helen answered, “It’s all pretty kosher,” she said, wondering why, since she was Catholic. “We’re more like a community resource than competition for a doctor.”

“Well, we’ll have to figure out who stands to lose from your gain,” he said, writing a note on his clipboard and then gazing appreciatively up and down at Helen, who was trying to visualize the neighbourhood competition. The Big Carrot Dispensary was a different sort of operation than their own. Who could it be?

“Then the other thing is how much profit you’re actually clearing.” He raised his eyebrows. “We are not certain that the ROI synchronize with the exposure of the lease on this building.”

“You don’t own it?”

“Afraid not. It had to be sold and while she’s not paying market rent, in order to justify the expense, we may need to bolster the profit margin.”

“We were thinking about doing something with the back room,” Helen said, wondering how many new ideas she’d be allowed to have.

Evelyn joined the pair and Helen tactfully moved away, sensing that Norman’s eyes had followed her. *How many ideas indeed* feeling the sweep of attention on her waist and on her breasts. *Are they negotiating a deal?*

## He's Gone

Helen pulled both duvet covers up around her neck, listening to the sound of sleety rain slashing the windows, and dreading what the ice might do to the neighbourhood trees. She practiced breathing out slowly and thought of the blood pressure monitor on the kitchen counter downstairs. It had been difficult helping Blaze on the icy steps. His legs were so weak. How could he manage the glazing of freezing rain? She ran her hand over the cover from Chloe's bed. Her own room was never warm. These old windows just latched with a hook and eye, and the wood was brittle and ready to split. The whole house seemed fragile.

Helen lay in the dark seeking the memory of a fragrance, lilies of the valley, which went with feeling safe, when Daddy was still alive, when everything was fine. She counted 7, 8, 9 and visualized moss-covered rocks at the back of their garden but heard a branch groan under the weight of the ice. The computer warning rang, and the refrigerator stopped humming. She took off her eye mask and listened to silence. The power was out. Now it would really be cold. At least Blaze had his fur. She hoped Chloe was warm, in Ireland, on a sheep farm. She probably wasn't though. Weren't they stingy with heating over there? Helen turned onto her right side, the side you were supposed to be on when you were dying, to practice.

She opened her eyes. It was dark. The mask had come off. Her nose was cold. The room was really chilly. Then she remembered--the heat had gone off. She flicked her lamp switch. Nothing. The battery clock read 5:17.

She got dressed in three layers of turtlenecks and two leggings. Strange, Blaze hadn't come to greet her yet, he was still sleeping in his place at the landing of the stairs.

But when she touched him, he was stiff.

"No," she said as her hand registered the dog's cold, and clearly dead, shoulder. Rage turned into a dizzying swirl as Helen realized there was nobody to call. No Chloe, no Frank, no *Maman*, no Daddy, no Blaze. Drawing back from the body of the dead dog, Helen lay down on the landing and wept.

Eventually she poured a large shot of brandy, put on her Canadian Tire boots and heavy parka and opened the front door. The steps were glossy with a thick coating of ice. And there was her neighbour, another person she'd barely spoken to over how many winters. He looked Ethiopian, pompous and proud, and took too many parking spaces with his pickup truck and trailer. All right, now he can pay for his sins she thought, gingerly making her way down the steps.

He assessed her approach with surprise no doubt. He chopped at the ice while she crossed the street, and she knew he realized he would be asked for help. What would he do? His girlfriends, the ones she had seen, had been black—not that she wanted to be his girlfriend, he probably had way too much action for her to handle, she thought, bursting into sobs. He looked at her with modest horror. "What's happening?" he asked.

"My dog is dead," she said, hurling herself into his strange embrace.

All she had to do was hold the door open. He nimbly carried the suddenly flat and stiff body of what used to be her dearest friend down the slippery steps.

“Where should I put him?”

“In the shed.”

Its south-facing sliding doors still worked—an old picnic table received the poor dog’s remains.

Helen returned to her solitary house and closed the door. Going to a basket she pulled out a soft white puff of alpaca wool.

She did not slip into a dark and freezing ocean.

Stella Marie had come into the shop a few weeks ago looking for Lady’s Mantle for her alpacas. Her beautiful long silver hair and interesting knitted sweater caught Helen’s eye immediately when the door chime rang. She’d bought fenugreek and Blessed Thistle too. Helen remembered her hands: strong, tanned, small. She’d asked for Stella’s card and found her way to Polaris Farm, a stone cottage and its barn with a tiny all-female herd.

The woodstove in Stella’s workroom filled her small space with warmth, as did skeins of wool in luminous colours, an iron kettle, a double treadle spinning wheel, and felted tapestries including strips of silk and sewn figures. Helen could hardly see enough; she’d brought home batts, roving, carding combs and a precious bag of pure white fleece.



Her loving companion was gone. His leash still hung on the newel post. His water dish was still full in the kitchen. Helen put on her lice picking gown, spread a drop cloth on the floor, and began to separate the silky strands.

## The Heart

The fleece had been picked through and then gently combed through the carders, flat handled boards with wire dog brush-like beds for straightening the wool. Helen sat still, except for this movement of her hands, for several evenings, watching a small stash of glowing white fibre develop.

While sitting this way one evening just after dinner, she heard Blaze's rabies and name tags jingling together. It was not a memory, it was real, she was sure. She looked up and saw the dried David Austin double rose she'd kept from last summer, and smelling it found it still fragrant though much smaller than it had been when it bloomed, like a miniature of itself. Setting it before her on the old pine table she placed it inside a handful of the fleece and said a prayer. First, the traditional ones, *Our Father* and *Hail Mary* just as Daddy had taught her. Then her own. That Blaze had found his way into beauty, that Chloe would be safe, and become wise, and that her mother had found the help she needed. Whatever that was.

In a white French ceramic bowl from her Grandmother's kitchen on top of a soft bath towel she'd had for years, she poured a little bit of sea kelp shampoo and warm water, then wrapped the dried rose in the fibre, gently wrapping it up, thinking of Chloe when she was a baby, and her mother's kitchen full of brothy soup, freshly baked bread with butter and baked vanilla custard.

The mellow Bach cello suite 2 in D minor played in the background—Chloe never learned it fully, so much was left undone, if only she could realize how much Helen loved her.

Helen took the bits of differently toned rose-coloured fleece in pink, soft coral and gentle red that Stella Marie had given her as gifts and whirled them around the symmetrical dried petals

of the rose, the pure white alpaca fibre and each other, felting them, listening to the arch of the melodies. She left his leash hanging in its place, no need to take it down, she hadn't trapped his spirit, he had found his way into a blue blue cloudless sky. She swirled the warm water, the lightly fragrant soapy wool and adding a few drops of Bulgarian rose absolute to the rosary globe, Helen envisioned the world under the care of a loving and giving mother parent angel who shone a soft light onto all of them, Evelyn, Norman and all their customers.

The early December light brought warmth through the south-facing windows of their shop, and both women gazed out, watching customers window-shop at Virgin Mobile and Alchemy, a boutique with patchouli incense just across the street. Nobody had come into Thuna's all morning. Helen took the moment.

“Would it be OK if I fixed up the back room as a special shop for Christmas?”

“What do you mean?” Evelyn asked.

“Decorate it and display gift products,” Helen answered, thinking about the creamy white needle felted doves she'd been making over the past few weeks. She could put together some baskets of tinctures, oils and teas as well.

“All right,” Evelyn seemed to be making a concession, but Helen was so happy to have a go-ahead that it didn't matter, nor did she wonder what was being lost, wasn't it a win/win, more foot traffic, more beauty, more fun. She imagined Spadina Avenue where she could find a bolt of imperfectly dyed sheer indigo silk, just right for making an Oracle tent, to decorate with tiny golden stars and strings of twinkly lights on flexible invisible wire. There was plenty of cedar in

her own back yard for the fragrance, the blessing and she would place small branches of it under the muslin bags of *Mother's Love* tea.

“I could make some magic potions as well,” Helen ventured ~~cautiously~~.

Evelyn's eyebrows arched. “What did you have in mind?”

“*Love Potion #9, Elixir Vitae*, that kind of thing.”

Evelyn considered. “Made of what?”

“Healthy things, loving things.”

“Yes, but specifically of what?”

“Rum and vanilla, lavender and roses, ginger and hibiscus, rosemary and copal.”

“From my inventory?”

“Yes, and I'll just charge you for the time.”

It might not have been the best deal, what about intellectual property, labelling, liability, was it kosher—of course not, was it Jewish, Christian, pagan? Who were the people who would buy it, who would help Evelyn if Helen was in the back room? None of these questions were asked, nor answered. But the bowls of rose petals, sprinklings of essential oils, silken ribbons around net bags and sparkly chandelier crystal drops brought a sad looking man whose eyeglasses were duct-taped at the hinge into the back of the shop.

“Do you tell fortunes?” he asked.

“I can, Helen said, if you ask at the front,” feeling like a child, even though she was a mother with a living-somewhere else child, daughter, young woman in another country, and suddenly she felt lonely. She did not want another dog.

Helen looked at the man’s palm. They were seated, and Evelyn was looking in at them over the man’s shoulder, unbeknownst to him. The palm had a strong life line. “You’re healthy,” she told him, waiting for a clue as to what he really wanted. He looked at her hair. She realized that what he wanted was for her to hold his hand. She looked at it again and turned it to the outer edge. “Children?” She asked.

“I do have a son,” the man said, “but I don’t see much of him.”

*St. Johnswort* Helen thought, but she’d just point out the St. Francis brand Evelyn had in stock. “Take healing baths,” she advised, “I’ve got a special formula, with sea kelp brine that will help wash away the tears. This is the time when you can start again,” she told him firmly, looking into his sincere eyes.

“Throw away any socks in your drawer which have holes, don’t let your life essence leak out through your feet, stand on the earth under a tree, a cedar tree if possible. And here, this incense will clear your field.”

She gave him a packet of the rosemary and copal formula which she’d sewn into a colourfully striped bag.

“Bring them to the front,” she told him after explaining how to burn it on charcoal in a flameproof pot, “And if you need more, just come again and ask for me.”

He would he said and picked up several more things on his way to the cash, where Evelyn rang up the sale.

The needle-felted doves were a hit, they were selling at least two a day, more than Helen could keep up with, she'd only made 18. Why not set up a workshop, they still had time to invite a few of the neighbourhood ladies in for tea and a session of making crafts together? It was December 15, let's do it now, I'll put up flyers at The Carrot, Book City and the juice bar. The alpaca had been cleaned and carded, she had the special needles and foam to keep them from stabbing through. Three participants signed up in two days, enough to run it. Evelyn and Norman spoke softly to each other just outside of Helen's earshot, but she could see them in the mirror cleverly placed just inside the Oracle door. Somehow the admiration was lacking in their glances, but Helen didn't really feel too sad, just more aware of a missing flavour. She had the fleece, the scraps of fabric, yarn and lengths of bright embroidery floss.

“Stella Marie! You came!”

She hadn't registered but of course there was room for one more at the table and the women all had plenty of space to work. Bubbles of laughter and moments of tears gave way to each other as the women spoke then were quietly absorbed in the small figures each were making of the magically soft alpaca fleece, radiantly coloured felt and ribbons.

A couple of hours later the women left with extra purchases of Dr. Bronner's liquid soap and aphrodisiac chocolate truffles in their jute eco shopping bags. Helen straightened up the table and chairs, swept and emptied the trash before she noticed Norman waiting to speak.

"How long did you want to maintain that part of the shop?" he asked.

"Why not keep it going?" Helen countered, not sure what she was sensing.

He didn't reply, and Helen realized something was off-kilter. She gazed at the window, seeing it come to life with tiny gnomes made of alpaca fleece and felt, little needle felted sheep and most of all what she wanted to create—dolls. Looking forward, she saw that once this small rush of trade paused after Christmas, that the shop might stand stale, with Norman rueful at his QuickBooks. Thinking *timing is everything* she barrelled on.

"Norman, wouldn't it be better to diversify a little? Bring foot traffic into the shop?"

"What kind of customers are you going to attract?"

"Women, mostly, I think.

"Using herbs and hand craft together," she went on, a vague image of poppets and cauldrons beginning to emerge, so shifting her tack, "to maintain our traditional knowledge and support local economies", which seemed to bring him back from the stony-faced land of *case denied*.

Of course, Norman was there at the window to keep an eye on things as the women came in, brushing past him into the back, past Evelyn without even a cursory glance at the post-holiday display of detoxifying emetics, purgatives and laxatives.

Helen took quick note of a small, sad smile between Norman and Evelyn but had no time to try and figure it out.

Thursdays became the highlight of Helen's week, and during the afternoon between 1:30-4, burlings of gossip, chuckles of laughter and a few glugs of hawthorn berry brandy punctuated the soft quiet atmosphere of focused concentration.



## Chloe's Christmas Present

Helen envisioned a perfected version of the apron she had designed, a reversible Japanese cross-backed pinafore. She'd stitch up the one for Chloe in denim with a red flannel lining—it would be cozy for indoors in the winter, what was she eating? Fried bread with canned beans? Helen's chest felt achy, she didn't want to imagine spending Christmas alone, what would she serve herself, ridiculous to cook roast beef. Maybe a filet mignon. Maybe brussels sprouts would be OK, what would Stella Marie be doing? Would it be strange to intrude—would a call to her be welcome?

Helen cut out the pieces of fabric on her kitchen table after unrolling the stiff paper pattern from a tube labeled Japanese Apron. She'd sewn this 3 times before, and each time it was getting better. Chloe wouldn't like the rosy print that lined her own, but maybe she'd think this one was strong! Would she hear from her soon? Helen poured a shot of brandy and turned on the iron to press back the seams, in which she'd placed sprigs of rosemary. When would she hear from her?

## Cross-Quarter Day

Groundhog Day, Imbolc, fertility day, lambing time, Candlemas, St. Brigids, Fred *la marmotte*. A special day to make a felted doll. Why? Helen rehearsed the negotiation, feeling the opposition rise in Norman before anything even began. She'd wounded his vanity, somehow. Why couldn't he just be friends, see that she brought value to the shop, why was there also this other thing, this tension.

*"This just isn't scientific herbalism she told him in her head, and we have to understand the needs of our customers and offer them things which meet those needs.*

*Who cares if Evelyn doesn't want to stay home and tend her houseplants all day long, she further told him when he said, "The future of herbalism is sales through the internet."*

Helen looked down at her hands and the fleece she was carding. Maybe Stella Marie had an idea. She dialled.

"Is now a good time to talk?" Helen asked her friend.

"Yes! So good to hear from you, what's on your mind?"

Four women filtered in for the dollmaking workshop. Helen came forward and saying, "Happy Valentine's Day", and held up the red packets of *Love Potion #9*, Norman watching.

"So, what's the back-up plan?" Stella Marie asked at the pee break once she had checked that Norman wasn't standing behind the curtain. The other women were stretching their legs or browsing in the shop.

"Why do you ask?" Helen responded nervously.

“Well just in case, the weather predictions are pretty bad for the next couple of months, I need a hand with my mother, I won’t be able to get in as often now.”

Helen said that she’d go on Mondays, it was a lull day. Evelyn rarely took a day off but didn’t need her 7 days a week. It might be better anyway, for many reasons. It was always good to have a back-up plan.

It was the beginning of a new cycle of four dollmaking afternoons and Helen looked into the three faces seated at the round pine table in the back room over which the draped Oracle curtain of starry night still remained. Helen wished Stella Marie was there.

There was only one new arrival, tense looking Grace, dressed in sleek black. Phyllis, in plus-size chenille surrounded by tote bags, was in her usual spot as was Constance. Helen wondered about Constance and wanted to understand her more. She must be around the same age as me, or maybe a little older, Helen thought. She seemed to be on her own, never mentioned kids or a partner. She wore a colourful tiered gypsy skirt over yoga pants, had flopped her old shearling coat half on the floor, and wore her mostly brown with threads of grey hair loose over a black shrunken men’s cashmere sweater. Old Blundstone boots completed the look. A cannabis user with a flask of medicinal brandy and happy to share, but smoking was strictly for the break, outside.

Helen began. “Welcome everyone, and a special welcome to you, Grace. We always start with an intention which guides our work.”

“I’m here for self-care,” Grace told them, first around the circle. “I’ve been a bit stressed at work and I wanted to try something new that would calm me down.”

Phyllis spoke next. “This doll is my Crossing-Over Woman, who shows me the way from my Mother years through menopause.” She showed signs of having a hot flash right now, she was perspiring and flushed.

“Sage tea?” Helen suggested— “I’ll make some at the break for you to try.” Phyllis nodded.

“As for me,” Constance broke in, “This will be The Navigator.”

They all leaned forward to listen. “Tell us more,” Helen prompted.

“I’ve been tracking a situation, and I’ve seen things,” Constance said with menace.

“What kinds of things?” Helen asked.

“Nests of black snakes which roll in balls and travel through the air,” Constance began. Helen swallowed nervously, and Grace coughed. Helen wondered if Constance might be a paranoid schizophrenic. *What exactly is that* she wondered, mind racing to the conclusion that *the only way out is through* and prompting nervously, “Tell us more.”

“It’s my niece. I know that Greek pharmacy is connected. The Doll will tell me more.”

Grace touched her jacket pocket for the reassurance of her cigarettes.

“What?” Phyllis asked.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if you all think I’m crazy now, but I’m not. I just see a few more things than most people’s eyes can register. There’s some bad shit going on in that Greek pharmacy, I’ve known it for years, but for some reason now the whole magma stream has been intensified, I see the airborne nests of snakes and their highway through the air and I know it’s time to act.”

“What are you talking about?” Helen asked her.

“Those Greeks are selling date rape drugs; they’re involved in human trafficking. My niece is missing, and I know it’s connected!”

“What!?” They all yelled in unison, Helen getting to her feet. She didn’t want this in her world of felted white doves and tiny elves wearing capes. *We were here for comfort*, she thought miserably but then, they were here--this was the team, this is the work before us.

“All right. If this is the path we have been given, we will walk it,” she said, thinking of Jean-Luc Picard, the man second to her father who seemed to know what to do at all times. She *would* be like him, she resolved, thinking *could this be real?* Dolls as special agents. Anyway, there was Norman with his milk-carton periscopes probably watching them now, then suddenly remembering Frank and that whole camera in the teddy bear thing a few years ago.

“I tell you, that pharmacy is a nexus of evil,” Constance testified in a loud voice, as Norman peeked through the door.

“I think it’s time for a break,” Helen said.

Constance and Grace came in looking like friends, a cloud of cannabis smoke surrounding them both.

“Look guys, “Grace began, “I shouldn’t be telling you this, but I’m a cop. She’s right. That pharmacy is into some bad shit. Just don’t say I told you.”

While transferring chamomile from a large brown bag of pure paper into the sparkling clean apothecary jar, Helen breathed in the apple scent of the flowers and saw a way forward.

## The Navigator

The doll taking shape in Constance's hands had two heads. One up, one down, joined at the knees. Each member of the crafting circle looked at it to try and understand.

The hours passed in quiet concentration. Later the women took home their work in process as well as some sage tea, Kinnick-Kinnick smoking mixture, ginkgo tincture, the lacework of dreams, and one each of Helen's new handsewn needle books to keep their instruments neatly at hand. Helen returned to the craft table, the shop was in order and she felt drawn back to her work, knowing that if she stopped now the mood would be broken, even in the short drive across the Pottery Bridge, up Bayview towards home.

"Norman, what are you doing here?"

He was looking at the figure in her hands, the tiny needle-felted embryo, and she saw combined fear, anger and disgust. What was he thinking?

"Just driving by and saw the lights were on, after business hours. What are *you* doing here?"

It was at the next Thursday dollmaking gathering that the door of the shop crashed open and the spirit of Helen's now-dead dog Blaze materialized, though Helen did not see it. All the women turned as one in the direction of the sound, and the form of the wolf-like animal guarded the door. A male voice said something nasty and Grace said, "I don't want him to connect me with you," taking off through the back door, which locked. Phyllis urinated in distress, actually quite a lot of fluid could be heard pissing out and Helen realized she'd better get a towel. It was

Constance who sprang out of the back room and later repeated to Helen how she'd zapped that fuckhead with her snakepower, confronting his threats to Norman with "Tell him I saw what he did." Miraculously, the bad guy departed, but not before the spirit of the dog pushed the supply door closet shut, trapping Helen inside, for there was no inner knob.

Helen could hear Phyllis calling Constance a moment later and expected them to open the door for her, but then there was no sound at all, and then no light around the crack of the door either. Now what was she going to do?

It was a very uncomfortable night for Helen and when eventually she heard Evelyn come through the back door she shouted as loud as she could.

"What the devil are you doing in there?" Evelyn demanded, looking down at Helen in disbelief. "Norman thought you'd run out the back!"

"Well I hadn't, and I don't know how it happened, and I really have to go to the bathroom."

Helen went home, showered, ate and lying down, fell into a sound sleep. During the long hours of the night, in the entirely dark small space she had seen, over and over, Chloe tying a cord of satin rope around the two doorknobs of French bedroom doors to keep them locked. Helen asked the five-year-old *why* and she answered *so Daddy doesn't kill us in the night*.

That was when Helen knew she had to get them out of there. *But how, but how, but how*. Chloe didn't seem to remember any of it, and the counselor urged Helen to *never speak ill of Frank*. She barely ever had. And *what had happened at that birthday party for Bisavô*? She



never got the real story, that's for sure. Frank mumbling later he had done something to keep Chloe safe. What did that mean? Helen began to hate the smell of white vinegar from the mop and decided to tell Evelyn they needed to use dish detergent on the floor instead.

There was another image, couldn't quite get hold of it. Knives?

It was a flat, overcast day with thin light on the dull faces of the few passers-by. The doorbell chimed and a thin man in high quality technical clothing walked straight toward Helen. Norman wasn't there. Evelyn was at the back counter weighing up and mixing one of her formulae in a huge stainless-steel bowl.

"How may I be of assistance?" Helen asked, as he drew her out of Evelyn's sight line. She wasn't afraid. "What is it?"

"May we use your meeting room?"

Puzzled, Helen escorted him back, letting Evelyn know they'd be consulting for a little while. Evelyn nodded, just barely paying attention, it was a low-traffic time.

"I have something for you, and an apology," he began. She'd never seen him before.

"What?"

"I've been watching you for years and actually, I love you," the man began, watching her carefully.

Helen thought this was strange, but his face looked sincere.

“I’ve brought you a video, it’s actually on YouTube, but I wasn’t sure you’d try to find it. You might be able to help, if you chose to. My time is over now, I know in a short while I’ll have been extinguished. That’s why I never told you I loved you—it’s not a life a man would wish on the woman he loved. Goodbye,” he said. Then he walked out of the shop.

On Thursday after the crafts circle was seated around the table, she asked,

“Does anybody here have a VCR or a TV?”

“I do,” both Constance and Phyllis said in unison. Grace didn’t answer but listened.

Helen told them the story and asked if they wanted to watch it with her. They did.

It was when they were at Phyllis’ place that they started to talk in a different way. For one there was no restriction on drinking or smoking, and despite the clutter of spreadsheets and half-altered costumes Phyllis had a cozy place and offered them a hot heaping hors d’oeuvres tray of leek bhajis, chicken samosas with coriander chutney and chili lime edamame. Helen was normally a red wine drinker but the chilled Pinot Grigio was great and she wanted to relax, she’d been alone a lot outside shop hours. Which was OK, she’d sorted through and cleaned quite a lot of alpaca wool in the evenings but wasn’t sure what she was going to do with it yet.

“So, Constance, what’s going on with you?” she asked, knowing that Constance and Phyllis had been up to something together. Constance and Phyllis looked at Grace. “We’re not sure what you know.”

Grace began. “Whatever you’ve got to say will be inadmissible as police evidence.”

“We actually know that,” said Phyllis, “and we don’t want to put you in a bad position either. That’s why we’re taking the law into our own hands.

“What did you have in mind?” Grace asked.

“Promise you won’t tell,” Constance answered.

“Pretty sure I won’t,” Grace agreed.

“We’re mounting a campaign of psychological warfare against the perp and his family. After all, tit for tat and instead of tit that guy is going to get something completely different.” At that point Phyllis opened the door of an armoire and brought out a strange contraption, a picket sign with a doll mounted at the top, like a crest or the figure at the prow of a ship. But this doll had a very special feature, battery-powered chattering teeth mounted at the genitals.

Grace snickered.

“Our prototype,” Constance said.

The sign read, “Date Rape Drug Vendor”.

“What’s this?”

We’re campaigning, and we have the support of the Raging Grannies too. Phyllis got some of her ACTRA buddies from work. They all want to do her favours, so she’ll give them the best costumes.

“But there’s more. We’re going after his wife too. She’s known all along, and she did nothing but reap the profits. She’s an accessory, complicit as hell.

“What are you going to do to her?”

They completely forgot about the video and Helen only remembered the next day when she woke up. It was still inside Phyllis' machine. However, by Thursday it had 1,289 views on *Franchement*, Phyllis' YouTube channel. Helen's was one of them. She didn't know what to think, yet.

## Mirrors

The late February wet sleet stung Helen's face as she walked toward the shop. In her quilted tote bag was a collection of floral, striped and plaid printed cottons in ripe watermelon, egg yolk and periwinkle, accompanied by a spool of contrasting satin ribbons in Easter egg hues of lavender, robin's egg and blush. To counteract the grey, the cold, the dry. She opened the door and took a look at Norman. Why was he actually here so much?

Going back to her happy musings on the fabric mug coasters she would fill with potpourri and place on the counter to sell she hung her heavy down raspberry coloured coat next to Norman's and studied his more closely, noting the fraying edge at the cuff of the worn brown twill. Looking up, she could see him clearly in the series of mirrors he'd installed, standing while studying his laptop at the counter near the cash. His grey trousers were baggy at the seat, creased from days of having been repeatedly worn and likely the same was true of his underwear.

Norman lifted his head and looked back at Helen, flushing as he realized she was staring back at him. *Guess these mirrors are supposed to be one way*, Helen thought. Placing the fabric, ribbon and sewing kit on the round craft table, she went into the front part of the shop, to choose herbs with which to fill the coasters.

She sensed him watching her, how strange it felt, the skin is said to have eyes. *He must want love, don't we all, but the way he went about it*—her eyes went to the jar of cloves and she began to gather the ingredients of cinnamon chips, allspice berries and rosemary needles. *To remember the best of what we are* she thought.

## Warmth and Love

Helen had felt it before, that very special sense of warmth. Like when Daddy went over the words of the Lord's Prayer with her when she was little, before she went to sleep.

She knew she had been delivered into his strong and gentle hands, unexpectedly slipping out like a seal after less than an hour's labour. Her mother only gave birth once. Now they were gone. Chloe was gone too, no matter how eagerly she had nursed or how heartily she had laughed when she raised her eye from the breast and their gaze met.

The small figure taking shape in her hands materialized as though it had been beamed in, sent itself or was sent, she thought, gazing at its pearly colour and opening to a frequency through which it might speak. The wool allowed itself to be sculpted easily and forgivingly and as she began to create the pelvic bowl, she began to hear a rich, kind voice just at the edge of awareness.

Then there was Frank's face, he seemed to be falling, out and away, anchorless. They say the mother feeds her child's soul through her milk. Helen stood up and stretched, went into the kitchen, and turned on the kettle.

"List them," Frank had said, "Your friends." *Why?* Don't think about this, she told herself. *That part is over.* Look to the future. *Always go towards the brightest light.*

## Charivari

Phyllis cackled, “You should have seen their faces over at the Greek pharmacy! Between the picketers with doll’s choppers, the *vuvuzelas* and noisemakers, with us yelling, ‘We want to be as rich as you!’ Jimmy and his wife got a good ass kicking—everybody on the street was watching, people came out of the fruit stands, lots of iPhones clicking, let me tell you! It’s all over Facebook, showing the banner of their shop and *#date-rape-drug-vendor*. Their fucking evil eye charms aren’t worth a can of rat’s piss, but maybe we should throw cans of human piss on them next!”

Constance looked around the circle sharply. Grace shrugged.

*Mob justice* Helen thought, uneasily but looking across the table at the women stitching dresses for their flip dolls, she knew it was better than turning a blind eye.

“But what about that video?”

“Doesn’t surprise me, those bastards erode morale, and then it looks like only geeks are good.”

“What do you mean?”

“Long term social undermining through the media, drugs and pornography. Deliberately planned. Did you ever wonder what happened to the families like on *Lassie*? Next thing you knew it was all nannies or Uncle Bill because the parents were dead. And then it was the Simpsons, all that American crap, it’s infiltrated our media here too. Did you ever wonder why rap music actually caught on?”

“Did you ever wonder why you could buy porn at the corner store but breastfeeding your baby in public was illegal?”

“As a matter of fact, I have wondered about that very thing.”

“Kind of puts it into perspective, doesn't it?”



## The Method

Helen reviewed the phases of creating the little figure now lying in a stainless-steel colander in the sink. She'd taken a white pipe cleaner and bent it into a forward-leaning lower case 'p' about 2 inches long. Once that was secure, she snipped the pipe cleaner with a wire cutter and then wound on another base for the arms and established a second leg with the final segment of pipe cleaner.

With the framework in place, Helen picked up a small segment of clean and carded white sheep fleece and started winding it around the armature, again and again until she had a palm-sized recognizably human form. On a piece of sturdy grey foam and with a sharp felting needle, Helen then carefully pinned the sheep fibre to itself with a gentle jabbing motion to shape the fleece. This repeated pricking of the wool awakened the tiny latches along its shaft so that it bonded to itself and became an easy material to sculpt.

The problem was that the figure was simply too big and loose—Helen wanted it smaller, and then she remembered a method. Once the kettle had boiled, she baptized the figure with the scalding water. It was eerie—she asked forgiveness even as she remembered Demeter baptizing an infant with fire to make him immortal. His mother had been enraged when she came upon them unforeseen.

*Whatever doesn't kill me makes me stronger* Helen thought, repeating the procedure of pouring each kettleful of boiling water over the poppet, waiting and reflecting while the hot wool cooled, then squeezing the figure to shape it again and again.

Boiled wool, very insulating. Stretchy. Helen thought of a favourite wool sweater Chloe had laundered and put into the dryer. It had become a doll sweater for Patty, Chloe's cuddly

baby. But Chloe had cried. Why didn't she write? *Girls are supposed to leave their mothers.*  
Was that true? Psych 101 for Actors: Individuation.

She saw her mother, wearing a clean blue and white apron, blonde hair up in a chignon. She stood in front of the range in which a beef, tomato, red wine and mushroom stew braised. Small apple tarts displayed on the counter. A fresh salad dressed with olive oil, apple cider vinegar and *Herbes de Provence*.

There was no going back to Quebec though, *Maman* was in the world of the spirits. Would Chloe come back to Toronto?

Helen shaped the little form into a warm and cheerful arms-wide, legs-open seated posture and placed it on an heirloom crocheted too-good-to-be-used blue and white potholder, which one of *Maman's* old aunties had embellished with a white crocheted rose. It needed a platform—the slow cooker.

The smile of this little creature seeped into the atmosphere of the room. The kitchen had always been a friendly place, with its clean jars of brandy covered peaches, pot barley and lentils. A laminated water colour painting of the night sky Chloe had done in kindergarten. In the fridge maple syrup, almond butter, yogurt, organic eggs, lancinato kale and a bone broth with wild rice, shitake mushrooms and carrots. On the table, a floral placemat set with good Danish silver *Maman* did not use after Daddy died and there were boarders in the house.

*Maman* had seemed tireless but really, she was probably just holding it together. Helen went over and picked up the little figure. It seemed to be saying something to her. Rolling up her placemat Helen brought out her needle felting pad and a palette of hues in rose and red of fleece roving. The little figure wanted a heart. Helen began by smoothing a few strands of cherry coloured fibre in a half-centimetre circle, tacking it down gently with the felting needle. It began to take shape as she patiently added strands, tacked and then shaped with the sharp tool, which both guided the shaping and anchored it down. The figure now had its *coeur*.

## The Bust

Helen took the black leather fanny pack off her closet shelf and prepared for what was to come, loading it with the assortment of necessities, consisting of her slim wallet, a tiny bottle of Rescue Remedy, vodka in a 4 oz spray bottle for disinfectant, 2 green gel Tylenols in a square of plastic wrap, a small but powerful aerosol bottle of hot pepper spray in case a weapon was needed, and the Swiss Army knife Daddy had given her for her 12<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Once the waist pack was organized and standing by, she went through her yoga dance routine: Happy Baby, hip socket looseners and prone twists, seated wide-legged stretches, splits on both sides, 100-count Plank, Child, Warriors I and II, Triangle, 10 push-ups, Child, squats, Chair, Tree, Wheel and Star.

Then the mind. Her final phase of preparation was to light a white candle, placed at the centre of her small round dining table, surrounded by five perfect apples. She invoked the compassionate presence of the Virgin Mary and merged with the blissful Sky blue expanse.

Thus prepared, she drove the Jetta down to the designated meeting spot, the very back of the Big Carrot parking lot, and bought a parking ticket for the maximum amount. It was uncertain how long this would take, and it would be better to be safe.

Constance arrived next and opened the passenger door of Helen's car. Her hair was loose. Helen would have preferred that it be tied back for this operation but decided not to suggest it.

“So, let's go over the plan,” Helen said.

“OK, so you're going to go by searching for your lost chihuahua puppy, and distract him while I sneak in.”

“And once you’re inside?”

“The Navigator will tell me what to do.”

This was too vague for Helen, yet the reality was that the girls were missing. To find them wouldn’t guarantee that Chloe would arrive home safely, but it would be a good luck charm, an offering to the spirits who would watch over her and keep her from harm.

Phyllis got into the car next, slamming the door and catching her breath. Helen wondered how the *avoirdufois* factor would play out here but decided it likely didn’t matter—Phyllis didn’t have an athletic role, she was coordinating the social media broadcast.

“We were going over the game plan,” Helen prompted.

“Well we’re all set to video. Everybody’s in their spots and ready for action.”

“How many background actors do you have in the area?” Constance asked.

“17 at last count, all descriptions, they look totally random.”

“And they all have media?” Helen confirmed.

“They damn sure do.” Phyllis said with satisfaction.

Grace was on duty and ready to spring. Her partner was aware of the irregularities but was overlooking them. All systems go.

Helen brought out all her actor’s training, channeling Cameron Diaz in *Charlie’s Angels* as she fluster-ran, breasts uptilted and ass-cheeks out just enough to flag sex but maintain core integrity.

The door guard's head turned as she came on set, so full of juicy juicy,

“Oh please help me,” she undulated breathily, sensing his boner rise.

“What?” his crust still intact but pecker vivid.

“My puppy, my puppy,” Helen moaned, as though she were unzipping his pants.

He stepped forward. She'd landed the hook. Constance slipped inside the door. But he heard the soft clang of metal on metal as the door closed behind him and lunged forward, grabbing Helen's ponytail and the hem of her leather jacket, with the cold rage of those who realize they've been played.

Praying this was being caught on video from several angles and that one of Phyllis' flock would have the wit to call 911, Helen took in a blurred impression of torn leatherette, dirty linoleum and whiskey bottles behind a bar. He hurled her into a side room and locked the door. The sound of his footsteps only lasted a moment, where was Constance?

Turning, Helen saw the two girls, partly conscious, tied at the ankles to steel bedframes. Each was dressed in a cheap baby doll negligee with no underwear, and the smell was bad. With a surge of rage, she took out the Swiss Army knife, and extracting the scissors tool, she snipped each girl's ankle free from the pantyhose ties. The real problem would be getting them outside.

Removing her library card (the easiest one to replace if damaged) from her wallet, Helen slid it between the doorknob and doorframe, pressing gently until she heard it pop. Emerging cautiously, puzzled at the silence, Helen took a quick glance in through the open door across the hall and saw another door leading to a staircase down. How long did she have?

She assessed the first girl, whose tangled hair had streaks of blue in it.

“Wake up,” she commanded, drawing on the body memory of training the adolescent Blaze.

“Whaa?” the girl responded.

Helen seized the girl under her knees, flipped her onto her side, then sat her up by scooping under her shoulder with her right arm and pressing her hip to the bed with her left.

“What the fuck?” the girl said from down a tunnel.

“We’re getting out of here. Do you have any clothes?”

There was no verbal response, only some movement. Helen looked at the other girl, a lighter-boned blonde. Her eyes were open but looked unconnected to the controls.

“Get out of bed!” Helen ordered. There was a slight responsive movement. The seconds were passing.

“Get up, bitch!” Helen was now a Navy Seal, a new role, but it was real. With her face in the blonde girl’s face she passed a charge from the realm where lightning dwells, through the eyes. The ignition started to spark.

She turned to the other girl.

“You run or I’ll kick you to death!” The girl nodded, getting to her feet.

Helen realized that arctic chill and ice melter salt was on the path to deliverance and once again prayed to God and the Blessed Virgin Mary for help. Then she heard Constance and the door guard on the stairs, arguing and it sounded like struggling,

“Run, bitch,” she hissed to the bigger girl, swinging the lighter one to a seated position then leveraging her gravity through the knees to standing. The big girl wobbled.

The first girl took a wavery step, hearing the voices on the stairs and putting the pieces together. Seeing a model for walking, the second one followed, rubbery, how would Helen get them out-

The volume of their argument beneath the floor was increasing and there was a scrambling sound, *now another man’s voice--* Helen became crisp and orderly. She turned and re-locked the door in which they had been held, took hold of each girl’s arm and informed them clearly, “We’re leaving now,” surprised at their dawning confused compliance and thinking ahead to how they’d manage once the winter air hit them. They’d just have to bear it, there were background actors outside who knew what it was like to be freezing when you did a scene for the 35<sup>th</sup> time, *just get through 7 more paces* and then a Firefighter in brown coveralls opened the door, closely followed by another.

“Thank you God,” Helen said, pushing the girls forward, and then to the men, “We need blankets.” They were produced. “We need to find my friend quickly, I think it could be bad,” she turned pointing them to the office which had a staircase facing down.

Opening the glass and metal door Helen felt the puff of lethal cold billow in onto the barely covered bodies. They were past modesty, just gasped at the sudden wind. But a Constable with a strong and caring face came toward them.



## The Confrontation

Helen was looking forward to the debrief at the Craft Circle this evening. She'd been waiting to use the lusciously hand-dyed colours of alpaca fleece from Stella Marie's farm studio, and now they could have the perfect celebration, like the way it was when something special happened before Daddy died.

Returning to the front of the shop, she saw Evelyn with a young woman whose skin was almost grey. Helen subtly crossed herself, to break any negative energy. Here, in public, she mostly suppressed the impulse—it had become socially wrong—but it provided security and comfort.

Then she noticed a customer who was interested in the floral sachet display and went to join her.

“The woman over there is my sister,” the healthy-looking woman began, wasting no time with preliminaries. “I brought her here from Newmarket, because I've heard about Evelyn's success treating Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.”

“Is there anything I can do for *you*?” Helen began. “Are you her caregiver? It can be draining to hold everything together,”

“Damn sure right about that,” the sister answered, picking up a Norfolk Rose-printed bundle labelled ‘Escape’.

“How can I help?”

“I'm really tired myself. What should I do?”

“I’ve got a sheet with recommendations for self-care. It’s free. We have some products here, but of course the main thing is taking the time to be your own best mother, best friend. Do you have children?”

“Yes, three of them, and my husband is like another child.”

Helen winced. “I know the feeling.”

“OK first, rest and good food.” Helen saw the baseline was stable. “Do you enjoy herbal teas? I can make something special up, just for you.”

The woman brightened-

“Fruity or spicy?”

“Both.”

Then Helen took down a special bath formula with a Holy Dove label, with a slightly tentative feeling.

“This is a different approach, one of my own. I said the rosary into the water.”

She took the bottle. “Whatever you did is OK.”

When Evelyn came to cashing out the Holy Dove water, she glanced at Helen but continued ringing things up with no comment.

An hour later the Craft Circle was seated around the round table in back shrieking with laughter as they re-traced the steps of last night's bust. The white wine was out, and they'd been on the back steps for a smoke too. Jabbing away at the little figures each was creating on the altar of their grey foam block, Phyllis began to chant spontaneously in rhythm with the pokes of the felting needle,

*Powerless to harm*

*You are powerless to harm*

*Powerless to harm*

*You are powerless to harm*

After one refrain first Constance and then even Grace added her voice. For whatever reason Helen felt cautious and with good reason as Norman exploded through the star-misted midnight blue curtain.

"Just what the hell is going on here?" he demanded, looking at the figures and the needles in their hands. "Helen, may I have a word?"

The Circle went silent. Grace reached for her glass and touched her pocket. Constance gave Norman's back a glance of searing hatred. Phyllis looked down and considered her options.

"Yes, Norman?" Helen said, attempting to control her breathing, once they were at the front of the shop. Evelyn was still there but did not approach.

"I'd like to know what the hell you think you're doing?"

Helen did not answer. Norman had his mind made up that he knew what was going on. That was clear enough.

“Well?”

“I don’t believe I owe you any explanation, Norman.”

He looked utterly shocked.

“You are sorely mistaken about that. I believe that voodoo is grounds for dismissal.”

Helen barked a kind of laugh, but otherwise said absolutely nothing.

Norman seemed to want a verbal exchange. However, she wouldn’t give the dog his bone.

“Did you hear me? You’re fired!”

Helen just stood there and breathed, imagining the vast underground root system of the old oak tree which stood near the gateway of Mt. Pleasant cemetery. Norman would be there soon enough. No need to hasten his demise. She drew up the energy of the oak through the soles of her feet, which tingled ecstatically. She saw herself from a distance, looking at a small man having a tantrum, and like a cameraman on a crane, saw Evelyn walking into the frame.

“Norman, you’re out of line. You’d best go home.” Evelyn looked at Helen sympathetically, even admiringly.

Norman didn’t move. Perhaps he was frozen. He no longer seemed to know what he was doing.

Phyllis came to the curtain and assessed the proceedings on the shop side. She questioned Helen with her eyes, received some kind of a message and then withdrew. There was a murmuring from the other side of the curtain and the sound of the back door being closed, softly.

“Norman, did you hear me?” Evelyn asked him as though he were in a trance, or unconscious. Perhaps he was.

## Hot

It was getting towards the end of the day and Helen watched Evelyn gather her things. Norman arrived with no visible sign that anything had changed. Evelyn nodded to him, continued placing some files into her battered leather briefcase and then went to the back. Norman nodded stiffly and went to the counter, where he settled himself to eat. This was a routine Helen had learned to understand, but she sighed and turned away, went to the row of gleaming glass jars and began to straighten them one last time. The air felt like steel wool against her skin.

Then, the welcome sound of jingling door bells. She turned and saw a big bear-like man, holding a large and highly magnetizing bouquet of coral coloured roses with contrasting soft yellows and sage green-

“I found you!” he shouted happily. Coming forward, he knelt down on one knee for Norman, who was still holding his pastrami on rye. Evelyn was peeking through the curtain

“I saved you! I was one of the firefighters at the crime scene!”

She extended her hand toward him gently, and he kissed it, like the romantic hero in a movie. Helen’s glee at Norman’s radiating confusion could not have been more succulent. It was her moment to play, but this dear man’s face was so very sincere, with just a trace of stubble on his cheeks. It would be like sandpaper to have rub against her face, she thought, looking at his nicely formed lips.

“I love you! You are my heroin!” He declared, pressing the bouquet into her arms.

Bending to breathe in the delicious scent of the roses, Helen realized that Norman had no idea about The Bust, but she didn't want this darling, muscular creature before her to misread the laughter which threatened to escape, so she bent further into the flowers and allowed the complex fragrance to send love magic into the deep core of her brain.

“Please allow her to accompany me to dinner at Scaramouche!” he commanded Norman and Evelyn, who had now emerged fully, and was standing fascinated in front of the starry curtain.

Remembering this scene and the dinner date which followed it at Toronto's legendary restaurant three nights ago, Helen looked down at the small wrapped wire hand which was taking shape in her own hands. He was a fine, strong man. But was there hidden damage? She liked his green eyes. He hadn't rushed things, but she liked his touch. And his kisses.

She had taken a spool of 18-gauge wire and formed it with abundant length at the ulna and radius bone positions to graft onto the arm of The Doll of Love and Wisdom later. First the wire had received a wrap with strips of gauze bandage, then a layer of chunky underspun pure white wool wound over the gauze. She had boiled it during last night's solitary dinner, then fished it out of the soapy pot on the back burner with a barbecue fork. It was primitive, lumpy, beautiful. Did she want a boyfriend?

She found the skein of laceweight two-ply alpaca, the best of Stella-Marie's undyed yarns, and began to wrap the hand today with length cut from the skein. It was entrancing to watch the small form come into being. She would leave the center open at the palm. It was the left hand, the receptive pole. What would he want? What would need to change?

She cut and wound another section of the snowy skein and then another, without noticing that as the skein shifted it was twisting. At first, she simply pulled another length but began to notice the confusion, so started trying to find the clear path to extract this thread. She remembered Frank when they'd first met. He'd been beautiful too and look at what had happened.

The more tried to organize this jumble, the less she could understand what to do. How had she created this mess? Hadn't she had been careful, neat? She had been too quick, pulling at the joy without noticing the twisting, shifting movement of the strands.

A wave of panic rose, and she began to count her breath. Slowly, slowly, she told herself, it's only wool, remembering the way the midwife guides the breathing of a woman in labour.

Suddenly Frank was there, in the vines, behind the tangled curtain, a small child with brown curls, hiding but calling to her, nonetheless. She felt the imprint of the old man's hand and the thrust of his penis and the hair on her scalp rose. Finally she knew. She had seen. She saw the frozen, burnt etching. She understood what had happened at Bishavô's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party and why Chloe had gone away. She understood why Frank's breathing was so shallow, why the fragments of his soul were here now tangled in her yarn, the rotting vines, the groin hair of Hades. Could it ever be repaired?



## Oh, it's You

Helen recognized Frank from the back as he paid for his coffee, watching the rhythm of jest and laughter bounce along with the cashier. She wouldn't turn and leave before he saw her, she decided as he moved away from the register. A moment later his eyes rested on her then sparked into a nanosecond of fear before self-possession returned.

“Join me?” he invited.

OK, she would. “So, you're a hero,” he ventured once they were seated at the small cafe table. He'd always kept up on local news, good to know what was happening in the neighbourhoods where he had listings to sell. The sequence of his expressions, boyish, shrewd, charming, distracted were all familiar, even as she opened the paper which wrapped her caramelized pancetta sandwich. This little treat wasn't going as planned.

“Have you heard from Chloe?” she asked him.

“Good I bumped into you, I wanted to set her up in a grow-op.”

Helen put the sandwich down.

“What?”

“Yes, it would be a good income stream, easy money for her and keep the wealth in the family,” he laughed.

Helen paused. Under these conditions she wouldn't want Chloe to come back.

## Gertrude

Helen drove the 10 minutes over the Bloor-Danforth bridge from Thuna's to Gertrude's beautiful little Rosedale coach house to check in on her and make her some morsel for dinner. She drew in through the gates and parked in one of the two spots allocated around the back of the ivy-covered big house, which Gertrude also owned, but rented out to a diplomatic family.

Helen rapped twice with the heavy brass door knocker and then let herself in. She loved entering this elegantly furnished jewel box of a dwelling, with its soft, well-worn Persian wool carpeting, fitted mahogany bookshelves with volumes of classics, porcelain lamps with silk shades and slender, cashmere-swathed Gertrude herself in an armchair surrounded by books. Adelaide had no trouble keeping it clean with once-weekly visits--it was small enough that there was none of the fusty, grimy quality old people's homes often had.

Gertrude's face brightened when she saw Helen enter and Helen adjusted her chair so that they were at a friendlier angle, turned more towards each other than the room.

"Are you hungry?" Helen asked.

"Don't be ridiculous," Gertrude answered, "You know I'm on a slow course of self-starvation. It's best that I let this old carcass run dry."

"How about a cup of tea?" Helen asked, thinking that there must be some of the chamomile-lavender mixture left that she'd brought here last week.

"If you insist," Gertrude answered, "But it's merely for the ceremonial value, you know."

Helen set up a tray with a lace-trimmed mat, the teapot, silver strainer, cups, saucers and toasted English muffins with a ramekin of chive cream cheese.

"How lovely," Gertrude said, as Helen placed it on the round walnut tea table.

Some of Charles' things had been brought here when Gertrude had moved over from the big house, and Helen wondered if his spirit was still impressed on them, a lighthouse to act as guide for checking in on his still-living wife. His leather umbrella stand, with an ivory handled cane, a folding spiked seat for the golf course (but the thought of golf always stung, since Daddy had been killed, suddenly on the golf course by a random golf ball to the head). Helen turned away from sad thoughts and poured the tea.

"How are you?" Helen asked.

Gertrude shrugged. A light flashed, and they heard the crunch of gravel as another car drove in.

"Are you expecting anyone?"

"Oh, it's probably the public health nurse."

The nurse knocked, and Helen went to answer the door, admitting the clipboard-bearing individual who assessed the entranceway and then the room without apparent admiration. Was her accent Barbadian? The muffins were now getting cold.

"Is she eating?" Lillybelle inquired, glancing at the untouched snack and beginning to check off boxes on a form.

Helen thought Gertrude would prefer to answer directly, but she was wrong. Gertrude was taking a look at Lillybelle and didn't seem prone to reveal any secrets.

The gap in their exchange had lasted an awkwardly long moment so Helen responded,

"Her appetite is reduced."

"And is she drinking? The elderly become demented quickly when dehydrated."

"She doesn't appear to be demented," Helen replied awkwardly.

“Is she living alone?”

“She is able to manage with her team checking in.”

“At this age, she shouldn’t be spending the nights by herself,” Lillybelle explained to them, as though they really ought to know this themselves, but she would explain it to their stubborn, white colonial blank rich faces.

Helen was at a loss to answer, and Gertrude did not contribute, perhaps she thought this was the best line of defense against officialdom.

“Hearing aids?”

“She doesn’t require them.”

“And how often is she being monitored by the doctor?”

“From time to time.”

“Well perhaps I’ll put in an order for her to be fully assessed.”

“I’m not sure that it will be necessary at this time,” Helen ventured.

“Are you the daughter?”

“No.”

“Then perhaps I’ll bring in the necessary supports. This woman must be monitored more fully. Has she had her flu vaccine?”

Helen looked at Gertrude, who now was called upon to speak.

“That won’t be necessary,” Gertrude pronounced. However, Lillybelle was rummaging in her bag to bring forth the hypodermic needle.

“Your age group is at most risk for flu, dear,” Lillybelle commanded with a gesture of *give me your arm*, which Gertrude ignored.

“Perhaps some other time.”

Lillybelle reluctantly replaced the syringe into her bag and made some notes with a heavy scratching sound. Her lips were pressed together in a firm line.

“You can expect a health visitor to arrive within the next several days to give you a full assessment.”

Gertrude regarded her without visible expression and did not extend her hand as Lillybelle rose to leave.

A week later Helen asked, “How was the doctor visit?”

“Well, it made the plan function well.”

“How so?”

“Now I have the opioids and anti-anxiety drugs I’ll need for my demise.”

“What do you mean?”

“I think you know. I’ve told you in so many words already. I’m not long for this vale of tears.”

“What are you planning?”

“I’ll tell you when Stella-Marie is here.”

“I love the way you tie your scarf,” Stella-Marie said, as Helen entered the coach house.

“Oh thanks, let me show you.”

They faced the large entranceway mirror and Helen laid the scarf over her friend’s shoulders. The sense of Gertrude’s approving eyes upon this exchange was tactile, Helen felt as a background thought, while guiding Stella-Marie’s hands through the process.

“It has to be a wide, soft scarf. Double it, then thread one end only through the loop, snuggle the loop up towards your neck, then twist the two tails before threading them over the outermost section again. The tail can hang to the side or be wrapped in and through again, as you prefer.”

Stella-Marie gave Helen’s hand a gentle squeeze and the women’s eyes met.

Once they were situated Gertrude told Stella-Marie to open a bottle of *Pouilly-Fuissé*. The glasses were cool, delicate, simple, perfect. Helen was normally a red wine drinker, but this was delicious.

“I’m tired of the physical pain,” Gertrude told them. “I’ve completed my purposes now, at least to the best of my ability. I’d rather go *compos mentis* at my own discretion than fall into the hands of random strangers.

It's true, there had been a case of multiple rapings by an orderly at a nursing home. But surely, not one for the wealthy?

"I'd like to keep some semblance of dignity, and so my life will end next Saturday night."

Stella-Marie flinched. She hadn't realized this wasn't a vague, theoretical construct, though as an alpaca breeder, she had first-hand experience of the procession between life and death.

"Mother," Stella-Marie began.

"Enough," Gertrude raised her hand to silence objections. "Now if only that damned public health nurse doesn't barge in as I'm making my escape." She took another sip of wine. Helen and Stella-Marie looked at each other.

Gertrude was wearing a celestial blue cashmere turtleneck and seated as usual in her armchair in lamplight. Stella-Marie had been sitting in the other armchair and Helen waved her back into it.

Gertrude began, "It's a very unusual conversation for us in this culture, but in the past, in Japan for example, it was customary for older people to withdraw."

"I'm not comfortable with this, Mother, but I understand your position to some extent," Stella-Marie said.

“How do you see my role in this?” Helen asked.

“You’d be legally implicated in you were to remain, and I can’t risk that, but I wanted to say goodbye to you formally, and to ask if you’d be interested in the research I collected. I heard about your courage in saving the girls and this would be both a kind of gift to Charles, as well as an acknowledgement to you of my esteem.” Gertrude’s speech was formal, but the tone was rich, harmonious and warm. Tears stung Helen’s eyes. She took a tissue out of her purse.

“Yes, of course. I am so sad to see you go. Perhaps I should leave you together now.”

Helen started her car but couldn’t pull out of the driveway. She was sobbing too much to see.



## Remembering His Holiness

Helen sat at the kitchen table, sewing a little red pouch for someone who wanted to boost their mojo. Even though she didn't feel like crying anymore, Gertrude was dead.

She remembered the time about 20 years ago when His Holiness the Dalai Lama had been speaking at Massey Hall. She'd been working as an usher while attending Uni. It had only been a moment but had always stayed with her. He had such a kind face.

Helen had been guiding him backstage with his translator following when she had the impulse and followed it, to bow and ask, "What's the most important thing that I need to remember?"

First, he had placed his large, warm and sensitive hand on her head, then after a moment he had spoken.

She remembered his response very clearly.

"It's the same if you are Christian or Buddhist. You must accept that you will suffer. That is an inevitable aspect of our incarnated life. But in so doing, and in directing your intentions to manifest the greatest outcome possible (to liberate all beings), your actions can resonate through every dimension of space and time through the interconnectedness of all that is.

Don't worry about having a humble career, just do the best you can with the materials at hand.

Don't be lazy, and never give up."

Then he nodded. The session was over. She thanked him and promised to follow his advice.

After the funeral Stella-Marie, Helen and Tom drove back to Gertrude's coach house for the reception to follow. Not many guests were expected, but a few would need to be served something decent and to share some memories.

Ahead of time, Tom poured a generous tulip glass of cognac for each of them.

"Look, we need you," both siblings tilted their heads forward toward Helen, "apart from friendship there is practicality."

Helen agreed to house-sit here, while they sorted out what would happen next, which was only partly covered by the estate plan Gertrude had organized. Despite having downsized into the coach house there were multitudes of books and Gertrude's voluminous notes. Though they seemed well organized around her beautiful old desk, which had an up-to-date desktop computer, they filled five lateral filing cabinets, the contents of some still belonging to Charles,

Stella said, "Simply put, my father was a member of the intelligence community, and he wasn't one of those who deceived our mother as to his professional identity. It was a vague but a prestigious position, and to some extent they discussed his work. You may find some interesting materials if you would like to help us sort them."

Of course, Helen could hardly wait to discover Gertrude's inner thoughts, amazed that they trusted her to this extent.

"I'm sure there is jewellery here. Perhaps you'd better take it." Helen said.

Stella-Marie answered, "There's time for that. I don't think you'll be taking Mother's pearls to Van Rijk."

They raised their glasses to each other, swirled them in a sad way and then tasted the 10-year-old *Daniel Bouju*.

“If you want to stay here full time,” she continued, “Tom can help you locate a tenant for your house—he’s well connected.” Their eyes met and he smiled.

It would be wonderful, Helen thought, to be in this warm, elegant, well-appointed home, and not only that to be paid for it, and then on top of that to have money coming in from the rental of her house.

“Here’s Mother’s letter,” Tom said. Better read it now before anybody comes.

Helen took the piece of fine stationery and read Gertrude’s elegant script:

My dear Helen:

Thank you for the friendship you have shown me, as an elderly woman. I have learned just how precious friendship is, and how invisible and vulnerable elderly women are.

Within my possession are what I consider key documents. They contain a spectrum of materials relating to the history of trauma bonding, which is a long one. (Why else would Percival’s mother have slipped away with him so that he would not be subjected to the knighthood?)

The evidence of how these introjected patterns have undermined generation after generation is all here, demonstrated by the collusion of those who were charged to protect in the pillage of the soul of our civilization.

Of course, the sacrifice of the best males of an entire generation in WWI, our lawmakers, judges and policy-makers represented a devastating loss which left Canada in the hands of moral weaklings. That being said, the evidence of worldwide complicity between government and corporate interests to exploit and enslave the population is all here, and at your disposal.

However, we are at present in the midst of an as-yet-unrecognized mass extinction event. Members of the public, of course, refuses to admit this into their reduced imaginations, regardless of the fact that they may vaguely have known of a documentary promoting this theory. They simply can't absorb the bad news or re-pattern their behaviours. They have no spiritual or intellectual resources so perhaps it is best that the herd be culled.

A few however will remain. If in that remaining, some (like you) are able to accomplish the true purposes of human life, or at least make progress in that direction, the larger legacy Charles left will be continued. For we were not born to be enslaved, but have within ourselves a noble power, that which transmutes filth into nectar, or meat into a rainbow.

I leave it to you to explore.

Your friend,

Gertrude.

PS: If I am able to help you from the other side, I will.

## Instructions

Helen almost missed the turn onto Heinzman St., even though she was driving slowly. It was an old street and the shabby houses were set close together. Just up ahead was the former synagogue, now converted into the Tibetan temple Charles had specified in his written instructions within the Rainbow Body file.

Helen was relieved to see a parking space just up ahead and pulled in, carefully lifting the basket of fruit and cookies out of the trunk and checking her bag for the white silk greeting scarves.

She presented one of these to the attractive older Tibetan woman who answered the heavy wooden door and the second khata to a younger lama who greeted her in English.

“I’ll be your translator,” he said, with a smile, leading her up the stairs and into a small shrine room where the Lama sat, cross legged on a low, padded platform. The room was full of images, none of which Helen could make out distinctly as she passed. The room was dimly lit but had a heartening quality although it was very cold inside. The heat did not appear to be on at all, Helen thought, wondering if she could keep her coat on and approximating Charles’ directions on how to bow and then kneel, touching her forehead on the floor respectfully.

Standing once more, she first offered the remaining khata and then the cello-wrapped gift basket to the Rinpoche. He smiled, and his teeth looked like a row of Chicklets, Helen thought, distractedly, then re-focused with embarrassment.

She pulled Charles’ letter from her purse, from within a sturdy brown envelope. It had been impossible for her to know the contents because they were written in Tibetan script. She passed it to the young lama, who indicated the cushion upon which she should sit. After reading the content, he said a few words to the elder teacher and passed him the letter. There was quiet

while the older lama read, and then the Tibetans talked between themselves. She couldn't read their facial expressions but realized it was about her.

Finally the translator said, "What you are asking is unusual. Rinpoche has agreed however, because of the circumstances."

Helen felt immensely relieved, although she had no idea what to expect.

"I will be your tutor, and Lama Sonam will give you the *wang* and the *lung* transmissions. There are the energy transfer and the essence of having heard the text from an authentic holder."

Again, Helen didn't know what this meant, but trusted Charles, although she had never met him.

"First you will need to take Refuge," the young lama continued, "And then we will begin the instruction on *ngöndro*."

Back at the coach house, Helen assessed how she would set up her shrine. She was counting on the fact that His Holiness had said, in a way that time at Massey Hall when he blessed her backstage, that Buddhism and Christianity had a bridge. After all, they weren't always Buddhist in Tibet. They had other traditions, too, old ones, shamanic ones. She'd seen a BBC documentary on it once. But wasn't there some question about believing in God?

Of course there was a God, Helen thought, but it this was here, now, wasn't it a sign from God that she was supposed to do this? God works in mysterious ways, and it wasn't all over two thousand years ago. Things are still developing, she thought. All the answers aren't known.

She didn't want to sit with her back to the door, even though it was unlikely that anyone would visit unannounced. It felt strange to move Gertrude's furnishings around, however they

had invited her to make herself at home, and ultimately, she was doing this for all of them. They had asked her to.

She was doing this for all the victims Charles had so relentlessly outlined in his notes, of the aboriginal child sex trafficking operations run through Catholic operations, abetted by corrupt members of the RCMP. The details of how children as young as two were raped, tortured and killed in rituals had burnt itself into Helen's imagination, igniting a smouldering rage which threatened to make its way out of the insulated Pyrex box in which she attempted to contain it. Even Norman had asked if she was all right. What answer could she give?

The hardest thing was in knowing that this wasn't confined to Charles' time, but was continuing right up to the present, as Gertrude had made some subsequent notes on the file. The tepid investigations into 'Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women' which were occasionally referred to in the press never focused on the perpetrators or the destinations of the women, nor the warehouses in which they were kept, like Ceausescu's baby factories. Helen felt her blood pressure rising and that she needed to control it, or she would have a stroke. Taking positive action to destroy the problem from within would be the method. They would never be able to trace her or retaliate, nor would she be hindered by the apparent impossibility of one person blowing up an intricate and highly profitable corporate enterprise.

She dragged the sofa so that it's back was towards the door, opening up the corner just to the right of the entrance. The coffee table did well for the shrine. She had cleaned it thoroughly, using warm salt water scented with orange essential oil.

The central focus, mirror, *melong* or self-reflection of her enlightened nature would be the exquisite rock crystal statue of Vajrasattva. She couldn't have even trusted Blaze to be at

wag-tail level with it, but there were no animals here to investigate or knock it over, nor would she have guests who might be tempted to touch it.

However, for the time being the sacred image would remain in the glass-fronted display case, above her eye level, for the intense physicality of the preliminary series of practices would take months to complete. Thank God she'd kept up her yoga and Pilates.

Helen opened the text and placed it on the book holder so that it wouldn't touch the floor. Vowing to bring all beings to complete enlightenment and full realization of compassion, Helen began to read through the opening phrases of the *Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro*. Her Tibetan pronunciation wasn't authentic, she knew, but she was also certain that the intensity of her motivation would be the deciding factor for any and all of her spiritual allies.



## Grafting on the Hands

Helen took a 3-foot length of the 18-gauge copper wire and snipped it with the wire cutter. She looped a circle 6 inches in, and then went back over the 5-centimetre circle to create the five digits of the Doll's left hand. Next, she created a tubular puff of the wool fleece, compressing and wetting it a little with a spray bottle in which some shampoo had been mixed with the water. Inserting each one of these into the respective flat wire outline of the finger shape, she wrapped each in turn with some chunky lightly spun natural wool.

Then she made the long bones inside the hand, except that they didn't exactly join up to the fingers. Frustrating, she needed to create a rounded palm once the fleece had been felted over the entire structure. Wrapping all the structures inside the palm with the yarn, Helen set it to boil on her stove, uneasy with the image for a moment, before remembering Demeter placing Achilles into the flames, except that this was boiling water.

The right hand had already been attached, but she'd done so too soon, the felted sheath of the hands wasn't reduced to a fine enough cushiony resilience when she shook the tiny hand in greeting. Yet it was alive. And looking at the bare stub of the left wrist was impossible any longer, she had to move forward with this operation. However, she wouldn't rush. Each step in turn.

She thought of Daniel. He'd never been here. She was holding back.

First there was her mother, always in the back left corner, she thought, going to pour herself a glass of red wine, just as she would have done. Helen looked at the boiling hand and drank the wine. Her mother. She thought of the limestone cave through her grandmother's linen closet, the deep dark of it, in the granite mountains in France. A place to hide, a place to sleep the

cold, dark days away, a place to be safe and to dream the long winter dream. To evade capture. Is that what she wanted? To evade capture by a man?

Well she didn't like hockey, and he did, and he wanted to take her, along with his pals and their girlfriends. That was a no. But?

With a towel on her lap to catch the dust and vegetation, she brushed out more of the fleece with the wire carding combs. She missed her father. Blaze was gone too. So there'd be no conflict about how to manage your animal. Or child. Chloe was gone, maybe for a long time.

Helen felt a flush of anger that she was probably ruining her hands with manual labour. That was pathetic too, at Christmas, a post-card of a flock of sheep. Still, sheep are loving. They offer of themselves, their wool, their milk and cheese, their meat. Their wool was so fascinating. The felting process, subjecting the wool to duress, to heat and agitation just made it stronger. Yet it was still reworkable. You could wet it and completely change its shape. Successive incarnations.

Setting the carding aside, she emptied the saucepan over a colander into the sink and drained the little hand shape, pouring another glass of wine as it cooled. Turning it over would speed the process. She saw her Father and his Mother. They were standing in the little herb bed they grew full of plants to help pregnant and birthing women. Herbs to prevent hemorrhage, bring on more milk, stay calm. She could see the two of them at the side of a sloping cobbled lane which inclined upwards between stone walls. There were arches, hanging greenery, red flowers.

It would take overnight to dry and then she'd see what to do next, no need to rush. It takes time to create an entire world. The Norns at the end of time, spinning their yarn, are very old women, they are used to waiting.



# IT'S DIFFERENT NOW

Suzanne Banay Santo

## ABSTRACT

Within an herbal apothecary, four women are at work, making dolls that change the world. Here is the story of how they began the journey together, the foes they outwitted, and the friends that helped them, both human and from the spirit world.

[Suzanne Banay Santo](#)

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## How Can a Doll be an Agent of Transformation?

Suzanne Banay Santo

*William Blake, Plate 26 Songs of Innocence*

Though dolls as phenomena are almost universal, because the vast majority of people who are interested in dolls and doll-making are either children or female, the field has generally been seen as beneath notice for scholarly inquiry, though the academic climate is changing. Perhaps we have become tired of the culture of artists' despair, the broken world and the failure of humanity to overcome consumeristic impulses.

We've collectively heard the bad news long enough and a cultural fermentation

is taking place. Here women's voices are primary and far from shrill and strident. It is a world of innocence, play, imagination, colour, tactile enjoyment and encompassing all of these, an engagement with forces of the heart. These experiences may include private moments of reverie, local social gatherings, one-day workshops and year-long internet classes. With a few inexpensive and easily sourced supplies such as wire, gauze and wool, women have rediscovered and reinvented an age old craft which brings them joy. To mock it, with sly sophistication, would in the words of William Blake, "put the light of knowledge out". (1801). Whereas,



He who respects the Infants faith  
Triumphs over Hell & Death  
The Childs Toys & the Old Mans Reasons  
Are the Fruits of Two seasons.

Further,

Man was made for Joy and Woe  
And when this we rightly know  
Thro the World we safely go  
Joy & Woe are woven fine  
A Clothing for the soul divine  
Under every grief & pine  
Runs a joy with silken twine  
The Babe is more than swadling Bands  
Throughout all these Human Lands  
Tools were made & Born were hands  
Every farmer understands  
Every Tear from Every Eye  
Becomes a Babe in Eternity  
This is caught by Females bright  
And returned to its own delight.

Perhaps Blake's images of the various kinds of birds which precede these stanzas, representations of beings who freely ascend, indicate a possibility that the human ability to reason could not only coexist with, but assist the open-hearted ability to hear the voice of another kind of being, a kind of being we call the doll.



### Tip-toeing to Mary

Amy and Andrew J. DiMaggio Jr. of LaPlace don't have to be told that their 1-year-old daughter Anna Maria is special. They get a glimpse of it every day when the toddler walks out to the front yard of her house and begins an animated conversation with the Blessed Mother. "Whenever she is with us in the front yard, she will always stop playing at some point and walk up to our statue of Mary," the DiMaggios said. "In this photo, she was holding her hands up and talking to Mary in her own babble language. We hope that this picture will inspire your readers to remember the words of Jesus who said that to enter the kingdom of heaven we must be as open as a child."



Dolls appear in many different formulations and for many different purposes, encompassing a vast range of roles. They emerge as characters in children's imaginative play, where psychologists have named them 'transitional objects' (Winnicott, 1953). Winnicott also identified the roles of comforter and bridge builder to higher orders of relationship as key to the strength of the bond children establish with self-chosen objects. For women, dolls can also provide containers for working with psychic contents which are otherwise unwieldy or overwhelming. (Hastings, 2015). In certain cultural contexts dolls are ritual figurations and can be experienced as agents of their own, with the power to bless, or the power to harm. (Bailey, 1990; Lee, 2006; Whitehead, 2013).

In childhood, the transitional blanket, teddy bear or doll provides a sense of security as a young person adjusts to such changes as entering a new classroom and learning the rules of that environment. The presence of the doll mediates anxiety. The child experiences the doll as someone helpful and approving. (Ainsworth, 1969) The background sense of stability this approval generates is a foundation to the formation of more complex social relationships.



Dollmaking has been used successfully by art therapists with young clients who are bereaved. Barbara McIntyre worked with a girl whose sister was killed in a head-on collision to the car in which both girls were passengers. The sisters resembled each other and had been in a very close relationship. Unsurprisingly trauma and grief reactions unsettled the young girl significantly and McIntyre was selected for therapeutic assistance.

McIntyre suggested doll making as the capstone project for their sessions before they were completed at the time of the girl's high school graduation. This prospect was greeted with happy anticipation by the young client. Many poignant memories arose during the creation of the doll, which grew to resemble both sisters. The doll became a being upon which the girl focused her love, for example creating purple dancing slippers out of satin ribbon, because her sister had enjoyed dancing. The doll provided a context for trusting exchanges with the therapist, including working through other troubling experiences, including memories of a father who had acted out frightening episodes of destructive rage towards the family, both girls and their mother.

The experience of creating the doll, her wardrobe and slippers, helped the girl absorb some of the essence of her sister into her own identity, as evidenced by her determination to make a place in her life to dance in her sister's honour and memory. She was able to resolve her grief more deeply through creating and interacting with the doll and pass through what had been a discontinuity of identity formation in the face of a major loss. (Feen-Calligan, McIntyre and Sands-Goldstein, 2009).

Dolls are often set aside as girls mature. Girls who are eager to not be seen as "babies" will often abandon what had been precious companions once they pass a certain threshold. Historically, upon marriage, Greek and Roman girls deposited their dolls at the shrine of the goddess who had been chosen to be her protector. (Young, 1992) However in contemporary

society, women may return to an interest in dolls and enter into the process of dollmaking, spending significant amounts of time, emotional energy and financial resources in this activity. ‘Reborn’ doll artists and those women who play with these life size infant dolls are assisted in working through anxiety and sadness, according to Dr. Gail Saltz (2008).

Doll play is a form of self-soothing for those who have experienced loss of a child, or those who must confront at menopause a painful surge of emotion that they have never been mothers. Empty-nesters may also find themselves at a painful juncture as they reconstruct an identity which had been built around the interactions inherent in parenting. While in the state of reverie and play, the emotional pain subsides.

Because the experience of loss of a primary relationship such as a parent, sibling, child or spouse can cause severe and persisting distress which is incompatible with the demands placed upon an individual, grief may be suppressed expediently, in order to function. However, such feelings may erupt in full force when a subsequent loss occurs and urgently demand attention. The attachment system is not under conscious control. (Weiss, 1988). In the face of immediate problems, earlier injuries may reverberate and prompt women to seek each other out.

One of the classic social structures that contain these support systems are textile-related activities Craft in the context of social connectedness has been experienced as therapeutic even in post-disaster situations, such as after the fatal Christchurch New Zealand earthquake of 22 February 2011. (Maidment, Tudor, Campbell and Whittaker 2015).





Such activities as knitting with its tactile qualities of warmth and association with wool have been found to have a significant relationship with the sense of perceived happiness, calm and well-being. (Riley et al. 2013, p. 50).

Thus, for adults, whether individually or in a group, the process of dollmaking can be a healing experience, leading to greater self-knowledge and an enhanced sense of personal agency.

Pamela Hastings, a contemporary dollmaker and teacher of transformative dollmaking where the images produced are not always aesthetically pleasing, writes “The doll you create is NOT YOU. It is a vehicle for making the invisible visible,” (p 11-12) and therefore workable because it is now tangible and malleable. Hastings mentions the role of the inner critic as dampening the spirit of the creative practitioner and suggests that the engrossing activity of dollmaking can reconfigure habitual patterns which tend to suppress women’s efforts to bring forth new ways of being.



Artists can be vulnerable to paralyzing self-doubt and self-criticism, to introjects which take the form of a Bluebeard such as described by Clarissa Pinkola Estes, PhD. (1992), which can destroy the naïve woman and the creative projects she might otherwise have birthed. This being the case it is useful to look at practices which support early efforts that might appear primitive, rudimentary or unsophisticated, in order to allow the process to continue unfolding.

Artists need faith while setting out on a journey, to weather the inevitable moments of confusion and discouragement as their raw material emerges, and to mediate feedback so that it can be integrated and their creative projects be clarified, strengthened and enhanced. The tactile sense of process in shaping a doll, particularly with materials which remain malleable such as felted wool, provides an evocative physical metaphor. To experience layers of development where ideas can be joined, pulled apart and reshaped without being broken or spoiled is useful for those who might have been disappointed that they were unable to create perfection in one draft. This experience may carry over into other domains of creativity. Fiction writers are often enjoined to ‘show not tell’, yet as words and the thoughts they are built on are intangible, the skills involved in meshing physicality with ideas in written form may require practice. Thus, sensory process can be a useful experience to the writer offering both kinesthetic awareness and anxiety mediation elements.



Once brought into form, can the doll, or certain dolls, created in specific contexts be said to possess agency of their own? Until relatively recently, this question would be outside the realm of acceptable academic discourse. Animism or ‘fetishism’ was considered primitive superstition, and Christian missionary culture attempted to, and often succeeded in extinguishing earlier spiritual traditions and their practices. We do have records however of a considerable amount of cross-cultural activity where power and independent capacity is ascribed to certain forms of human figuration. Amy Whitehead has proposed that certain religious statues are not objects but “statue persons” (2013) on the basis of their roles and relational engagements in particular communities. Built upon a theoretical basis of ‘ontological emergence’ (Scott, 2006) Whitehead proposes that everyday objects and religious objects are part of a continuum and tests the concepts of ‘things’ in the context of the experience of love and its effects.

Certain figures, such as that of the Virgin of Alcala in Spain, were created as guardians and protectors of a particular community.





Other figures, such as the Ukrainian motanka, are related to domestic settings, often created by a mother or grandmother in states of reverie and prayer to bless a child or newly established family household. (Three Snails, 2019)



Across cultures, various attestations of the agency of individual figures exist, along with descriptions which overlap with our concept of personality and personal agenda. A range of temperaments and qualities among figurations appear to exist.

In a case in Mongol culture, the image was placated rather than loved. A particular statue of Genghis Khan was reported to be dangerous, well able to act by itself and to kill if angered. In an account of an incident at Eight White Tents in Ordos, the Western Mongol leader Toyon Taisi mocked Khan in front of this statue and inexplicably fell down dead, with a wound which appeared to have been inflicted by an arrow in his back. An arrow in the statue's golden quiver was found stained with blood at the same time. (Charleaux, 2010)

For the purposes of this particular research we will focus on figures which are regarded as possessing positive agency and define 'positive' as 'non-harming' or life-affirming.

There are accounts from Tibet of individual figurations acting on their own volition, though apparently there are rules they must follow. A particular statue of the Buddha at the age of 12, known as the 'Jowo' and regarded as the holiest statue in Tibet interacted with a man known as Ben of Kongpo. This man had travelled on foot for weeks on a pilgrimage to Lhasa, a cultural activity that was vibrantly alive before Chinese occupation and which still persists despite relentless discouragement of devotional practices. Ben was described as 'simple but full of devotion' and unfamiliar with the routine at the Jokhang Temple. He shared some of the food offerings that had been set in front of the Jowo and left his boots with the Jowo for safekeeping while he circumambulated the temple.

When the caretaker of the temple, enraged at this blunder, took the boots to toss outside, a shout was heard from the statue: 'Stop! I'm watching those boots for Ben of Kongpo!' When

Ben returned, he thanked the Jowo and invited him to dinner in Kongpo. The Jowo spoke for a second time, promising that he would indeed visit. A year later Ben's wife saw something like the sun shining under the water and rushed home to tell her husband. Ben told her to put the water on for tea and hurried down to the river, where he saw the Jowo, whom he thought was drowning. Jumping in to save his friend, he took hold of the Jowo and carried him out. Walking back together to Ben's house, they had an animated conversation, however the Jowo confided to Ben that he could not actually enter the dwelling, but would remain here in the rock face, at which point he dissolved into what has become known as a natural spot where healings take place. (Sogyal Rinpoche, 1994)

Two of the key elements in bringing forth a figure with the capacity to exert an effect upon its field of operation are the motivation with which it was brought into being, and that it was brought into being by hand; a birth by hand-craft, unique and singular.

The popular decline of individualized handwork has carried us away from a wellspring of knowledge which transcends material skill. However, the intricate processes by which silversmiths design charms or women protect family members by praying into their knitted garments while they are being fashioned have not all been lost. The generative hand/mind union has interesting effects upon those who enjoy it.

The practice of mindfulness, or absorption in an activity in which one is fully aware and engaged, which brings the often flighty and easily distracted mind to rest in single one-pointed engagement qualifies as *shamatha* or calm abiding meditation. (Sogyal Rinpoche, 1994, p. 62) This practice defuses negativity and pain, mediates anxiety and improves vitality and coping. Mindfulness-based stress reduction programs have been demonstrated to reduce cortisol, the major stress hormone in the human organism. Reductions in cortisol have been shown to be

helpful in reducing irritable bowel syndrome and chronic pain, among other conditions. (Matousek, Dobkin and Pruessner, 2009).

Such projects can create associations and inspire positive regard for other individuals, activate complex neurological processes and orchestrate the basis for social circles. (Johnson & Sullivan-Marx, 2006). The motivation to create works of art which are transformational brings wide-ranging social possibilities.

Indeed, we are in a historical moment where a great deal of freedom to explore is possible, as the threat such poppets might once have evoked is now largely absent from public awareness in Europe and North America.

The embodied dream of a hand-crafted doll could serve a variety of purposes in an individual woman's life. Women who are navigating bereavement can find solace in building up a soft, resilient little body. The activity has a resonance for women who are rebuilding their lives, and express joy in bringing an affirmative presence into being. Those who are navigating debilitating stress have found that the forms which emerge from the work of their hands tell them something that their minds hadn't already known and in this way helps them find the way forward.

Transformative dollmaking is increasingly being recognized as a modality of complementary healing. Three practitioners were interviewed and expressed different orientations toward their practice.

- Barb Kobe is an instructor who offers a year-long coaching practice for women's empowerment through dollmaking. She has developed a structured and sequenced curriculum focused on befriending oneself through creating specific archetypes such as 'The Shadow' and 'The Talisman'. The current tuition for her on-line course is \$1,200 and the cohort per year is 30 people. Approximately 200 people have completed the series. Kobe emphasizes emotions in her work and says that this approach best suits visual and kinesthetic learners. When asked about repeating thematic elements that rise in her groups, Kobe answered, "The bottom line is self-love. Doll making is the one art where you make a symbol that looks back at you." She states that the doll does have agency of its own and that this is because it evokes archetypal content in the viewer, though this is usually only activated in women. Kobe states that "Women are hungry for this work" and feels that this is concurrent with a return to embodiment in the aftermath of the "Me Too" movement. Once the pervasive culture of sexual harm has been acknowledged, the natural instinct is for a rising collective to find ways of healing that involve safe and nurturing sensory feedback.
- Anne Heck, a survivor of violent rape, worked with Kobe's curriculum for 7 years and has gone on to share her perspective on how to employ doll making as a healing practice. Heck combines what she learned from Kobe with teachings from the Medicine Wheel, a map of the cycles of life which involves the symbolic elements of the cardinal directions. For Heck, being in nature and listening with the inner ear to its teachings is of great importance. She too feels that dolls created with sacred intent have agency of their own, and that this is experienced through the heart, rather than the intellect. Heck instructs those who wish to study with her in ceremonially based one-to-one coaching sessions.



- Sharon Riley creates dolls in shamanic states of consciousness as an act of healing for the collective and for nature. While Riley does occasionally teach one-to-one by Skype, and has in the past taught group workshops, her approach is somewhat different than the prior two interviewees. Riley acknowledges the importance of the emotions but feels that the essence of her work is best characterized as spiritual rather than emotional.

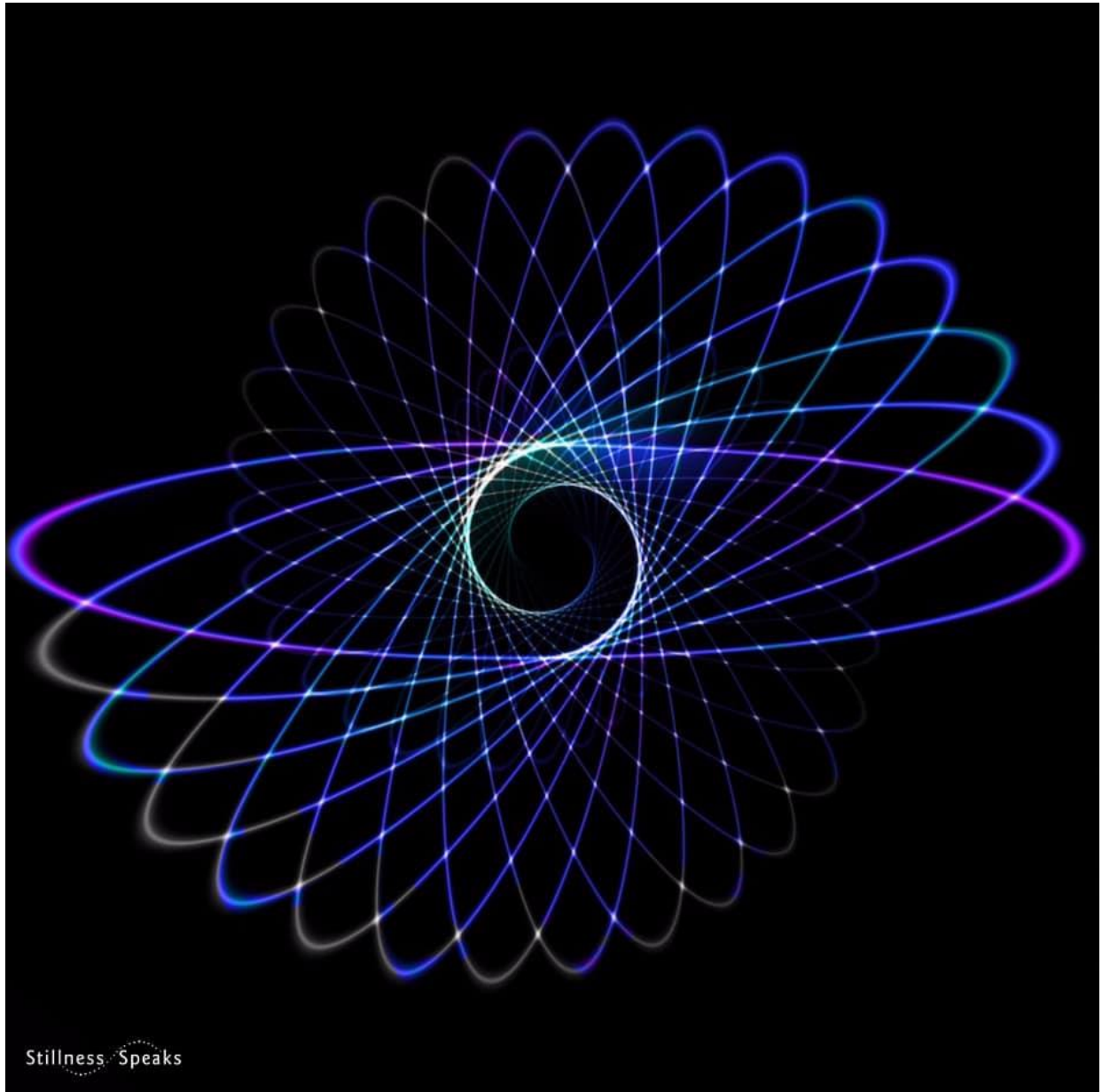
Riley states, “My personal journey with dolls has been less about the history of doll making and more about translating into the physical, information from my dreams, from meditation, from personal journey work, from nature, symbolic representations of the information I am seeing/ feeling. I experience it as a way to facilitate personal healing and transformation for myself and others, to create metaphorical representations/ archetypes in the physical, voices of healing for ourselves, others, the larger collective, our planet. I've loved dolls since I was a little girl. My few dolls were friends that helped me get through really rough times as a child. I experienced them as life giving entities who offered a listening ear, comfort, companionship in my loneliness, and even then, insight into my childhood pain and trauma.”

Riley continues, "The dolls I make now have voices... I hear them, experiencing them as conduits to develop deeper awareness, into the personal and the collective. The act of physicalizing the messages that come to me facilitates deepening levels of awareness, of self, of my environment. I truly believe I received a "calling" several years ago while in meditation. The night of that particular meditation which happened in a very special place on the Bay of Fundy while I sat on a large crystal geode is as clear to me now as it happened then. My doll making continues to intertwine with the information I received that day." (Riley, 2019)



Modern physics demonstrates the interconnectedness of phenomena and the presence of resonance fields. Although contemporary practices of biology and medicine have not as yet integrated the findings of quantum physics, such researchers and practitioners as Bruce Lipton, PhD (2015) and Larry Dossey, MD have suggested that medicine must be reinvented outside the interests of multinational pharmaceutical companies and their profiteering manipulations of medical education and practice. Likewise, such researchers as Nassim Hamein have created whole curricula for those without scientific backgrounds to begin to assimilate the implications of quantum physics. (Hamein et al., 2016)

According to His Holiness, the Dalai Lama (2005) “One of the most important philosophical insights in Buddhism comes from what is known as the theory of emptiness. At its



heart is the deep recognition that there is a fundamental disparity between the way we perceive the world, including our own existence in it, and the way things actually are.” (p. 46) Phenomena are not discrete, self-enclosed entities, but part of a continuously interacting, fluid process in dynamic relationship with and contingent upon many factors.

From the perspective of distinguished historian Phillippe Ariés (1962), "...We have had considerable difficulty in separating the doll, children's toys, from other images and statuettes...which more often than not had religious significance.



Children carry an icon of the Virgin Mary at the Pronoei holiday parade - July 14, 2010

The doll was also the dangerous instrument of the magician and the witch. (p.69). A contemporary spokeswoman for and practitioner of magic states that dolls may be used to heal disease, induce love, unite the estranged, and promote and enhance fertility. (Illes p.88)

In these various ways, then, dolls have played transformative roles in numerous ways for both children and adults. For children, transitional objects in the form of dolls help bring about an enhanced sense of self and increased coping skills. For adults, creating hand-made dolls in states of flow has the capacity to bring about fresh ways of seeing and being. Further, dollmaking is a context for new social groups to be formed, groups which are unconstrained by official channels of education, healthcare, religion, media or economic networks which require some measure of role-playing.

Particular figurations, such as the Virgin of Alcala, can be tested against concepts of personhood and have been proved to be individuals in their own right. Quantum physics demonstrates that the universe is not made of solid, discrete atoms or identities, but that reality itself is continuously being woven and reweaved by our choices and acts. Each of these illustrations provides an example of how a doll can be an agent of transformation.

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## Appendix

These videos provide another window through which to experience the creative and reflective process I engaged with as research for both the Creative and Critical aspects of my thesis.

Dolls: <https://vimeo.com/319983389>

The Spirit of Dollmaking: <https://vimeo.com/323534465>

The Doll as an Agent of Healing: <https://vimeo.com/328021889>