



Matryoshkas

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For Janine Thompson

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Matryoshka

When I was eight
Mrs. Martin gave me my first
matryoshka--

shiny and smooth,

she wore a pink babushka
with yellow flowers

and each layer

was smaller, more detailed

until the heart of the doll was reached

and held between my thumb and forefinger.

As I grew, I collected their stories
and displayed them on my shelves,

imagining myself in the Winter Palace
or traveling to places I had only seen on maps
in my Social Studies class.

Now, I hold them to remember
what my dreams once looked like.

The Starling

The five am sky
greet mourning doves
who have come back to
the pine tree in my yard...

it has been five winters
that they have gone away
and six springs
they have returned

and their wandering wakes me
with a foggy refrain
I realize I had forgotten

and it causes me to muse
upon words
that return to my memory
as a wave is pulled by the moon.

The tone of my mother's voice
when she read me stories
circles over my head
like a Hildebrandt's Starling

and I will always look for the
colors she described,
the colors I was certain I knew.

Aunt Judy, Thanksgiving 2006

The autumn sun is resting in the sky
and I still smell your perfume scented hand.
Though time has stolen moments, age has lied
about the candle's height upon its stand.

And even though my throat is hard and square,
I hug you and your pearls brush past my lip.
A softness comes over my heart, grasping despair.
You let me go, sweater grazing past my fingertip.

In this gold room you stand beside
the old stove in the kitchen all aglow
with black walnut trees shivering outside
The old farmhouse on Fulton Road.

Crowns of Forsythia

When Spring came,
Katie Evans and I became princesses
of her backyard.

We wove crowns of forsythia
and were surrounded by fairies
that rested on the pale green leaves
forcing their way from branches

We discovered friendships with
small creatures that crawled
over our palms...

Even though our hands were small,
they held the world.

Quilt

When I was young,
I gathered calico squares
the color of summer trees
and began to sew

like my great grandmother did.

When I wanted to imagine
what she had been like,
I would go into my parents room
and run my fingers along
the dimpling of her embroidery,
feel the colors
folded at the foot of their bed.

I dreamt of laying my quilt
over my daughter
if she fell asleep on the porch

or spreading it on the grass
for a concert in the park.

At night I opened my windows
and laid on my bed,
joining fabric with thread
covering my knees

and like a long letter,
it was finished one day
and had to be folded.

Lodgia

Pale petals fall
from the snowball bushes
planted at the Fisher House...

and another season is passing

like you did in your dreaming.

And I will sing for you
the song of your mother:

Ach spij kochanie...

and you will be young again,
walking down Main Street in Chicago
with Louis
like in that picture that hangs in the foyer.

We will leave the window
to your bedroom open
in hopes you will visit us
in the scent of a Spring night such as this.

Joyeux Noel

Celine stands behind the counter
at Le Petit Prince, a patisserie,
on the corner
of 14 Mile and Pierce
in the old neighborhood
where I make my yearly trek
to buy gateaux and cookies
for Christmas.

Men and women come in
and speak to her in French
like they have for the past 40 years
ordering brioche and buche de noel
for parties.
"Joyeux Noel," she says
as they leave.
My son touches the glass display

She smiles
and I try to distract him.
I ask for the delicately painted snowmen
for the children's stockings on
Christmas morning,
trying to put pieces of my past
into their lives.

I remember walking six blocks
from home
to the corner to get mille feuille,
many layers to cover
my school dress,
something to do
while I waited for Dad
to come home.

I would sneak it in my room
and hide it in my closet
because it had alcohol in it

and good Presbyterian girls
didn't drink or write poetry

about making love to their boyfriends
by the duck pond
on a blanket under ash trees.

The only evidence that remained-
calligraphy ink on my fingers
and a burning in my throat.

Upon Seeing an Old Beau

It could have been a
San Francisco beach
or an A&P parking lot
where you saw me--
twenty years
reduced to minutia.
To look at us now,
one would never believe
that first kisses
produced snow stung cheeks
and modesty covered thighs,
now canals for new life.
Maps of years traced over our eyes,
stories of places seen,
dreams we breathed out
under Aurora Borealis' flickering.
But your voice has the same
questioning tone
meandering through rings of sound
and pearls
fall to the floor,
astonished.

A Visit With Wallace Stevens

As I sit by the window,
on this summer day,
book of Wallace Stevens in my lap-

I imagine you
reading these same poems...
at a different time in your life
enveloped by quiet midnight,
when youth's surly kiss
was easier to reach for.

In his poem about Key West,
the ocean speaks to me
from its four corners---
language of listless longing :

ljubav će pronaći vas
ako se traži sa svojim, svim srcem

Out of these tongues,
I begin my search for truth...
beginnings of a heart muscle's formation-

knitted
under and over
bruises.

I know I have not worn innocence
in the same way as you-

scales will shed in different patterns
from my skin to Earth's skirt
swish away,
swallowed by the wind.

Life written with different words...

But in sleep, I keep my eyes open
to catch your wisdom
as it sneaks past my window
in the middle of the night...

hoping to memorize
the fingerprint left
on the pane.

Letter to Phyllis

The week before I left for England,
you and I had our last lesson--
I stood next to you
as you played Handel's Aria
on your grand piano
and I sang to the lake.

And you would breathe
with me
showing me how to fill my lungs
to bring out the richness
of the C note--
and if the sound rang out
you would form the word Yes
with your lips.

When my husband and I
sat in that cathedral in York
and listened to the
boys choir rehearse--
voices rising, weaving
with carved wood rafters.

I heard that note again,
a force visiting me
filling my ears
and escaping my lips
as I remembered you
under my breath.

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Biography

Heather Ann Schmidt teaches writing at Oakland Community College. Her poems and flash fiction have appeared in journals in America and Canada. Her books are *Njaa* (Recycled Karma Press, 2009), *Channeling Isadora Duncan* (Gold Wake Press, 2009), *The Owl & the Muse: Collected Tanka* (Recycled Karma Press, 2009), and *The Bat's Lovesong: American Haiku* (Crisis Chronicles Press, 2009). Forthcoming are *Recalling Life Through the Eye of the Needle* (Village Green Books, 2010), *Transient Angels* (Crisis Chronicles, 2010) and *Red Hibiscus* (Crisis Chronicles Press, 2011).