

# In This

# Moment

BY MONTANA JONES

Sunday morning my family is seated at the kitchen table, by the window overlooking our yard. The pan of frying bacon is spitting out hot greasy remarks onto the stovetop. My mother flips them like retorts. "If you don't, then I will," she jabs. "Call her." My father pours himself a coffee, stirs for a good long minute.

I sit, eyes riveted to my drawing, my hand glued around a pencil crayon, which is stuck to the paper. I dare not move or make a mark. If I do, my mother will surely explode, my father fragment. By freezing the moment, holding still, nothing will happen. It almost always works.

Before my mother found whatever it was she had fished out of my Dad's coat pocket, I was working on my third drawing this morning. I am trying to perfect a family portrait, but can't get it quite right. My signature in the corner on the bottom is good though. "C-e-l-i-a", in bright yellow letters.

I have drawn individual circles, mother in one, father in another, my brother and my cat Mishu, our old house near the top, and me in the middle. I coloured starbursts around them, with the longest arms reaching out to join the others. The entire background is filled in black. But when I stood back to see, it just looked like little faces peering out of dots in the night sky. I need to connect the dots, so they will be all together, like a family.

My brother is concentrating on prying apart his fork tines with a spoon. He drums his foot against the table leg, louder and louder, but our parents don't seem to notice. The clatter blends with the increasing tension filling the air. I cannot figure out how it can be so silent and so deafening at the same time.

"You have to end it. End it now," says my mother in a tight voice.

Her words sound like the seconds just before hot water overflowed the bathtub onto our new bathroom rug. Last week, she had left the tap running to answer the phone, and forgot. She was busy yelling at my father for calling to say he'd be home late. I saw the water level rising higher, but sat silent, fascinated at how my mother's voice rose up just like it did.

"I'll tell her myself!" my mother finally spills over, and I flinch, jolted back into this moment.

My father doesn't seem to be sitting so much as floating in position over his chair, like he might drift off at the first opportunity. "Dorothy, please," he says. I could swear he rises another inch, and picture him expanding, his belly a

swelling red balloon that pops the buttons of his shirt. I'm afraid that if my mother utters another word, he will lift off. Just float outside and up into a sky pure azure, with clouds so fully blown they look as if they've been creamed into whips of white. Higher and higher, a round little red speck escaping into the blue.

"I thought all this was behind us," my mother says angrily. "You told me it was over." My brother clunks his foot faster.

"Call her!" she shrills. "Call her right now!" She thrusts the telephone receiver at my Dad, stretching the coil till the black body leaps like an elastic across the kitchen table. The

cord takes along the ketchup and jug of orange juice in its crashing descent to the floor. A pasty red island of sauce begins to form streaky pink beaches where the orange juice pools around it. A sharp triangle of broken bottle glass perches atop the tomato sand like a transparent Christmas tree. I pretend it's a palm tree. I think of how the oozing mess is the exact colour of sunsets.

"That's it Charles," my mother's voice wavy like a breaking radio station. "I won't be made a fool!" I think of April Fool and Raspberry Fool and don't know why my mother could be so angry at either. I like the idea of being a prank or a spongy pink dessert.

My mother grabs the phone back and dials with a shaking rigid finger. I am afraid it will snap like one of my pencils.

"For heaven's sake, Dot," my father sighs. He gets up to rescue the charred smoking bits and proceeds to make bacon sandwiches. Both my brother's legs are motoring now, jarring the table in steady beats so that the cutlery rattles with each kick, like a drum roll preceding some spectacular event.

"Dorothy, you are becoming hysterical." He says this in the same tone that he might state her eyes were blue. It is enough to make her slam the telephone down and come at him. He calmly heads out of the kitchen. Grabbing the frying pan handle, she hurls it like a Frisbee across the room and it bounces off the wall before landing. My father has already made it to the hallway and continues on

---

I sit, eyes riveted to my drawing, my hand glued around a pencil crayon, which is stuck to the paper. I dare not move or make a mark. If I do, my mother will surely explode.

---

upstairs. My mother goes after him, a screaming stream of assaults flowing from her mouth. Transparent bubbles float from her cartoon lips, and pop empty as the angry words burst out. But I can't hear the actual words, just mellow bubbling like an aquarium.

There is no sound. Our parents took it with them upstairs. I look at my brother, who has suddenly stopped his manic beating. He blinks wide-eyed back at me. Then he delves into a new project, using the fork to mindlessly etch initials into the dining room tabletop. He seems oblivious to the background noise from the second floor. I want to say something to him, but I know we are in two different places, in two separate moments.

The unfinished sandwiches lie on the counter, white bread waiting with flat open arms, decorated with burnt smudges of pork, no second slices to cover and protect them. To make them complete.

On the wall where the flying pan hit, a horsetail of dark grease has appeared, staining the flowered wallpaper. Long artistic bacon fat brushstrokes connect the little petals that repeat across the wall. I am impressed with the creativity of this talented black skillet, now motionless on the floor. I wonder what other brilliant paintings it might one day create, achievements dependent on the intensity level of my mother's fury.

Clutching pencils and paper, I slip off the chair, step over the now flattened island of ketchup and on my way to my room, check the walls of the bathroom, living room, and hallway for signs of past arguments I might have missed. There were probably works of art all around me, chips and streaks, sculpted and painted by objects thrown.

My family moved here only four months ago, at the beginning of summer. It was a fresh start, my mother said, as if our old house was stale and crusty. It was away from the city that seemed to hold too many complicated people mixed into my parents' lives. I wonder how soon we will have to move again, when this country house will form its own dried layer that cannot be skimmed off and freshened.

A few of those people from before are already overlapping into this new life. I never really see them, but they are creeping in just the same. They are the nameless ones in my parents' arguments, they are there in the spreading ketchup, and the grease stained wallpaper.

If I could just get the portrait right then maybe the spontaneous art would stop appearing. Maybe those other people would stop surfacing too. It's as if all the moments in our lives are random dots drifting off in different directions. My mother's dots, my brother's dots, my father's, and mine, all aimless and separate. I don't know how to connect all the dots of moments together and get my whole family in one place. I have this idea that if I could, that's what a family is. Connected, sharing, and remembering the same moments.

Tonight my father worked late, and my mother talked on the phone a long while in little murmurs and coos. She

sat me, my brother, and our supper in front of the television, with instructions not to interrupt her. Between Spaghetti-O bites, I started over on a new portrait, making the background as black as night. I spelled my name out next, in the bottom corner, because that part is easy.

One day in school my teacher had the class look up all the meanings for our names. It was fun until I had to read out loud that Celia means blind, and the other kids started to tease me. I'm the best artist in our class, so I told them if it were true then I wouldn't be such a good drawer. Plus I know I can see a lot of things nobody else ever sees. But I didn't say that part. After Walt Disney, my mother came out and put us to bed.

\*\*\*

It could have been the warm plasticine pad of Mishu's paw against Celia's sleeping cheek that woke her, or murmuring voices rising out of her dreams. She was upside down again, feet by the headboard, rumpled blanket wrapped around one leg.

Her toes padded cold and quiet out into the hallway darkness. She heard a low voice, her mother's voice, different somehow and swirling with a deep one, their tones together hushed and unfamiliar, melting like the warm red haze behind closed eyelids.

Silence then, and little wet noises like when Mishu licked her ears. At the end of the hall they were framed in the doorway, the white porch light edging the joined silhouettes like two frosted figurines on a cake. Her mother looked so pretty outlined in lace light. Celia must have made a sound, because her mother's head turned and she quickly pulled away. The one four-armed body split into two – her mother's and the low voice's.

Her mother started toward Celia, "What are you doing up honey?" She swept the child up before she could speak, as if one word spoken here might fall and shatter letters on the hallway floor.

Tucking Celia into bed, her mother has her own voice again. "Now you stay in bed, and go back to sleep."

"Why were you kissing that man?" Celia asks, the covers across half her face. She tests the fuzzy wool with her tongue. She can blow and make her breath stay in a hot circle on the blanket, just for a few seconds.

No answer. Then, "He's my friend. Don't you always hug and kiss your friends?" her voice stretched thin and high. "Now sleep."

Celia tries to picture her father with his lips against the shadowed man's mouth. She thinks it was one of the grown-ups at her parents' last party. She *had* seen the men laugh and clink their glasses together. But never kiss.

"Night sweetie," her mother pushes down on Celia's forehead as if this would make her stick to the bed.

Mishu on her pillow vibrates into Celia's ear and the girl pushes her face into the warm tickley belly. She chants softly "Mishu, Mishu..."

"Missyou too." Her mother closes the bedroom door. The cat's rumbling purr fills Celia's head, till the pull of sleep gradually ripples her dreams into soft, dark fur fields that muffle the distant murmuring.

*A summer's day, people outside on their lush green lawns, wielding rubber hoses and washing their cars, firing up the barbecues, kneeling in their gardens, plucking fat monster worms from their viney worlds. Kids scramble onto the streets chasing runaway balls. They are in their old*

*house. The warm sunshine fades and the sky grows gray and dark, it is cold but no one really notices but Celia. It feels like a very bad place, despite appearances. She looks up into the sky and sees torpedo-like silver shapes everywhere, falling almost in slow motion, as if suspended, like a ballet of nuclear bombs, and she knows that when they complete their gradual descent they will obliterate every living thing, spectacularly, and expect no applause nor encore. She knows about nuclear bombs from a program her father watched long ago, he'd said it wasn't real when she began crying at the mushrooms and bodies. She frantically tries to gather her family, to find them and get them to look up and see the danger, escape underground together. There is an underground of strangers amassing, the man her mother was kissing, a woman with a telephone for a face, all trying to get somewhere, to a safer place. Though she knows it does not really exist. It is futile down there in the tunnels, filled with panicking people turned violent with their fear. Almost better to stay aboveground and wait. Lawnmowers and barking dogs fade out, painted over with a high pitched constant, the shrill insistent buzz of cricket song sounding from the falling metallic silver orbs. So piercing the noise it is mistaken for lulling quiet. Row upon row of ordered, slowly advancing dots filling all open space, everywhere. Coming so slowly, it seems that time has ceased already. In the dreadful stillness they speckle the entire sky like wafting dandelion parachutes on a perfect summer day, only this time, in this dream, Celia's father is a tiny red balloon drifting high above, escaping into the blue. His broken string trails behind, disconnected. Her mother is the Dot waving at him to come down.*



Diana Dean, "Mother and Daughter," 50" x 75.5", Oil on Canvas, 1985.

Celia wakes abruptly, eyes wide open. She has had that dream again. For the first time, Celia thinks of how her mother's name fits. Dot. Short and hurried, brief and pre-occupied. Just like her mother. She wonders at the coincidence. If her mother's name fits so perfectly, why is Celia not blind?

She gets out of bed and goes down the dark hallway, this time to the front door. The whole house is still except for the snoring of her father, now home and asleep. She can hear his rhythm, constant like the heartbeat of the house. She goes outside.

On this new night the sun has long dissolved behind the treeline to the west, and the sweeping combs of grassy field surrounding the house are alive. Celia closes the door quietly behind her and sits on the top slab of limestone steps. Leaning back on her hands she looks up.

Imbedded in the huge dome of a sky above, crystalline stars waver in their brilliance. Below, the stars seem to be reflected across the black meadow, where hundreds of fireflies shimmer and burst with momentary light, then fade and work up to their next brilliant instant. Again, a few lightbeats away, and again, till the entire ground, as far as she can see, is alive with an orchestra of growing and fading flashes, mirroring the stars above in a fantastic few moments that seem at once perfect and magical.

On the quiet black canvas, she can hear them whispering in a tinkling fairy-like laughter. Fragile, like tiny glass bells, ringing just to her.

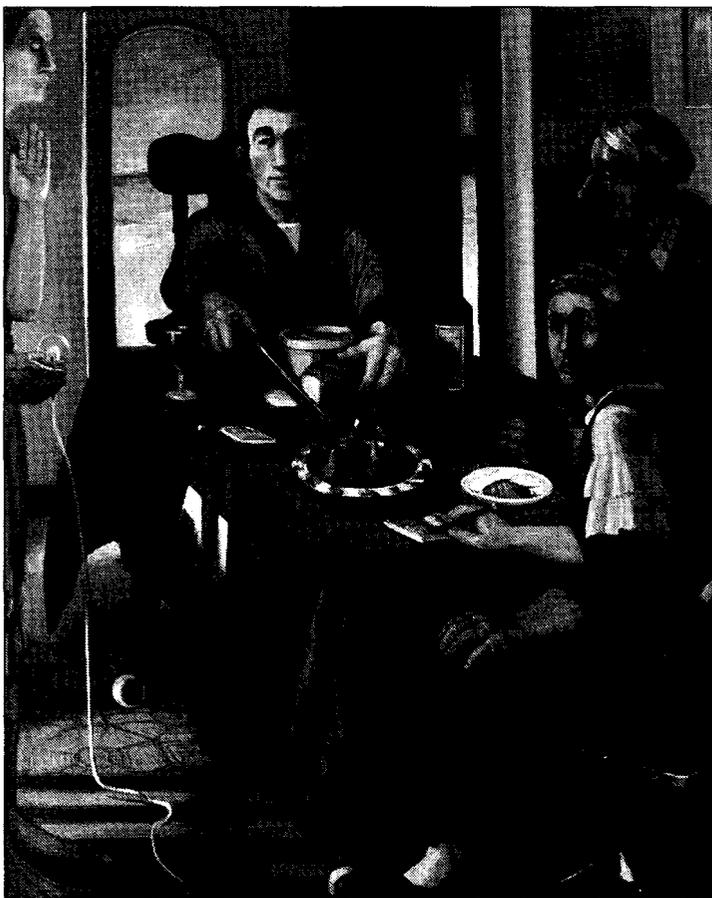
In this moment, she suddenly knows that every flash of light before her, every glimmer, are all the moments of her life so far. All the collected dots concentrated into tiny

bright sparks born and extinguished. The ones yet to fire their brief white brilliance are her future, the moments yet to unfold. Celia wraps her arms around her knees, watching, knowing that somehow she painted this most beautiful of pictures all by herself.

Like paint, the endless black runs off all the corners of the night, and even though the firefly dots are scattered, she knows they are really all together, connected by something invisible. It is the very thing that makes them so beautiful. She sees it all, and this time feels no urge to connect the dots.

Celia stands up and slips quietly inside the house to awaken her little brother. She needs to show him this vision, this family of light. He has to see it too. If he does, Celia knows that one day both of them really will be connected, sharing and remembering these same moments.

*Montana Jones is many kinds of women: bon vivant, raconteur, spinner of yarns, watcher of whales, goatherd, former winner of the Sutton Agricultural Fair Spelling Bee, wayfarer, and frequenter of Tuesday cheap movie nights. She lives on a farm near Kingston, Ontario and looks forward to this summer's first fireflies. Email her at montanajones@yahoo.ca.*



Diana Dean, "Self-Portrait with R," 70" x 55", Oil on Canvas, 1972-1999.

## DEBORAH SOMMERER

### The Blue One, My mother

Medieval folk, I've heard, believed  
winged things a metaphor for souls :  
butterflies and birds  
lighting a silent world with memory.

Twenty years ago,  
my round-limbed younger son  
wailing on my shoulder,  
I saw a Monarch pause.  
We three, in that moment, fixed,  
on an ancient, rocky hill top  
where neither bush nor bird  
gave shelter, gave solace.

The Monarch paused,  
line-drawn black feet brushing  
the sun-beaten stone,  
and forsook the stone for my elbow,  
and the child quieted,  
watching the slow opening and closing  
of his wings,  
dark orange and black under the relentless sun.  
He stayed and stayed  
and opened a rift in time.

So that my father, dead so many years,  
returned to us,  
and I knew it.

So that now,  
in a back garden in Toronto,  
a pale cornflower butterfly  
who clings, fragile, on my kneecap  
and will not go,  
connects me to Persephone's world  
which has always been there,  
although for me, before, unpeopled.

*Deborah Sommerer's poetry appears earlier in this volume.*