

Howard Faerstein

December Women

The slab of memories called up on an idle day—

She returned to the village with one sack of potatoes and another of flour.
In a few days she'd make another trip for sugar. Her brothers met her by
the square. Cossacks had raided again, their father killed and dismembered.
The oldest son carried an arm to the gravesite. She went into mourning and
the elders advised her to make herself filthy and ugly.

Last night I dreamed of different ways to carry you. Like driftwood above breakers.
Across my back like a sack of roots. And then I dreamed of how I'd take you. Upright,
against the garden fence. Against the espaliered cherry trees.

Attempts at form lead to chaos. Words without a matrix ooze forth at odd
moments, diffuse like thought. The barest hint of development and I become confused
with the choices.

Mother sitting in the kitchen chewing her lips. I can remember hugging her, begging her
not to die. Another time, over tea, she suggested that breast cancer
was caused by excessive touch.

My daughter, her small clenched fist. Her laughter in mid-air, high above the trampoline.
Tongue snaking the corners of her mouth. Her resentment toward
the dictator of Russia. If she were ugly I'd fear for her less.

In the spreading darkness young Costa Rican sisters sweep the terrace
encircling the pool while the tourists prepare for sleep.

To break away is impossible, to surrender, the same.
We live the years as a wasp clasps its mate,
as a dying man grabs at space.

Howard Faerstein is the author of two chapbooks: *Play a Song on the Drums, he said* and *Out of Order (Main Street Rag)* and two full-length collections: *Dreaming of the Rain in Brooklyn* and *Googootz and Other Poems*, both published by Press 53. His work can be found in *Great River Review*, *Nimrod*, *CutThroat*, *Off the Coast*, *Rattle, upstreet*, *Mudfish* and online in *Verse Daily*, *Nixes Mate*, *Gris-Gris*, *Peacock Journal*, and *Connotation*. He presently volunteers as a citizenship mentor at the Center for New Americans, is co-poetry editor of *CutThroat, A Journal of the Arts*, and lives in Florence, MA.