

Jennifer Martelli

Praying

I couldn't bear to tend them into the fall, so in this narrow, shaded place guarded by my neighbor's fence, I made a death garden: vegetables on their dry vines, summer baskets and clay pots of purple impatiens, cosmos, basil, lemon balm, mint. I left them—coward that I am—to die on their own. When I was a child, my mother told me the mantis was praying. I know now that the females lay their little pearl eggs each autumn then eat their mates. Is this praying or preying? I'm unsure about so much. The pond behind my home, with turtles as big as stones, grows a layer of pollen on its surface so thick, flies can skate across it. But perhaps it's not a pond: the water drains and returns with tides. And the turtles keep leaving, try to cross Leggs Hill Road. Nothing has ever been clear to me.

I Sleep in the Daytime

"Life During Wartime," The Talking Heads

Yesterday, in my half-lucid dream, this: two pearls just outside the bedroom window. I know they were my parents.

I'd watched a movie deep into that night when time stopped mattering: all the angels in heaven were sent by God to destroy us—

they came down the road, the sky was a dark ocean. (Believe me, the women

who've come to me in my poems hold my parents deep within their bones—and now I have to keep still in my sadness).

The coastline where I live is shaped like hooks for miles. I walked three beaches at low tide.

The washed-up rocks made a moon-scape: some white and speckled like the eggs of a great reptile, some rusted tigers' eyes, some smooth, iridescent.

And Yet, And Yet

--Molly Ringwald, "What About the Breakfast Club, Revisiting the Movies of My Youth in the age of #MeToo"

at the end of the movie, Molly folded her left diamond stud into Judd's fingerless-gloved fist which he pumped high, triumphant, frozen in the that 80s stop action, rewarded after a day at Sherman High School, Sherman, Illinois, in 1984, for his slow clap after her perfect cleavage-vised lipstick rub (how ashamed she was, dragging the color from her own full lips), after calling her Queenie for hours, after crawling through the tunnel her legs made below the desk where he ducked (and I could feel it, his long dirty hair tickling the insides of her thighs). I remember loving that suede sarong (I mean, to own such a thing in high school) and how she matched her outfit perfectly: the pink V-neck shirt with that rich brown pelt.

Nancy Pelosi's Beads, 1984-present

She wore *Eye of the Tiger*, *Thrill of the Fight* orange striped beads: they shone—her tiger eyes shone, even in the photos, they shone like a wet pelt. In the 80s we all looked like little men with big shoulder pads. Tahitian South Sea Pearls: *spectacular, emotional, thunderous*: sky blue and gold, sky blue and gold, sky blue and gold, sky blue and gold, clasped. How we see the past from the future: gold snake eggs in an owl's beak. Pelosi's beads so dark they reflected how endless and orbital. I like a story that turns on itself like a wounded animal: a story that curves the way a spine curves, licks itself clean, scented, whole. Careless folk confused her mace with a caduceus: she's not here to heal. The mace she pinned to her breast held a pearl atop 13 bound gold rods. Pelosi's jade beads, Easter egg yellow beads, chaste beads, torqued her throat. Her Marquita Masterson beads: blue black gumballs to choke a horse—she wore them around her neck like war trophies clasped with two thick red hooks.

The Swallow

I'm painting my own *The Last Supper* on midnight velvet:
Shirley Chisholm in a blue and white check dress
and Danica Roem, her long brown hair held back

in a cotton bandana kerchief, and in between: Bella,
Kamala, Hillary, Maxine, Elizabeth, Alexandria, Pat,
Nancy, Gerry, Tammy, Ayanna. With a bristle brush

I'll add small tortoiseshell cups so no one can spill the salt.
I'll trace the rims of the dishes with real metallic
paint. The women will eat to the heart of the Italian bread,

dip its hard crust into the olive oil (I'll mix green and gold).

POETRY

Men are men, and they'll huddle in groups of three,

some shocked or angry or in grief, some will nod,
yes. I'll add birds (tiny flicks like eyelashes) flying between
the ionic columns. I'll be the waxwing or the rock dove

or the swallow in the background
past the tall cypress trees.

Jennifer Martelli is the author of *My Tarantella* (Bordighera Press), awarded an Honorable Mention from the Italian-American Studies Association, selected as a 2019 "Must Read" by the Massachusetts Center for the Book, and named as a finalist for the Housatonic Book Award. Her chapbook, *After Bird*, was the winner of the Grey Book Press open reading, 2016. Her work has appeared or will appear in *Verse Daily*, *Iron Horse Review* (winner, Photo Finish contest), *The Sycamore Review*, and *POETRY*. Jennifer Martelli has twice received grants from the Massachusetts Cultural Council for her poetry. She is co-poetry editor for *Mom Egg Review* and co-curates the Italian-American Writers Series.