

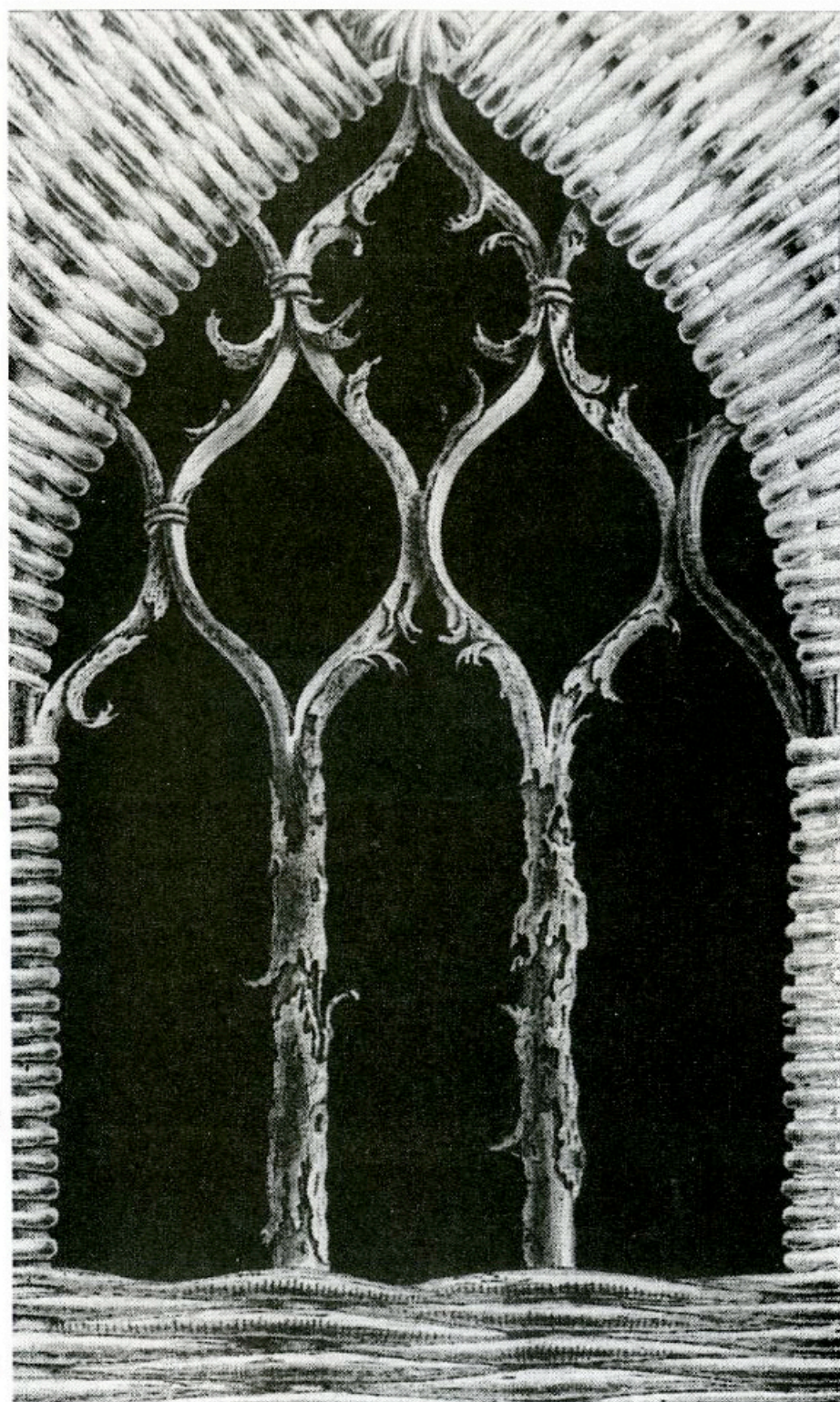
# THE HOLDING SKY

**APPREHENDED BY ANOTHER**, this inheritance is invisible, manifesting, if it does at all, through quantification. In its felt conditioning, in the ways it structures my life, it manifests as distress that ebbs and flows. It is complemented, let's say, by hardened lumps of tissue just beneath the surface of my flesh that recur sporadically, adhering only to the body's concealed logics.

This matrilineal inheritance means that my grandmother was buried before I was born. It means that my mother's eldest sister was the first to die, under the age of 40. Another sister, upon diagnosis of the gene mutation, chose to have preventative mastectomies. Her daughter, similarly diagnosed but so young still, waits, hoping for a miracle while delaying the inevitable. In an analysis of my mother's genome, she is lucky. I cannot speak with certainty about my own, not on a cellular level. But the lumps come and go.

It has happened that the knots have first been discovered by a lover. It has happened that it has been my own hand. It is remarkable, either way, how quickly I come to doubt what was there before. Is this new? Is this even a mass? Or is it hysteria? What follows are doctor visits, diagnostic procedures and thus far that the lumps are benign. And eventually they self-destruct, leaving me to consider that I really did invent them, that the inheritance is, after all, an illness of the mind that mutates the flesh in ways discernible only to me.

My statistical risk, calculated through bloodlines, is elevated. But my statistical risk, calculated through bloodlines, is not high enough to qualify me for genetic testing. I have also



been told there is absolutely no way doctors will perform preventative mastectomies for me, despite my deep desire to do so. To be clear, there is no methodological difference in the procedure, be my risk 10%, 17% or 25%. What is different, to doctors, is my state of mind. I am weary from the emotional suffering and the body's ill provocations. I am denied the capacity to address them conclusively.

I live in a time and place where medical modes of address exist and are theoretically available, which is a fortunate state. I acknowledge this. But I want to circumscribe the withholding of permission, what it is to be on its receiving end. This is my exhaustion: it is the fact that statistical risk sounds nice enough except that either it is poison or it is not, it comes from an alienation between body and mind as the seat of the self, it is the recurring regret about the life I am living when I imagine that this time the news will be bad, it is my ear tuned to the dog whistle of every story about breast cancer that circulates amongst friends, it comes from my lover's honesty about desire and how it would diminish, it is a friend asking about what he should talk about on his cancer podcast and I suggest paternalism and it's him just not getting it, it's not enough money to take this conversation elsewhere, it's the low level angst that sometimes becomes anguish yet never, conversely, diminishes entirely, it's the fact that so far everything's been okay but I'm still here in a ditch of dread, gaslighted by biological inheritance, waiting to be betrayed.

**APPROACHING INHERITANCE**

c. t.

**I PRIED** open my eyes, but the rest of my body was locked in a thick, matted mess. Numb atmospheric pain eclipsed my lower left arm and hand. Its tendons and ligaments recoiled into my shoulder, which throbbed to breathe through its denseness. The tissue and muscle between my ribs on the left was tender. Sharp spasms pierced from the core muscles around my heart. I severed this side of my body and released it to hover somewhere between my right side and the ceiling.

I thought momentarily that perhaps I was having a heart attack and should call someone. But I'd felt like this hundreds of times before, when no more severe trauma eclipsed the turbulence; when the pathology turned out to be a series of jammed ribbed bones or ventricle arrhythmia induced by a saturation of self-judgement and blame.

I walked out of my room and through the equally dense mess of boxes, paper wrapping, vases, dishes, piles of loose change to be sorted, blankets and fabric that I'd recently brought home from my dead grandmother's house. I regretted taking any of it; of having anything imbued with her breath in my house and my life. It all felt like death. Not human death, but spiritual death. The form that can strike endlessly in a lifetime. The little deaths that only corporeal death can finally put an end to.

And I regretted taking the time to help clean out her house, which required spending three days with my mother in the turbulence of her own disembodiment: three days of feeling the drag of her mother's expectations on her life. I felt fifty-six years of *never feeling good enough* suffocate the house. I watched closely for the first time since we shared a home twenty years ago at how she's retreated towards the smallest apertures striving for air; becoming increasingly pale, distracted, tremulous, absent.



Always falling into a hole, then saying "ok, this is not your grave, get out of this hole," getting out of the hole which is not the grave, falling into a hole again, saying "ok, this is also not your grave, get out of this hole," getting out of that hole, falling into another one; sometimes falling into a hole within a hole, or many holes within holes, getting out of them one after the other, then falling again, saying "this is not your grave, get out of the hole"; sometimes being pushed, saying "you can not push me into this hole, it is not my grave," and getting out defiantly, then falling into a hole again without any pushing; sometimes falling into a set of holes whose structures are predictable, ideological, and long dug, often falling into this set of structural and impersonal holes; sometimes falling into holes with other people, with other people, saying "this is not our mass grave, get out of this hole," all together getting out of the hole together, hands and legs and arms and human ladders of each other to get out of the hole that is not the mass grave but that will only be gotten out of together; sometimes the willful-falling into a hole which is not the grave because it is easier than not falling into a hole really, but then once in it, realizing it is not the grave, getting out of the hole eventually; sometimes falling into a hole and languishing there for days, weeks, months, years, because while not the grave very difficult, still, to climb out of and you know after this hole there's just another and another; sometimes surveying the landscape of holes and wishing for a high quality final hole; sometimes thinking of who has fallen into holes which are not graves but might be better if they were; sometimes too ardently contemplating the final hole while trying to avoid the provisional ones; sometimes dutifully falling and getting out, with perfect fortitude, saying "look at the skill and spirit with which I rise from that which resembles the grave but isn't!"

WHAT RESEMBLES THE GRAVE BUT ISN'T  
Anne Boyer



In this house I felt nauseous vertigo. Every cell of my body felt sick from the consciousness of being born of that weary woman's body, who was born in the cupped palm of a wearier woman's body.

A substantial part of the sorting and cleaning that I helped my mother with was in my grandmother's study. It consisted of sorting through binders, shopping bags and accordion folders of correspondence, photos, recipe clippings, taxes and health advice. At the time I had no interest in gleaning anything about her life through exposure to her personal archive. I simply extracted what was obviously discardable and handed over the rest to my mother to wager the meaning of.

I did select one letter that was written by my grandmother to 'Mother Elmgren', dated March 8, 1973, from 7112 144th St. Surrey, BC. It was the very last line of a three-page hand-written letter that drew me to it:

*Why does life so often seem so pointless, and yet we won't really give it up.*

*Take care, Love Lois*

I have written variations of this line numerous times in journals and letters. I feel so intimate with this conundrum, that without context or detail, I can imagine the breadth of variable conditions that provoked its reflection in her. For myself, the frequency of its recurrence is matched only by one other dilemma: that my mother would not begin to live her own life until her mother died, and in turn, I will not begin to live my own until she passes.

At a distance from the small study, packed with personal affects, garbage bags overflowing with refuse and the banter of moving logistics, I feel that I've inherited this trembling phenomenon. I don't really need to possess any of my grandmother's belongings to remember her. I can feel her fatigue in every little death.

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**  
**Amy Kazymierchuk.**