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Mourning Cloak

Selma Mann

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Love, death, loss, longing, cancer, butterflies,
and the healing power of poetry and of surrender to the guidance of a muse. The poet, Selma Mann, an attorney, a rational-humanist sort—romantic and spiritual enough—found herself driven to composition by a series of losses and crises. In grief, pain, and poetry she discovered an enchanted world emerging from and fusing with the natural world, rendering it a luscious, sparkling place to live, despite sharp edges and frequent cruel surprises, a world perhaps directed and monitored "in a secret cave by gnomes sipping chamomile."

Thus she found herself a poet by necessity. Her muse seems to act as a guardian angel, demanding poems to suit the occasion when confusion cries for understanding. When Mann wanders too deeply into the woods and feels lost, the muse forces her to find her way with her pen as a compass.

There is drama, tragedy and comedy here, viewed from new camera angles, but also wisdom whose price to the bearer is always dear.

J. Alexie Crane, III
Poetry Editor
Premiere Sortie Press

Selma Mann's own telling of Mourning Cloak's existence and history:
My poetry has been a gift of loss. On January 18, 2009, Al, my soulmate for over 40 years, died. We called each other "Love," one of those couples always holding hands. I felt broken without him, but found myself comforted by an unexpected connection: the beautiful dark butterflies known as "Mourning Cloak" that appeared in my garden shortly after Al's death, flying and playing around me and those I love, landing on my hat, filling me with wonder. I'm convinced that they're tiny pieces of his spirit saying "hi."

My world had changed. I was going through the motions of returning to work, spending time with family and friends. I went to a bereavement group that would prove to be my road back to life. Healing from the loss required that I look within in ways I never had before. But more loss lay ahead.

Nine months after finding Al's body, I was diagnosed with invasive breast cancer. Bilateral mastectomies, lymph node removal, and reconstruction followed. It was the first time in my life I'd been hospitalized for anything but giving birth to my daughters. I devoutly hope it's the last. I missed Al. I clearly remember lying in my hospital bed frightened and in pain, when I felt a hand on my shoulder that I'm convinced was Al.

It was around this time that I found myself writing poems. I did not find my muse. My muse found me. I suddenly found myself compelled to write poems that seemed to arrive whole from someplace in my spirit I didn't know existed. My poetry has evolved, although I still have no idea where the poems come from. They appear to me, usually in their entirety, often in the garden or as I'm on a walk, and I feel an urgent need to reach for my notebook or sit at a computer. I recognize they are created from fragments of my experiences since childhood, causing me to wonder where my muse was hiding all this time. I've written about grief, sorrow, love, family, and laughter.

I wish I could say I’m free of sorrow, but in November I lost my beautiful, courageous mother, Carlota. This time I was blessed to be able to say goodbye. It’s a very different grief journey from my previous losses.

My life is filled with love and connection, and I feel surrounded by angels and spirits. It’s difficult to believe that January, 2013, was the fourth anniversary of Al’s death, the third anniversary of my surgery, and my third year free of cancer. I must confess I’m a bit of a Pollyanna, always looking for silver linings. I have faced the events and flow of my life, and believe that no matter how dark and frightening they may be, if I keep walking I will get through them, and find unexpected gifts in their wake. I am, after all, a poet now, and a suitable landing field for butterflies.

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Candace Edwards:

People live in this new moment of lifestyle always attempt to and must have the time or they will get great deal of stress from both way of life and work. So , when we ask do people have time, we will say absolutely indeed. People is human not really a huge robot. Then we question again, what kind of activity do you possess when the spare time coming to an individual of course your answer can unlimited right. Then do you ever try this one, reading books. It can be your alternative within spending your spare time, the book you have read is usually Mourning Cloak.

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