

# TALISMANS



*Maudelle Driskell*

*The Hobbleshush Granite State Poetry Series, Volume VIII*

HOBBLEBUSH BOOKS  
Brookline, New Hampshire

Copyright © 2014 by Maudelle Driskell

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission from the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Composed in Adobe Arno Pro at Hobblebush Books

Printed in the United States of America

Cover illustration: “#6, from the Garden of the Phoenix series”;  
monotype; 2011; by Marie Pavlicek-Wehrl; [www.mariepavlicek.com](http://www.mariepavlicek.com)

Back cover author photo by E. Stokesbury

ISBN: 978-1-939449-03-0

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014934160

*The Hobblebush Granite State Poetry Series, Volume VIII*

*Editors: Sidney Hall Jr. and Rodger Martin*

HOBBLEBUSH BOOKS

17-A Old Milford Road  
Brookline, New Hampshire 03033

[www.hobblebush.com](http://www.hobblebush.com)

*For my family—the biological,  
the creative, and the chosen*



# CONTENTS

## I

<i>Talismans</i>	3
<i>Koans of a Different Order</i>	4
<i>Mistakes You Might Make in Spanish but Probably Wouldn't in English</i>	5
<i>Relic</i>	6
<i>The Propaganda of Memory</i>	7
<i>The Math of Ice</i>	8
<i>The Heart's Archeology</i>	9
<i>Fire Blight</i>	10
<i>Last Letter Home</i>	11
<i>Enter the Nagging</i>	12
<i>Mine Ponies</i>	13
<i>As a Boy in the Shetland Islands, I Studied Homer by Lamps Made of Burning Birds</i>	14
<i>Dark Boy</i>	15
<i>Mr. Turnbill to the Loggerheads</i>	16
<i>Toward Lungfish</i>	17
<i>Scars</i>	18

## II

<i>Emt Class</i>	21
<i>CPR</i>	22
<i>Trailer Fire</i>	23
<i>To Suffocate Gladly in the Air</i>	24
<i>Waking Up with Retrofitted Eyes</i>	25
<i>At the Chemotherapy Clinic</i>	26
<i>The Moving Dark</i>	28
<i>Stud-Horse Diamonds and the Moon</i>	29
<i>Constancy</i>	30
<i>Sheet Metal Metronome</i>	31
<i>Forcing It</i>	32
<i>The Naming of the Body</i>	33
<i>For the Boy I Never Was</i>	35

<i>Spring Diving</i>	35
<i>Slingshot</i>	36
<i>Gorgon</i>	37
<i>Remembering Melville's Obituary at Four in the Morning</i>	38
<i>Fruit and War</i>	39
<i>Taking Tea in the Sweet Potato Garden</i>	40
<i>Offerings</i>	41
<i>Bourbon Vespers</i>	42

### III

#### *Fourteen Days*

1. Knot	45
2. Wish	46
3. Depth	47
4. The Day Possum Died	48
5. The Things I Can Do	49
6. Cutting the Hay	50
7. Imagination	51
8. On Just Holding Steady	52
9. Flaws of the Giant Clam	53
10. Closet Monster	54
11. How We Know Things	55
12. The Light the Eyes Make	56
13. Believing	57
14. Prayer	58

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	61
-----------------	----

◇ I ◇





## TALISMANS

At the flea market across from the Commerce speedway  
you can buy Elvis relics in ziplock bags  
with masking tape labels—the napkin smeared with peanut butter  
and banana grease, the pocket comb with a single strand  
of black hair twined in its teeth, rhinestones  
dandruffed from the white Las Vegas jumpsuit. All point  
with the insignificance of dogs that have already treed the coon  
toward the masterpiece of the collection—Elvis’s wart.

Showcased under the glass of an overturned jelly jar,  
impaled on a bright-yellow balled stickpin stuck in a cork,  
the wart, looking for all the world like an albino raisin,  
seems to hover, bound only by that yellow globe above it.

“That’s the last vestige of The King. Only \$500.  
You know, each cell has everything that you need  
to make a whole person. You could clone Elvis from that wart.”  
A crowd gathers in awe, imagining  
the million tiny possibilities risen before their eyes.

Something simple happens—devotions, beliefs,  
strong through some accident of conductivity—  
too much salt, too little salt, in the cell spaces of the neuroconductors,  
some brief spell of ball lightning rolling through our brains—  
quicken an interest in the local auto mechanic,  
sending us on crusades, giving us the idea for Velcro,  
telling us to kill our wives, leading us forward  
in blind faith, making us hear The Word  
and hope that, unlike steak, we move on to Glory,  
seeing, for the first time, the glistening strings of dew  
in moonlight, strung all along the spider’s tender lines,  
leaving us shaken in the divine smell of strawberries.

## KOANS OF A DIFFERENT ORDER

I make it a practice to write with my finger  
on every fogged motel bathroom mirror,  
squeaking out messages overlooked  
by hotel staff. The oils of my skin battle  
water molecules for years to come,  
bringing the truth to naked strangers.

*Your dog will make a gruesome discovery.*

The Gideons left their bible in that drawer.  
You may choose to open and read it.  
The millions of skin cells dusting the mattress pad,  
find their way into your body with each breath,  
and I am stamped across your forehead  
as you face your naked self in the mirror.

*If you can hear your heart beating, there is a problem.*

You lean close to line your eyes, trim your nose hair,  
check the back of your tongue for mucous,  
or your neck for hickies. We will always have our moments.  
And so it should be. This is how the truth comes  
upon you, when you are naked, staring and startled.

*Saliva is a carcinogen when swallowed over time.*

Time is catching you. Once it overtakes you,  
there is nothing. Subtract the hours in this room  
from the hours you have left. Go and get that book  
from the drawer. Tear two pages out for each heartbeat.  
When the two covers touch, you're gone.

## MISTAKES YOU MIGHT MAKE IN SPANISH BUT PROBABLY WOULDN'T IN ENGLISH

Order a soap sandwich with cheese.

Confuse fingernails and nipples . . .

asking the manicurist to smooth, moisturize,  
and paint your nipples “Just Right Pearl White”  
(to go with your scarf, of course). Remind her to leave  
them long enough to play the guitar, at least on the right.

Then announce, formally, that you are pregnant  
because of these mistakes.

Request a sturdy homosexual or a duck  
to raise your car because your portly, bald  
tires encountered a sustained prick  
and are just hissing themselves to death.