

Brenda Hornsby

My hand glides across my library like an individual unable to see, but able to feel the tangible strength, curiosity, and knowledge of which each shelf holds. With gathering small bundles of dust at the tips of my fingers each curve of the binding rolls behind my hand. In my library I feel the eyes of the authors staring down at me; shadows of Dante, Poe, Byron, Hardy, and Hemingway looming over me in their literal splendor. E.E. Cummings and other poets peek out from their rows, no two books aligned, and no Dewey decimal system for miles. There are rows of fiction dotted with contemporary, classic, and ancient literature ordered only with a fanciful whimsy in their varied size and color. The heavy cherry wood shelves seem to be a border around a playful patchwork quilt moving around the walls.

There are books on the floor, stacked in corners, falling out of baskets. There are manuals for knitting techniques intertwined with needles and yarn that sprawls across the floor in winding patterns through other books and around a chair. Tufts of wool are tucked into books on carding and spinning. There are books on glass, pewter, woodworking, furniture, silver, and other crafts begging to be referenced, their spines waiting to be cracked. There is a section of books on historical ceramics, scholarly and archaeological references on pottery and pottery making. Each one has a hint of dust, or a smudge of clay wedged between pages or splayed across the cover. There are small stacks of books from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, manuals on housekeeping, sewing, a woman's travels through India, or a history of the house and each person's place within it. These are riddled with historical magazines, pamphlets from museums, stored and stacked away for the hopeful historian. These books are used, rarely new, displaying their age and the people who have handled them before me. Each book has had its own adventure, and I the captor, have seized each for my own possession, cataloguing them in no particular order, but aware of where each is housed.

There is one book I read each year, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, by Annie Dillard. This is my hallowed, dog-eared, marked-in, weather-worn, treasure. And there is one passage within this work that lingers with me every day: "Live water heals memories. I look up the creek and here it comes, the future, being borne aloft as on a winding succession of laden trays. You may wake and look from the window and breathe the real air, and say, with satisfaction or longing, 'This is it'. But if you look up the creek, if you look up the creek in any weather, your spirit fills, and you are saying with an exulting rise of the lungs, 'Here it comes! The present is the wave that explodes over my head, flinging the air with particles at the height of its breathless unroll; it is the live water and the light that bears from undisclosed sources the freshest of news, renewed and renewing, world without end.'"

My library makes me feel as if all subjects and all authors are there in one room in the present, awaiting my attention with greed and hunger, baiting me with their gilded letters or colorful jackets. I wish that each present moment were a languid space in which I could bask in the pages of each book and absorb all of the words that await me each time I enter my library. A library speaks of an individual by whom the books have been collected. My library is essentially me, varied, eclectic and supported by the time, strength, history, and knowledge that surrounds it. It displays a person eager to learn, avidly interested in a multitude of subjects, but comforted by text. My heart is like the soft blanket of dust that covers all of the books, buffeted by their binding and entwined in their offerings. This library is like a tomb that awaits me each time I close and open the door. I am met with the streams of light that pass through the thin curtain of the window, my buried treasure, hidden passions, my soul and home.

