

Evelyn came down from
 Lawrenceville. Got letter from
 her and she started to read it
 but as soon as she struck the
 word "annulment" which he
 had taken from Henry & gave a
 married scream and was
 out a long time. I suffered terribly
 and was afraid of Henry and
 hated him. He's such a gang of
 mind and so much in body.
 I just know Henry and all another
 thing which I just
 like the girl Parkins
 and to Oshawa.
 and one night.

DRIFTING

MARCO FRATICELLI

...to see Virginia
 ...going to
 ...she is going to stay with
 ...a child of our family.
 ...little better.

Drifting

Marco Fraticelli





Drifting

Excerpts from the diaries of
Celesta Taylor
(1860 – 1937)

Selected
and with haiku by
Marco Fraticelli

Marco Fraticelli, *Drifting*
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especially Rina Fraticelli without whose help this
book would still be stuck in my head.

This book is dedicated to those who came before me
and those who will come after,
especially Stefan, Andrew, Joanna, and Elsa.

Preface

I have in my possession 8 diaries which were written by Celesta Taylor during the years 1905 to 1916. I also have many of her letters and photographs that were found at the same time.

With the exception of the letter that closes this book, all the prose entries that follow were taken directly from her diaries. Although I selected only those entries that I felt were the most interesting and relevant to the telling of her story, I have not changed her words in any way. Even errors in grammar and spelling were left untouched.

The haiku are mine. I wrote them as I imagined Celesta might have. Of course, she was a woman and I am a man. Also, she was born almost a hundred years before I was. Still there are experiences and emotions that are universal and timeless. It is into these that I tried to tap.

There might have been more diaries, but I suppose that we may never know, although I still have fantasies of stumbling across one in a flea market. Until that time, we will have to make do with what I have.

Introduction

Celesta Oakley was born in the Eastern Townships of Quebec on June 27, 1860. At the age of nineteen, she married Frank Taylor and they had two sons, Clifton and Albion.

In 1898, Frank Taylor died.

Around 1900, Celesta was hired as a housekeeper by her first cousin, Henry Miles. Henry was himself a widower with two teenage sons. As well, Henry was the father of a newborn baby, Evelyn, who was born out of wedlock with his fifteen year old niece, Clara Miles, whom Henry had engaged as a housekeeper for his two boys. It appears that when the baby was born, Clara was sent away and Henry kept the child.

At the time of the first journal, 1905, Celesta was 45 and Henry 32. Celesta was living in Henry's home with his boys Carroll and Tenny, and Evelyn who was now five years old. Celesta's own two sons were away at school. Initially, the arrangement was a godsend for Celesta. Because Henry had a successful lumber mill he was able to pay Celesta well and she was able to send money to her sons to help with their schooling.

However, after a while, Henry decided to give up his business. Both he and Celesta were Seventh-day Adventists and Henry chose to devote himself entirely to his religious pursuits. As he did not have much success in this regard, the household fell on hard times. During these difficult financial years, it is Celesta who provided the much-needed family income. She did everything that she could to bring in a little money. She raised canaries for sale. She washed and sold flour bags. She became a distributor for patent medicines and even doctored friends and relatives with gadgets of dubious medical value such as the oxygenator and the resuscitator.

As well, over the course of the ten years that the journals encompass, Celesta and Henry's relationship became more complicated and stressful for her. We have only Celesta's words with which to speculate on the exact nature of their relationship, however it is obvious that it was certainly more than that of an employer and his employee. How much more is for the reader to decide.

Henry gave me this diary
an old one of his
so I like it better than new.

November 6, 1910



October 11, 1905

X Got a sad letter from Albion saying he was not well. Sent letter with \$6.00 in it to him and a card to Clifton. These are anxious days for me.

November 6, 1905

X Went to see the doctor about my arm.

December 7, 1905

X Mill caught fire.

I sprinkle ashes
from the woodstove
onto the compost pile

December 18, 1905

Henry's surgical operation.

December 20, 1905

Henry sat up a few minutes.

December 21, 1905

Grandpa died.

December 25, 1905

Christmas. Ploding about as usual.

boxing day

I light the fire

with wrapping paper

January 5, 1906

Awful tired. Had 8 to dinner, supper, overnight,
and breakfast and dinner.

January 9, 1906

X Commenced a big tub of butter. Davis house
burned.

January 13, 1906

Went to Mrs Davis funeral.

Losing our snow. As warm as May.

Doors and windows open and no fire.

a religious calendar
in the dead woman's room
and maps pinned to the wall

February 02, 1906

I felt so poorly staid on the bed nearly all day.
Letter from Albion.

February 17, 1906

Sabbath. I went to meeting. Sent \$50.00 to
Albion.

I am lonely and sad nowadays.

February 25, 1906

I sugared off.

winter funeral
breakfast and supper
in the dark

March 17, 1906

I have a hard cold. First this winter.

Henry went to meeting. A little cool.

March 25, 1906

I fell on the veranda and hurt my back.

March 27, 1906

My back aches all the time. Cook, cook.

April 7, 1906

Sabbath. Staid at home and read.

sunrise

a bird clearing leaves

from last year's nest

April 21, 1906

All went to meeting.

April 27, 1906

Henry was up almost all night last night.

May 5, 1906

A horrible boil on my nose.

May 19, 1906

All went to meeting except Henry. An anxious day.

abandoned cabin
a fly struggles
in the spider's web

May 5, 1906

Received a picture of my precious baby, Albion.
Am awful tired. Have done a big day's work.
Eight to cook for and nine yesterday.

June 27, 1906

My birthday. Bought a tie for myself.
I don't feel well. Must work.

July 16, 1906

Henry and Clifton went to Waterloo.
Had the doctor lance Henry's boil.

his fingerprints
all over
my birthday picture

July 17, 1906

Very hot.

Henry overworked and made boil worse.

July 27, 1906

Poor Henry. Just crawling around.

July 30, 1906

Henry went to the sanatorium. Got there just in time to save his life.

no rain again

the X

in this month's calendar



Henry Miles' house. The young girl on the porch is Evelyn.

September 18, 1909

Henry, Carroll and I went to meeting. A good meeting but small. Henry prayed, spoke, taught class and reviewed the school.

September 22, 1909

I did a very large washing of white clothes and baked. Letter from Albion and Clifton.

September 23, 1909

X. I did not go to meeting. Had an impressive dream about the same Celesta of old. I was awakened about five. Did a lot of work. "I don't intend that you shall want for anything as long as I am here at home". Strange talk that.

September 24, 1909

Sad. My heart very bad. Had a long talk with Henry. He got riled a little.

September 26, 1909

I have been so sad all day. Sewed some but felt so bad I could not do much. Sent a letter to Albion. I wanted to talk with Henry but had no chance.

September 29, 1909

I canned 13 quarts of tomatoes.

October 05, 1909

I sewed all day. General work.
More cheerful with no reason.

a butterfly
settles
on one of my weeds

November 15, 1909

We put on three outside windows.

I went beech nutting with Mrs. Horace McElroy.

December 02, 1909

I did a heavy days work. Moped the parlor, office, dining, pantry and kitchen. Made pumpkin pies, cleaned the cupboard and knit.

December 07, 1909

Henry went to Waterloo. Got cooking oil and birdseed. I sent for two pictures to be finished off for Clifton and Albion of Papa, them and I.

December 19, 1909

Henry looks very poorly, so much trouble will soon kill him.

December 22, 1909

Baked bread, sauce, cabbage and am tired. Henry gone to Sherbrooke overnight.

December 23, 1909

I did a lot of work. Took the paper off the ceiling in the parlor. A nasty mess. Beech nuts to Albion and Clifton. Henry came on the 4:00 train. He got me a bottle of Scott's Emulsion. I cough bad and am failing in other ways. We had a happy, but sad also visit.

December 28, 1909

Meeting at our place. 22 there. The big room was full and a splendid meeting. Poor Aunt Phoebe spoke very earnestly, and Henry twice.

another

winter

haiku

December 30, 1909

I am so wretched and tired of all that belongs to
this old earth.

Visited a while with Henry in the evening. I had a
long cry and talked to him of my heartaches. He
tryed to comfort me.

I feel like a sour apple and it is hard to feel
different.

I presented Henry with a New Year's gift but he
would not accept it.

moonlight on ice
the farmer carries heavy rocks
in his dream

February 28, 1910

The Resuscitator arrived.

I am so sad and I wish I could fly.

Henry came. Awful glad to get home. He could hardly express his joy for home again.

A little evening talk brings up disappointed hopes like livid corpses that rise up to haunt me and will follow me days and days.

I was ill nearly all night and only slept about two hours. I have put in a wretched day thinking, and thus ends this month.

after the argument
pieces of myself
in the broken mirror

March 02, 1910

Lovely weather. Crows have come.

Evelyn so sick and her throat and lungs so bad. I used the Resuscitator for her and it helped right away. Henry also sick with a bad cold. I used the Resuscitator for his throat and chest.

March 03, 1910

Henry not able to run the mill today but the Resuscitator cured the cold. The snow is going fast and the logs are not all done.

How I wish I knew the future, but I suppose God has wisely hidden from us the book of fate. I feel awful miserable and look like death which is not a great way off unless there is a change. I am so sad all of the time.

the sound of snow
melting
off the roof

June 30, 1910

Dug more roots. Indian hemp for dropsy.

Visited with Henry until about midnight.

Although he was very tired still wanted to visit.
I felt more cheerful. I wish my mind was settled
more. Dear Lord guide me to where thou wouldst
have me be.

August 25, 1910

Sucking raw eggs.

How the summer is speeding away. I like to see it
go although I do not know what time is bringing
to me.

I wrote a pretty letter to Henry, "my heart for
thyne". Keep me faithful, Oh Lord.

almost autumn
finding a plum
that the squirrels missed

January 01, 1911

A new year filled with all its joys and sorrow is before us. May our days be filled with good deeds and life's pages be found unspotted at its close.

Henry appointed superintendant of Sabbath School.

We went to Clara's because she was in trouble and a bad cut hand. I used the Resuscitator for her arm which helped the running sore. Henry is trying to do them good. We started for home but he felt as if his work was not done so he phoned home. Found things all right there so returned and staid another day. Tried to make Clara's a more happy home.

new year's day
we remove our glasses
to kiss

April 16, 1911

An awful day with Henry. He is desperate financially and I think socially. He looks so careworn and bad.

Took care of Grace's baby from eleven to four so she could go to Magog to see the doctor. Used Oleum on the baby for hooping cough. On chest, back and bowels. Used Oxygenator for the first time.

In the evening we got a telegram that Earl had left school with Libby for the lumber woods. Henry took it more calmly than I feared.

spring
melting
us

June 22, 1911

Coronation day. Evelyn and I picked 25 quarts of strawberries. Awful lame and tired. I talked too plain to Henry about talking so wild as he did to Skinner. It doesn't sit well. I must be more careful. We are all unhappy because Henry is.

June 30, 1911

An awful lightning shower. Fifty-one years since I came and opened my eyes to this world of sin.

We had a talk about breaking up.

The last of the dear June month has gone. Not all sadness but so unsettled all the time. I wish I knew where God would have me. Such drifting.

in the window

my face

regretting the things said

July 11, 1911

'X' the first for nearly two years. I have breathed too much turpentine is the reason why.

String beans, our first returns from the garden. Still awful hot and no rain.

I went to Newburys because the baby Genevee was very low with pneumonia. I sat up all night with it. The baby died about noon. I laid it out. The first person I ever laid out. I then walked home 2 ½ miles.

July 14, 1911

The funeral at the house. Quite a lot there. I helped with the singing then I staid with the children and tried to divert their minds by picking flowers.

breathing
watching him
breathing

August 30, 1911

I went to the grave of my dear companion. Years ago today, my dear Frank and I were joined together in holy wedlock to share each other's joys and sorrows as long as we were spared to each other. My darling was laid out almost thirteen years ago. Dear Father, keep me true to thee, that I may be permitted to be reunited with the one that is resting in Jesus. The way seems so sad and lonely much of the time, yet I have so much to be thankful for.

Henry sought me at the graveyard. We started home after Sabbath. Had a lovely cool moon-light drive.

by his graveside
my shadow grows
shorter

December 06, 1911

Our white rooster and two lovely hens were stolen and the door left open. Elder Tanner called and heard Henry's letter. I did not enjoy his remarks too well regarding Henry's future work. He seems to have little faith.

I went to Mrs. Sargent's funeral. A glowing but untrue sermon.

December 14, 1911

We all went to meeting it being the week of prayer. All gave Henry a cold reception and he returned with a heart of stone.

December 25, 1911

I made pies, cake, doughnuts and things for Evelyn's stocking which she hung up last night. Henry is very kind and tender to me.

after the funeral
the children
making snow angels

January 02, 1912

Elder Tanner sent a line down for Henry to come up at 7 o'clock. He went and they had a conference on anything but a heavenly sitting there with Brown and Tanner as accusers. An awful unjust Council.

Henry returned almost eleven nearly frantic with the veins standing out on his forehead and his eyes looked almost wild. We had prayer and he prayed so earnestly for his persicuters.

Went to bed at one but he could not sleep and was wild with pain in his head. I got up dressed, bathed his head went back to bed.

it's not me
but the full moon
that keeps him awake

January 31, 1912

The last day of the first month.

Henry seems so sad, quiet and disheartened about his debts and the pittance that he gets to meet them with while another and others are getting big pay doing almost nothing and much less than he.

It was 31 below zero last night. We have to melt snow nowadays for most all the water we use. The house and barn chores take up so much time. My fire failed to burn so my plants froze. Well, that is a small affair.

this coldest day

I dust

the dried flower arrangement

February 04, 1912

Evelyn and I went to the post office and got the letter with the \$100.00 cheque in it for Henry in response to my urgent request.

Henry came on the 9:14 train all sad and disappointed about finances. After he did chores, we had worship. I put the cheque in his bible at psalm 146 and asked him to read it. He was so surprised, he said he could not believe his eyes at all and wept so he could hardly read or pray. He felt that it was an answer to prayer.

longer days

shorter days

still the cardinal sings

November, 14, 1912

The snow came to stay today.

May Newbury sent me some real oatmeal from Eaton's.

Sent a box of birds to Julia.

An awful storm inside. I sew evenings to drive away the evil spirits.

Ernest and Evelyn went to meeting. Some harsh words over the subject of going to meeting. He talked real mean standing up for those that had abused Henry. The Sabbath was spoiled by Ernest acting so before he went to meeting and getting Henry all nerved up.

autumn

leaves

winter

February 16, 1913

It rained a lot and we are losing our snow fast. Very warm. I had my window open all night with only a sheet and quilt over me. Hens began to lay – 4 eggs.

A whole dose of Henry's articles returned and he is almost desperate with blues. Letter from Canadian Lumberman pretending they did not suppose Henry wanted pay for some of his articles.

I am wretchedly lonesome and sad.

February 27, 1913

Henry missed the 4:20 train so he came home on a freight with the good news that they had hired him and wanted he should remain with them. He is to commence next Monday. He feels that he cannot hire out for longer than to pay his bills because of his longing to get into the work of God again. He is so sad all the time about taking up the work of lumbering again.

midwinter
steam rising
from the compost pile

January 1, 1914

As wishing each other a “Happy New Year” under such circumstances would be almost mockery, there was but few such remarks.

It is mostly awful weather and the hens legs’ are going to freeze only Carroll put them in the heated grain box.

My last bird died with sore feet and direah. Isn’t spelled right either. It is the last one and I have not been without a bird for 30 years before.

I can take the white of eggs beaten with lemon and cold water the only thing my stomach will retain.

new years eve
behind the jars of preserves
a broken cocoon

January 16, 1914

I am still very weak. Henry did not come on the four o'clock train. Mrs. Butler called about the doctor again. I sent for some medicine by her and we think she must have reported evil to the doctor for he wrote a mean letter back although he sent a bottle of medicine. He promised to wait until the first of March for his pay but now he wants it right away or will send no more medicine or come no more.

Florence finished my gray silk waiste. Have had it over two years and just finished. Six people have worked on it and one more must to stitch the collar. Grace Knolwlton nearly finished it so it would be ready to lay me out in.

hanging
in its own web
the dead spider

February 07, 1914

He wrote me a letter which I hope always to keep.

February 10, 1914

A little X The first for about 2 years. A rough cold day. None went to church. After a while a mental storm struck the home after which not much happiness. I am not feeling very happy today since the storm. May the Lord open the way for me as will best please him.

Henry seems thankful for his blessing and that he is at home with his loved ones. He seems lonesome to part with us at bedtime.

coldest night
he enters
my dream

June 24, 1914

Ella called to get the rest of Florence's pay. I did not have it for her so it affected my heart badly for some time.

Evelyn commenced to X. She was bathing and was frightened so she called me.

I can see Aunt is failing fast in strength and mind.

shy girl
watching
the cocoon

Dec 04, 1914

Called at Sister Hammonds. She is an awful looking sight. I sat up all night with her. She breathed heavily all night with the opiate.

Dec 05, 1914

A lovely day. The ground is bare. Henry came on the 9:00.

Sister Hammond died at 20 to 10 with tuberculosis of the bowels. An awful sufferer with only bones left with not skin enough to cover them. Many broken through. Her back bone, hip bone and jaw bones. Dr. Blake opened her.

Dec 07, 1914

Sister Hammond's funeral. Hammond staid here all night for supper and breakfast. They have the house shut up and fumigating it.

walking without her
his shadow
overtakes him

January 18, 1915

Evelyn, Henry and I sat up quite late and discussed her studies which were unreasonable long and hard. Decided to take her from school and she study at home such books as she can learn from and that with less study.

January 20, 1915

Henry took Evelyn's money from the bank, a little over three dollars. They won't take his note at the bank. No money will be loaned at all. I suffered much with neuralgia. Took a hot bath which helped me some.

shoveling

snow

flakes

January 23, 1915

A stormy bad day. My neuralgia most gone.

Henry went to Mill Martin's and got the 25 to send to the bank just in the nick of time. His face was beaming with smiles so I knew he had gotten it. Got letter and express order of ten from Henry Lane in response to my request, but the crisis is over and I will return it very soon. I appreciate it much. Also that he can keep things to himself.

through bare branches
the blue
jay

February 18, 1915

Helped Evelyn on lessons. I wrote to Clifton asking for money to pay taxes with. I only asked for three dollars. Wrote letter to Albion asking for five to pay on taxes.

Henry awful blue all the time.

February 25, 1915

Still raining. Henry hasn't a cent. I had to let him have 24 cents for postage. What shall we do if work does not come soon?

Baked bread.

February 28, 1915

Just heard Willie Richardson had gone to the front in France to cook.

this long night
a red maple leaf
for my bookmark



Celesta with Albion

March 1, 1915

A lovely day but my heart is so sad. Poor Eljia Ann Getty Peters died. Had la grippe and no doctor. It turned into Bright's disease and typhoid fever.

A letter from Clifton with three dollars towards the taxes. Henry has a bad cold and Aunt keeps to her bed today. Is fast forgetting who her relatives are.

March 9, 1915

A letter from Albion with five dollars for taxes which I had borrowed off Henry Lane. I am so sorry to call on my sons for it. Wish I could pay it all myself.

I commenced to learn 'Abide With Me'. It is hard for me to play sharps.

March 14, 1915

I weighed myself at the station, only 130 lbs. Less than I weighed after my being sick a year. My health is ruined, I think. Letter from Tenny. The first letter I got that was censored.

March 20, 1915

Henry went to meeting.

A cloudy day but not very cold. It sounds good to hear the crows.

Clifton gave me another dollar as a gift for St. Patrick's Day. What an idea. Always has some excuse for giving me a dollar.

Henry pretty blue. No letter from any firm or any orders and duns coming in.

I had a good sleep which I needed much.

It commenced to snow.

snowstorm

once again

the birds disappear

April 8, 1915

Let poor sick Henry have my dollar to get to Sherbrooke with. He will pay it back.

Evelyn went to Luke's after I told her I wanted her to study while I was gone and staid until 20 to 8. Came back sorry, but I think it is time something else was done besides saying I'm sorry.

April 16, 1915

Got 126 purple pills from Clara as an Easter gift, but I shall pay her for every one. I am so glad to get them for I feel that I need more strength to keep this poor weak heart beating. Don't know as it is doing any benefit to anyone, but there are some who wants it to beat as long as they live.

reading
the obituaries
with a magnifying glass

April 20, 1915

A lovely day. Cloudy but not very cold. It sounds good to hear the birds.

I made Aunt give up her dirty clothes and I did quite a washing for her. She had to have fomentations for her side.

Henry came on the nine. Much better, but the Resuscitator's effect makes him almost wild by spells so he doesn't dare to go to meeting.

April 29, 1915

An awful anxious day. Henry so upset because of no work. It makes all most sick.

I made bread and doughnuts. Henry got me a new broom.

geese returning

above

the clothesline

May 28, 1915

Vergo and her husband came. He wanted to borrow the Oxygenator but I hated to part with it, besides he is too far gone to help with anything. I feel afraid of him or anything he has touched. I like him ever so much although he is not very brilliant.

May 29, 1915

Evelyn and I went to Carvilles woods for leeks. Got leeks, snakeroot and wild turnip. Cleaning up after the tuberculosis guest.

newly widowed
she waters her flowers
in the rain

June 29, 1915

Henry and I went to South Bolton. Started for home almost dark. Met no autos at all. I asked the Lord to not let us meet them, but only the Lord and I knew about my request. Henry said that he felt that we would not meet any. The horse was frightened at many things in the night. Henry told me of the wonderful northern lights he saw about 2 o'clock one night going from Orleans to Irasbug. Got home about 11 o'clock.

July 1, 1915

Dominion Day flags flying. I finished hoeing the garden. Washed about 30 bags to sell. Charley Whitehead called peddling. I bought three spools of thread, a box of writing paper and Evelyn a pencil. Fifteen cents. I wrote in my diary which I had neglected. Evelyn got nearly a quart of strawberries. The first we had.

longest day
our young girl's lips
red with strawberry juice

July 24, 1915

Got the graduating booklet from my Albion from Hilliard College, Des Moines, Iowa. I little dreamed I would ever see my lamb's name among the college graduates. It seems waters sometimes run higher than their source. Lucky in my sons case that they do.

July 27, 1915

Evelyn, Clyde and I went fishing. Caught quite a string. I sat on the bank most of the time.

My birthday. Clyde sewed Evelyn's shoes and mine too. Evelyn made me a cake with maple frosting, all on the sly. Got a lovely pin cushion and box of native herb tablets. Also a card with my birthday flower on it, the white roses meaning sadness.

another birthday
on this birch
my initials only

October 1, 1915

Evelyn did not rest good and I only slept about three hours. Would awake crying and sobbing about Chameleon. This awful waking up is fast killing me but I do not care for that. I arose a little after five and wrote to Henry. Not so sweet. I went to Robb McClaughlins on an errand for Henry. Got some tomatoes off Mrs. Knowlton that she gave me. A lovely day. Evelyn got a letter from Henry trying to pour on oil. He is trying to get a position in a lumber firm in New York somewhere.

autumn rain
tomatoes ripening
on my windowsill

October 2, 1915

Rainy and so gloomy.

Sent a letter to Henry, a bitter one telling him
about my three dreams and the fulfillment of one.

I can hardly contain myself within these four
walls. O! if I were only differently constituted than
to be this fond affectionate trusting female that
longs for love, home and to make someone my
equal, happy with my love.

This learning to live alone is awful.

in the evergreen
an empty nest
filling with dead leaves

October 13, 1915

Sent an overcoat to Henry.

I am tired and lonely.

Evelyn sits up and is much better.

I went alone to the post office . . . Sister N urged me to go back with her. That I did and had a good chat little dreaming I was carrying in my hands written words that would give me another death-blow, but O they do not kill fast enough for I long to rest from it all.

The last complaint “no freedom”.

Evelyn cried until nearly 12 at night and I slept but little and suffered much but kept quiet and suffered for her sake.

re-reading your letter
the moth
circles my lamp

October 14, 1915

I am so weak, not week as Henry spells it, and sick
I can hardly sit up from grief and not sleeping and
taking no food but I cannot endure being quiet
and must work in order not to go wild.

I arranged the summer rooms, cleaned Evelyn's
room, arranged some in my room, wrote to Albion
and composed part of a letter to Chameleon.

I carried a heart of lead all day and ate almost
nothing. Look like a walking corpse.

October 17, 1915

A pretty day. Hope I will get a letter from
Chameleon. I am miserable with this cold in my
head. Tree-toad gaining.

October 19, 1915

Henry came on the 11:00 much to our surprise.
Acted cold.

I knew too well that his love and interests were being placed on another besides those of the home nest. He just kissed us both when he first came and expressed no pleasure at seeing us once more. After a while he came and embraced me, but I could see such a difference in all in every way. I rushed on with my work but with a heart of lead. I slept but little and put in a wretched night all smothered up to myself. He keeps his grip locked up because her letters and picture is in there. Never before has he kept that locked from me.

both with our feet
in this freezing river
our eyes meet



Celesta with Clifton

October 20, 1915

I look like death and have failed ever since I got his first letter about that girl. We thrashed things out and talked about his interest in the girl, most of the day. I am too frantic to be contained within these walls. He admitted that he loved her. Had kept company with her two months but that was a mistake for it could not be. Said he didn't want to come home, but would have to starve in the streets if he could not get home. We had some pretty hard words. He claiming that he had been as he believed led by God to bestow his attentions on her but evidently he had forgotten his promise that he would never do so until I was liberated so as to see other scenes and faces, not where everything reminded me of our past associations. O! This cruel world how can the human heart be so.

the leaves are gone
and half the moon too
but I am still here

October 21, 1915

I spent an awful night. Slept only as I was drugged by opium. No one but God knows what I suffered. The awful spell lasted about an hour in the cold dining room. My nerves would throw me nearly out of the rocking chair almost every moment and it was with great effort that I could breathe. Evelyn would not let him in for a long time, but he pressed his way through and came to comfort me. Thought I was going to die sure and begged me to forget the past, burn the troublesome letters and to take him back as before. He prayed earnestly for me, and wept bitterly when I told him what I wanted put on my tombstone.

tombstone
too weathered
to read the name

October 22, 1915

I took some opium which stupefied me for a time. He thought I was dying in his arms and tried to have me open my eyes and look at him but I was too exhausted to make the effort for that. He never mentioned taking me back after I came out of my bad spell. O! the agony of these days only heaven can compensate for. I have prayed for years that if it were not god's will for us to marry, He would take that love from my heart, but still no help, and I am left to wonder what is right in God's sight about it.

train whistle
the smell of mouthwash
in his kisses

November 9, 1915

Henry left his coat off and I got her last letter and read part of it. The most lovesick thing I have ever heard in my life. Chameleon “my own sweet true love” calling him her “darling pet” and “little pet” and signing herself “your own little pet”. I tried to keep composed but the awful thoughts nearly killed me and I walked the floor then went to the barn and walked for about an hour wringing my hands and walking back and forth and pounding my poor fist on hard things until it was all swollen and black. Henry found me after a time and did all in his power to comfort and soothe and cried with me most bitterly begging the Lord to save my reason. I was bent on destruction if I could. I walked until I was exhausted and he just made me come into the house and comforted me for hours. She wrote she pitied me and hoped I would very soon “get reconciled”. Such horrid words to my broken heart.

your breath on my neck
winter moon
through the apple tree

November 13, 1915

I cared for all the vegetables as the rats were eating them. Corked up the doors, brought in the flour barrel and puttered all day.

November 24, 1915

Snow came last night. Dreary and cloudy. I dressed and came down to the dungeon below. I looked in the mirror for the first time since ten days ago. I look like a walking corpse. As I saw my wasted form, flesh that but a few weeks ago was hard and solid now hangs on my frame like rags . . . I said, "Nothing short of murder, but done slowly".

the lake freezes
crows feet
in the mirror

December 21, 1915

It was too cold to sleep last night. I arose in the bitter cold and cleaned the parlor stove pipes for I was getting afraid of fire. We have had much awful cold weather. I am sick with this distemper. Slept on the floor last night and kept Evelyn on the couch so as to not go through cold room to bed. Aunt is coming well with her cold. I put on so much camphorated oil to her displeasure. I made three squash and one berry pie, and cake and tart shells. I cleaned and mopped our bedroom. Began a letter to Henry.

dreaming
of falling asleep
with you

February 3, 1916

Parliament buildings burned.

Lanie called. I gave her some boiled beef and onion.

Saw Henry Wilson with his uniform on. Poor boy!

Letter from May Willard. She wants to come and stay for nearly three months and do their spooning here much against her parents and friends wishes that she should marry him. I don't think that I run a courting shop. No, not me.

Henry is feeling awful about the matrimonial offer given me by a man off West because I do not love him.

talk of war

I put on one shoe

then the other

March 13, 1916

No letter from Henry yet. Fifteen days silence.

How cruel. Too busy I suppose.

Evelyn read to me in the evening and played.

I could not sleep until past midnight.

He haunts me so much and I cry out with grief: A
brute, a brute.

Far past midnight I was haunted and constantly
awakened by screaming dreadfully.

Dreamed that they were having a court over
me and were going to put me behind bars then
freedom would be theirs.

I put in awful hours of agony of mind and body
and look like death in the morning.

A cold day. Heard the first crow. It sounded pretty.

winter

apple

blossoms

April 03, 1916

Wrote to Clara. Sent her some mullen leaves for her cough.

April 10, 1916

Got a letter from Henry. He was most homesick and desperate to see Evelyn and I. He only had 29 cents to his name and with no home or no income. A heart rending one saying he could never give me up unless I was happy and we could write to each other, visit and comfort each other.

so far away

and still

both of us wishing on the same star

April 26, 1916

Pretty blue times for me.

I worked all day packing up Henry's things to send him. Took a can of strawberries which we had picked together four years ago, made them thick and put them safely in a wooden box in the trunk. Hope he will like them. So sad sending the things away which we have enjoyed together for nearly 14 years. Such is man as he is found today, not as God first made them.

sun and moon
in the morning sky
in the puddle my reflection

May 13, 1916

Fifteen days silence. So cruel. I am so wretchedly lonely I cannot read or play or write.

Grace talked to me about marrying Chameleon and was wild for us to be. Said it would be the best thing in the world and we three would make a team alone. She talked long and earnest over it and took his address to write to him about it. A pretty day, but I am so sad. Wish I could go to the woods as I used to but I cannot.

housebound
a butterfly
on my windowsill

June 3, 1916

A cloudy day that just met my saddened heart.
Picked dandelion blossoms for liver trouble.

June 9, 1916

Got a big letter from Henry which nearly killed me. Such news and changes are fast doing its death work on me. I nearly went wild. The wildest delirium all night until daybreak. Cold cloths on head, heart, throat. I fell away fearfully through the night. I walked miles. Oh such agony. Only God knows my grief.

night of no moon
I light every lamp
to read your letter

July 1, 1916

Another awful day that only God knows about. Such grief kills, but so slow. I only take sour milk for nourishment. I wrote to Henry an awful letter but he never answered it. I begged him to come home in my half crazed state. I wrote to Beauty begging her not to take my Henry. No reply.

July 2, 1916

Got the letter I expected but it was so icy that it nearly killed me. He haunted me all night. I slept but little.

watching the cat

watching the bird

watching the butterfly

July 3, 1916

The awful day. He stands up and promises vows that he can only partly keep. I hope that his future will be cursed but that he will be saved in the new earth where we can meet, "where they are not married or given in marriage but are as the angels are". I wonder what the angels are recording for Henry and the others this day. I hope yet that his grief will surpass mine if that can be possible.

Oh, the agony of mind only God knows. How much more agony can this heart stand?

I dressed all in black, wrote some to Henry on mourning paper.

alone in my bed
moths
cling to the screen

July 18, 1916

I went black berrying. Got six quarts. They are all steamed.

Evelyn came home on the four. Face all burned red by being on the water in the sun. She brought me candy, clam shells and a big white stone.

Evelyn got a smooth loving letter from Henry. She was so angry she tore it in pieces, wrote a few lines right to the point, and returned the whole thing.

I got a horrid letter telling me I could go where and when I pleased only leave Evelyn and the house in tact.

between each wave
my children
disappear

July 30, 1916

Very hot. Thunderstorm at night. I put in a hard night and can hardly sit up today caused by my dreams of being placed back 12 years ago with the sweet little girl baby and the man I loved. We were taking a lovely summer ride and he was smiling on us with true lovers eyes.

Letter from Henry. All about his marriage and justifying himself. Oh how cruel to write about it so. Slept none after four. The air is red and very strange looking. Put up a quart can of berries for Evelyn to take to school.

more rain
afraid of drowning
in you

August 16, 1916

It has rained for four days. Pond very high. I sorted letters from the desk all day emptying it for the Laurentian Company to have. Opening graves of past memories and viewing corpses all day. I am nearly too ill to sit up.

I could not sleep until past midnight thinking, thinking, thinking. Got another evasive letter from Chameleon. He sat up until nearly midnight writing such a homesick letter to me. How much I am appreciated and how he carries as many as two of my letters in his jacket all the time. He is almost desperate to come home and be as he used to be. I pity the poor wretch.

the widow

watches

the crows circle her fields

September 30, 1916

Sabbath. I did not go to meeting, only Evelyn went. I gave 25 cents for offering to send missionaries to heathen lands. I wrote some to Henry. Got a letter from him, but not one word in reply to my wedlock letter. So insulting.

I have symptoms of la grippe but can still stand at the helm. Thus another month has gone to the court of heaven with its doleful record. I am so heartbroken and discouraged all the time.

at the doctor's office
butterflies
in glass cases

October 14, 1916

Learned that Sister White had given up Sabbath and said it was all humbug.

Got a letter from Henry and one from A_____ in Colorado. He thinks that he is going to marry me sure. Poor dunce.

Henry is having glowing luck with his preaching.

John Drallet and wife came for a call. She is more homely than I am if possible. He is most all nose. I copied many recipes of Clara's.

laughing loudly
as they harvest pumpkins
the homely couple

October 28, 1916

Sabbath. The anniversary of my marriage to one of the best men on earth. Thirty-six years ago. What volumes have been written about us in the ledgers of heaven since that day. May God grant us reunion at last, after all the storms of this life are gone and we have passed in our records. I did not go to church. Had the Resuscitator used last night over my kidneys. Had a poor night and dreamed about Henry coming here after his things. Not himself at all and no interest in here only to get back to her. What happened about this time last year. Oh how cruel is man if such they can be called. He left us all.

It rained all night. I had to awaken Evelyn to talk with her I was so wretched.

last of the leaves fallen
a crow
on the highest branch

December 01, 1916

Slept but little dreaming all night about
Chameleon and Beauty.

I mopped some. Baked honey bread, brown bread,
Johnny cake, biscuits, oatmeal crackers, potatoes
and turnips.

Went to the station with May to meet her soldier
lover. She was going to Sherbrooke with him but
he came not. She wept bitterly. I tried to comfort
and got her to write to him. She did, a long letter.

December 03, 1916

My dear cousin Arvilla dropped away with heart
failure while lying down for a nap while getting
supper. I shall miss her much in this lonely world.

news of her death
each snowflake melts
as it touches the ground

December 05, 1916

An awful day. Stormed and blowed fierce. I melted snow to drink and cook with. Had to shovel to get to the road. I did not think that I could go to the funeral so I did not arise until nearly eight, but decided to go as far as West Shefford and if I found no way from there would return on night train. Met Nevada and husband on train and by invitation went with them to Knowlton and rode from there to Iron Hill with them. I like Nevada very much indeed. She has a smart husband.

after the funeral
my son photographs
himself

December 06, 1916

Dear Arvilla looks as natural as life. I was left alone with her for about two hours. I felt her face, hands, arms and cut off some of her hair. The funeral was at half past ten. No sermon, only a service.

Took the five o'clock train. Met my Evelyn at the station. All glad to see me home. Aunt had acted up pretty bad some of the time.

Letter waiting for me from Henry.

your name

scraped in the window frost
my fingertip . . . so cold

Dear Precious Celeste:

Words are inadequate to express my joy on receiving a letter from you written by your own hand. I recognized the "familiar" tracks" at sight which you know always look good to me. They have expressed our full sentences against me in the letters you wrote to Blanche and the mother. But I know you really did not intend to wrong me. Could I have ever stood up for you taking all the blame to myself.

Now regarding the letters of which you speak. Dear Jessie: you must know that I would with all my hearting from you that I thought

Reusen NY, December 03, 1916

Dear Precious Celesta:

Words are inadequate to express my joy on receiving a letter from you written by your own hand. I recognized the "canary tracks" at sight, which you know always looks good to me tho they have expressed awful sentences against me in the letters you wrote to Blanche and her mother. But I know you really did not intend to wrong me. And I have ever stood up for you taking all the blame to myself.

Now regarding the letters of which you speak. Dear Lessie: you must know that I would withhold nothing from you that I thought would really comfort you and would not be turned against me. But while I am sure that when in your right mind you would do nothing to injure or cause me trouble, others might. And these letters were misinterpreted and sent here as you know for the express purpose and hope that they would disgrace me and debase me in the depths of hell. Hence can you wonder that I propose to hold them a while at least. I have not destroyed them, but in justice to myself and the one who has chosen to share my troubles, I feel that I should retain them rather than take the chance of having those who have turned against me manipulate

them to the furtherance of their evil ends.

I have just returned from a trip to Buffalo and other important cities in search for a position. Blanche furnished the money to go with. Well, on our return her mother tells me that she received a letter from someone who signed it Clifton Taylor which ran me to the lowest notch. Said that its contents were so ridiculous that she burned it and did not want that I should tell Blanche anything about it. Said she could not think that one in his position and profession would have written such a letter for if all was true there was no use telling her or her daughter what a devil she had married after it is all over and no chance to retract. Hence she questioned that he wrote it. And such letters hurt you and Clifton as well as I for they would reason that if I am such a devil why should you remain in my house so many years. She would not tell me what the letter contained but said it was very rank. Whoever wrote it must have been short-sighted not to see how it would hurt them as well as me.

Now of course I told Blanche all about Evelyn but she would feel to annihilate anyone who would be so mean as to tell her people. She has no reproach on her name whatever and her people are very proud spirited. Hence we hope the letter contained nothing of that kind. The way

Tenny maneuvered he would disgrace both you and I.

However, Clifton did write to me at a time when it did seem I should die of grief over you and my debts comparing me to Balum and twitting me of my debts. I am sending you the letter. You will note that he requests that I never see you again but unless you protest I hope to see dear "Lell" many times again, and tell you of the many interesting things that has transpired since last fall and visit long again with "Goodness".

Oh, Lessie: you must not give up hope in God. You will understand it all some day if you are faithful and see why this awful experience was permitted. Bitter as it has been for both of us I know it is all for the best and I have not been controlled by mere fancy or sentiment either. Forgive me for my imprudence of years ago but bless me for freeing you from an unhappy life in bonds we should never take.

Yes I have burned all your letters which I did not care for others to read and have told you so before.

Regarding hay: Yes sell it and send the money to Williamson or use it if you need it as of course you do. There is no harm in your using it.

Of course I appreciate Tenny's watch care over you but do not appreciate the way he acted otherwise for everyone concerned himself included. He thought to injure me but instead he would have lost all their respect here had I not vindicated his cause. I was praising him while he said all he could to kill me. And they do not think much of him as it is. He doesn't see that as long as you people are all related to me and have known me for years that to write such hurts us all.

As yet I have no position but still hope on and pray that soon I may be able to send you money to relieve you there for I fear you are suffering for things. Yes and my darling Evelyn wrote me saying that she was no longer my dear girl or never to call her such etc.

Oh! what more must I endure.

Now I trust you will be able to stop grieving over the past. Well, oh I cannot write more for I must go and help hay. But you well know that I sympathize, love, and pity the poor faithful one who is still the apple of my eye tho I have no disappointments in Blanche. I trust this will be understood.

Lovingly,
Henry



Acknowledgements

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Marco Fraticelli was born in Montreal in 1945. A musician as well as a poet, he has been writing haiku for almost 40 years. For most of that time he has served on the executive of Haiku Canada. Among his other books are *Night Coach* and *Voyeur*, both published by Guernica Editions. His poetry has won prizes in Canada, the U.S. and Japan. He is the publisher of the Hexagram series of books (Kings Road Press). He lives in Valois, Quebec.

Celesta Found

Drifting is based on Marco Fraticelli's discovery of letters, journals and other documents dating from the early 20th century in an abandoned cabin in Québec's Eastern Townships. The journals, written by Celesta Taylor, provide a rare portrayal of daily life for women in rural Canada between 1895 and 1916.

The diaries led his sister, Rina Fraticelli, on a decades-long journey of investigation and discovery about the lives of women then and now. That journey is captured in the documentary film, *Celesta Found*. Internationally renowned modern dance artist Peggy Baker portrays Celesta Taylor in David McIlwraith's compelling documentary.

Personal use copies of *Celesta Found* are available from fraticelli@rogers.com.

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A little more composed
but still my grief is awful.
I have not written for nearly
2 weeks so early from memory
and aided by L. H. G.'s diary.
All I know is that I am
more than wretched wretched
all the time I crawl into
the little bed. Write a grief
letter to Clifton and Etta M.

3

The awful day He stands up
and promises names that
can only partly ever free. I
hope Mr. future will be cursed
but that he will be saved in
the new earth where all can
meet where they are not more
or fewer in number than
as the angels are.
I wonder what
are recording your words
the others this day. I may
yet find this grief will surpass
mine if it can be possible.

