Cell

Abstract
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Disciplines
Nonfiction

Comments
Lately I've been calling myself when necessity requires, the landline part of me who has a meeting and must be out the door dials the cell self lost in the deep pocket, nestled under sheets, in the far crease of the couch, or left behind the stack of books by the cold coffee cup mulling over something read by Pessoa. Lately, too, I've been forgetting the words for things. *Tortilla*, for example, in the Mexican restaurant I am helpless. "Unleavened flatbread, made from wheat or corn,"

I might say, or "What is the casing in which a burrito is housed?" as if this were *Jeopardy*. Never mind, a part of me folds inside itself, my brain cleans out its closets each night, discarding words like garments that are ill-fitting, out of style, or haven't been off their hangers for five seasons.
“Help me out,” my student says, “what’s the name of that tragic jazz singer?” (She thinks I’ll know this because I’m old.) We puzzle over it for minutes—
gardenia behind the ear, voice like Chinese porcelain, singer of “Strange Fruit,” before I surrender and google it, “lady sings the blues.” Or my friend, the plant pathologist, who can reel off the names for plants—castor bean (ricinus communis), black cohosh (cimicifuga racemosa), mugwort (artemisia vulgaris)—
who can tell you their habitats and every attribute but could not remember the title of a movie or its director if you tied her down and beat the bottoms of her feet. “Cutie-pie” is what she calls all movie stars. “You know, the one who was in that movie with what’s-her-name?”
Surely this is medical. I must ask my friend the botanist the Latin name of the medicinal, or visit the apothecary (Greek for apoteke,
the place in which a cure is stored), or just break down and visit my physician—good old what's-her-name—and confess all. Never mind, the phone is sure to ring someday from the endless bottom of my purse. The long message, when I manage to retrieve it, will be full of unrecognizable jargon. The voice of the nurse, no doubt, with all the gory details.