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94.3 AUTUMN 2014

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The Dalhousie Review
Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3H 4R2 Canada

Telephone: (902) 494-2541
Dalhousie.Review@dal.ca
http://www.dalhousiereview.dal.ca

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EDITORIAL

AS THE WINTER holidays approach and I rush in circles doing mad battle against looming deadlines, interminable traffic and an inevitable cold, I am sustained by the promise of a few dozey late-December afternoons in which eggnog and pajamas will feature prominently. And so, I was filled with delight upon discovering John Tagliabue's poem "When Sometimes Awkwardness is Almost Fitting." Here it is:

My
long
woolen
underwear
follow
me
around
a
little
loosely
like
some
inexact
but
pleasing
thought.

In his lively, thoughtful essay about Tagliabue, Gary Grieve-Carlson celebrates the poet's ability to quietly negotiate the relationship between the cosmic and the comic in a manner that instills a deep attentiveness and sense of "plenitude" in his readers. As such, I think Tagliabue might have appreciated Arthur Bull's "Blue Mat," which is also about mindfulness—as represented in the vision of a slug that crawls across a yoga mat, "moving as though all its senses / were concentrated in two fleshy horns, / their round nubs stressing and straining / to extend perception to the whole universe."

Tagliabue was American. He spent much of his adult life living in Maine, not far from where another famously attentive writer spent many

summers. I am thinking of Elizabeth Bishop, the sometimes Nova Scotian, whose presence also permeates this issue. Thomas R. Moore's poem, "Great Village House, Nova Scotia," pays homage to Bishop's masterful autobiographical story "In the Village," which counterpoises the rhythms of rural life with the scream that marked her mother's descent into deep depression and psychosis. "A scream, the echo of a scream hangs over that Nova Scotian village," wrote Bishop. More than sixty years after the story was first published, Moore considers how that scream reverberates in a town where "logging rigs rev" and spring rivers "urge Cobequid Bay beyond the berm."

Bishop is often remembered for her meticulous representation of the physical world. For me, this is most evident in her descriptions of animals, like the enormous moose that "looms" in the middle of a road, "towering, antlerless / high as a church, / homely as a house" ("The Moose"). Perhaps it is the smile evoked by the phrase "homely as a house," but I think Bishop would have been charmed—as you will be—by David Sapp's poem "The Hen," which imagines a hen and a farm dog riding to town in a farmer's jalopy:

> an odd couple that got along
> in a curious unison, cocking
> their heads at passing sights;
> she clucked as a fretting wife
> in low, wary comments
> and the occasional, excitable cackle,
> from him, a growling "humph."

Unlike Bishop's "otherworldly" moose or Bull's precocious slug, Sapp's animals are delightfully domestic. For all their differences though, these poetic renderings of human-animal encounters have a similar effect on us. They inspire wonder, prompting us to ask, as Bishop does,

> Why, why do we feel
> (we all feel) this sweet
> sensation of joy?

As the holidays approach, and joy is trumpeted by carolers and Christmas cards, I hope you all find a quiet afternoon to enjoy "this sweet / sensation" of readerly joy—while wearing pajamas.

Carrie Dawson

BLUE MAT

ARTHUR BULL

I am joined on my blue rubber yoga mat
by a slug, moving as though all its senses
were concentrated in two fleshy horns,
their round nubs stressing and straining
to extend perception to the whole universe:
seems pretty confident of getting it right.
I close my eyes awhile, then open them:
the slug is gone, having left behind only
a crooked white trail, shapely, still wet.

JOHN TAGLIABUE AND THE OFFICE OF THE POET

GARY GRIEVE-CARLSON

IN A LATE POEM JOHN TAGLIABUE describes himself in the act of "Taking a Wooden Statue of Don Quixote Down from the Top of My School Office Bookshelf as I Am about to Retire and Transpose Him to a Secret Place," and then adds, "We Need His Courage, I Vow Eternal Support." Many poets write in some sort of private space—a study, an enclosed porch, some sort of "room of one's own"—and those who work as college professors often write in an office supplied by their college or university. In this poem Tagliabue, who taught from 1953–1989 at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, addresses the wooden statue of Quixote in words that apply to himself and to any of us:

> Whatever you do
> whatever is done to you
> by all the materialist skeptics confused mundane
> distracted ones
> of the turning world, somewhat or completely blind to what
> you see, don't
> don't give up, Quixote! where would the Golden Age go
> then, where where
> would our increasing heightening nobility potency be
> without your
> dignity?
>
> [...]
>
> irrevocable one, dearest wreck, loftiest uncle, don't give up
> the Golden belief in Us.[1]

[1] John Tagliabue, *New and Selected Poems* (Orono, ME: The National Poetry Foundation, 1997) 357. Further page references to this work will appear in parentheses within the text.

This gentle, humorous poem responds to Quixote as exemplar of the Golden Age of Spanish literary history, but more significantly recognizes in the old knight an attitude of reverence for what is noble or golden in any of us, difficult as those things often are to discern in a turning world dominated by the material, the skeptical, the mundane, the distracted. The office of the poet may denote a physical space, but another meaning lies in the word's derivation from the Latin *officium* and the earliest English definitions cited by the Oxford English Dictionary: a service, a kindness, an attention done to or for someone, as in "I appreciate your good *offices* to my uncle"; somewhat later the word comes to mean a duty or obligation attaching to one's position or station, so that one performs one's office, a meaning that takes the Latin *officium* back to roots in *opus* and *facere*, "to do" one's "work." What, then, is the office of the poet? What service does the poet render, what kinds of attention does the poet bestow? If we think of certain names—Homer, Shakespeare, Yeats, Blake, Donne, Rilke, Dickinson, Whitman—the question may seem bizarre. To attempt to list the "services" incumbent upon a poet, to draw up a kind of job description, would be to trivialize or to diminish what it is that makes certain poems matter so largely to so many of us, to reduce the amplitude of those poets to whom we turn again, and again. But if, for the moment, we bracket such names and turn our attention to the less than famous (i.e., the overwhelming majority)—can we then speak of the office of the poet? Why, or how, can such poets matter?

The question is still far too broad, for poets, like dancers or painters or musicians, matter in very different ways. So let me narrow my focus still further: why, or how, did John Tagliabue perform the office of the poet? Why does he matter? Tagliabue emigrated to the United States with his parents from Cantù, Italy (near Lake Como) in 1927, when he was four years old, and grew up in New Jersey, where his father ran a restaurant at which his young son would dance for the customers. He earned his BA and MA in English at Columbia, where his favorite professor was Mark Van Doren, and his classmates included Allen Ginsberg (a lifelong friend) and Jack Kerouac. Over the course of his long career, he earned six Fulbright awards and taught in Spain, Italy, Greece, Lebanon, Indonesia, Japan, China and Brazil. His six books include *Poems* (1950), *A Japanese Journal* (1966), *The Buddha Uproar* (1968), *The Doorless Door* (1970), *The Great Day: Poems, 1962-1983* and *New and Selected Poems: 1942–1997*. Some of his poems appeared in prestigious journals such as *The American Scholar* and *The Kenyon Review*,

and Garrison Keillor included Tagliabue in his popular anthology *Good Poems*, but none of the major anthologies includes his poems. A search of the MLA database elicits almost no critical response to his work. His books were published by small presses, and the big final collection (*New and Selected*) by the National Poetry Foundation. So Tagliabue occupies that space between the major, anthologized poets and the second tier, those who may do very good work but are largely unknown.

To return to my question: how did John Tagliabue fulfill the office of the poet? In *The Will to Power* (Book III, fragment 821), Nietzsche writes, "What is essential in art remains its perfection of existence, its production of perfection and plenitude; art is essentially *affirmation*, *blessing*, *deification of existence*" (Nietzsche's emphasis). The next fragment, 822, is better known: "For a philosopher to say, 'the good and the beautiful are one,' is infamy; if he goes on to add, 'also the true,' one ought to thrash him. Truth is ugly. We possess *art* lest we *perish of the truth*" (Nietzsche's emphasis).[2] That last line is often rendered in English as "We have art in order not to die of the truth,"[3] and though the claim may seem flamboyant, over the top—a direct contradiction of Keats's claim that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty"—we take Nietzsche's point: the truth is often ugly, as the evening news regularly demonstrates. Some of the ugly truths of the world can kill us, suddenly or slowly, and in certain circumstances any of the arts might save one's life, or at least make one's life more bearable by offering a small light that the surrounding darkness cannot destroy. In what follows I am going to suggest that John Tagliabue's poems point toward the kind of perfection and plenitude that Nietzsche mentions, and that Tagliabue fulfills the office of the poet by engaging in repeated acts of "affirmation" and "blessing."

In the Quixote poem, the "truth" consists in the merely material, the always skeptical, the confused, the mundane—the "truth" includes the world of war, crime, avarice, suffering, diseases, pain, and cruelty. If such truth were all that the world held, and all that we could see, then many of us would

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[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1968) 434–35.

[3] See, for example, Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1959) 69, where the line is rendered: "we have art in order not to die of the truth." In her popular novel *The Goldfinch*, Donna Tartt uses the line as the epigraph to part five, though her translation changes one preposition: "We have art in order not to die from the truth." In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche writes, "Wir haben die *Kunst*, damit wir *nicht an der Wahrheit zugrunde gehen*" (Nietzsche's emphasis).

"perish of the truth," as Nietzsche puts it—as indeed many of us do perish of the truth. The office of the poet, as John Tagliabue fulfills it, is to offer the reader another way of looking at the world, another way of paying attention, vivid and funny and reverential, full of odd juxtapositions, reminding us that although the world may seem to be in the hands of the "lawyers and parliamentarians," it also includes the "poets and priests,"[4] who see things somewhat differently. In his *Journal* for 5 August 1851, Thoreau writes, "The question is not what you look at, but what you see,"[5] and though they may look at the same world, the lawyer and the poet see different things. In the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, Christ's disciples ask him "When will the kingdom come?" and Christ answers, "The kingdom of the Father is spread upon the earth and men do not see it."[6] This is startling news: rather than something prophesied to occur in the future, rather than something not of this world, the kingdom of heaven lies right in front of us, in the midst of this world of suffering and death and violence; it is all around us, right here, right now. Nietzsche's "art" and "truth" are not mere polar opposites, but are entangled each with the other. On the banks of Maine's polluted Androscoggin River the poet glimpses the sacred; in the post-industrial, economically depressed mill town of Lewiston, Maine, his eye discerns the celestial.

From a certain perspective, these claims can sound fatuously New Age, and some of the small critical response to Tagliabue has been negative. In his review of *New and Selected Poems*, Norman Friedman finds in its 330 pages "a certain sameness of diction, rhythm, and mood," and concludes that the poet "does not give off the air of a meticulous craftsman."[7] For Friedman, Tagliabue seems utterly unremarkable: he is a poet of "modest self-awareness and anchoring in ordinary life," and his poems depict "a modest, non-aggressive persona, one who can reflect upon himself, acknowledge and accept his own ambivalences, come to terms with his negative side and feelings of failure, and nevertheless emerge with a positive feeling." Friedman's Tagliabue sounds like someone who's embraced Norman Vincent Peale and the quiet virtues of suburban middle-class life. Friedman is wrong, yet one

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[4] John Tagliabue, *The Great Day: Poems, 1962–1983* (Plainfield, IN: Alembic, 1984) 14. Further page references to this work will appear in parentheses within the text.

[5] The Walden Woods Project. https://www.walden.org/Library/Quotation/Observation.

[6] http://gnosis.org/naghamm/gosthom.html.

[7] Norman Friedman, "Tagliabue and Cummings: A Comparative Review of John Tagliabue's *New and Selected Poems: 1942–1997* (The National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine, Orono, 1997)," *Spring: The Journal of the E.E. Cummings Society* 9 (October 2000): 171–74.

can see how Tagliabue might elicit such a response from someone who looks without seeing. His is not an academic or dense poetry—the poems feel quick, off-the-cuff, and his playfulness can sometimes seem silly, light, frivolous. But then Oscar Wilde could seem silly, light, frivolous, and Wilde was deadly serious. So is Tagliabue.

His more careful readers have been far more positive. On the back cover of the *New and Selected Poems*, Amy Clampitt states, "John Tagliabue writes out of a deeply sacramental sense of nature and history. He is, moreover, that rare person to whom poetry appears to come as naturally as breathing. It comes to this reader, poem by poem, as a Franciscan act of courtesy and praise." The back-cover blurbs on *The Great Day* come from poets as different as Gwendolyn Brooks, Hayden Carruth, John Ciardi, David Ignatow, Denise Levertov and X.J. Kennedy, for each of whom Tagliabue is a poet who matters.

How then, specifically, does this poet fulfill his office? In his Foreword to *The Great Day*, Tagliabue writes that a poem cannot sing "unless [it] reveals and bows to something greater than itself" (*Day* 14). The precise identity of that "something greater" may remain mysterious, but Tagliabue is always aware of it, and always honors its fundamental importance. In an untitled poem from his *Japanese Journal*, he asks,

To
what
do
we
pay
homage
as
we
go
toward
our
spiritual
home?
To
what
do
we
bow

as
we
grow
smaller
and
smaller
until
we
grow
bright
enough
to
enter
the
universe? (*New* 67)

This simple poem plays on the tension between acts of self-diminishment—paying homage, bowing, growing smaller—and their consequence: growing bright enough to leave behind the mundane and to enter the universe. The poem offers no answer to its two questions, but plainly, the things that most of us pay homage to and bow before are things that distend the self, leaving us far too large to enter the universe. Then, as if to make sure that the poetic speaker (as well as the reader included in the poem's "we") doesn't become too full of himself and his shamanic wisdom, the following poem, "When Sometimes Awkwardness Is Almost Fitting," pulls us back to the things of this world in a way that William Carlos Williams would appreciate:

My
long
woolen
under
wear
follow
me
around
a
little
loosely
like
some

inexact
but
pleasing
thought. (*New* 67)

We find a similar juxtaposition of the spiritual/cosmic and the gently comic in "The Praise of Asia Begun," from *The Buddha Uproar*. In Part One of that poem we read:

Towards
which dream
are you
dreaming?
your head
like a flower
has many aspects,
like a stone
has many hours,
our joy like
showers gives rise
to more drums and art (*New* 47)

The poem's opening question reminds us of the earlier "To what do we pay homage?" but here the speaker is addressing his beloved and appreciating the brightness and fecundity of her "many aspects." A major part of Tagliabue's strength as a poet consists in the disarming humor with which he approaches big subjects like sexual desire or God. His poem "'The Evidence of Consummation' Chapter from Vidyakara's SUBHASITARATNAKOSA" begins with a Whitmanesque catalogue of participles: the speaker is "battered," "wending," "walking," "falling, "reciting," and "desperately desiring more" of many disparate things: "eruptions," "sweating," "hitting it off," "lecturing naked," "sonatas for the jig." This battered speaker is feverish, beside himself, until the main clause in the poem's next line hits him, and

memories returned to him like the jangling of
anklet bracelets
which included her and she was exposing her
full presence again
he kept saying I don't want to be gone long
he did a handstand

really fast cartwheels
suggesting flowers until he rolled that way like
a smelly chariot
uphill
and she grabbed him and said I see you're here again.[8]

The poem's structure is reminiscent of Shakespeare's sonnet "When, in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes," whose speaker is similarly despondent until "haply" he thinks of "thee," the one whose love brings such wealth that he scorns to change his state with kings. Haply for Tagliabue's speaker, one of the memories that return to him includes "her," the one who can make him do handstands and cartwheels, the one who, as soon as he says "I don't want to be gone long," can grab him and say "I see you're here again." The diction and imagery may be closer to Krazy Kat than to Shakespeare, but in Tagliabue's imagination such connections are not uncommon.

In Tagliabue's poems topics of fundamental seriousness often rest alongside moments of self-deprecation or levity. In an untitled poem from *The Buddha Uproar* that begins by linking flowers with "Bodhi," the awakened consciousness attained by the Buddha, an "if/then" structure creates a childlike circularity that ends in laughter at, as well as with, the wise fool:

If blossomings
remind me of Bodhi
and Bodhi reminds me of Buddha
and Buddha reminds me of memory
and memory reminds me of you
then you remind me of blossomings
and days are all like flowers;
how radiant the dancing gods
as they reveal time in their hands!
how daring the glorious reader
as she laughs at the religious fool.

The way in which religious feeling is linked with an *other*, with "you," is typical for Tagliabue, who writes in that same volume, "If we are religious we awaken our enthusiasm, we awaken / the sleeping gods in each other."

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[8] John Tagliabue, *The Buddha Uproar* (Santa Cruz, CA: Kayak, 1968) no pagination.

Tagliabue's concerns are often religious, in the most generous and expansive sense of that term, but he can also be political, as in a poem that begins with a memory of Kafka's great story "In the Penal Colony," in which a machine inscribes the prisoner's sentence on his skin before his death. Kafka's story triggers in the poet's mind an image of "many in the dark sitting / for hours and hours, for years," watching television and "being / imprinted everywhere / on the body by the vibrations of the TV machines," so that "the body is being made to flicker / to flounder to shake in / sickness or staleness" (*New* 269–70). In another poem, "American Complicated with Integrity: Homage to Muriel," Tagliabue sympathizes with his students who find it "difficult to see in this harsh light, in the glare of / this machine place / with the ferocity of blandness," and who struggle to resist joining the "tired people almost well adjusted / to their lack of direction and / their routine," a line in which the adverb "almost" ratchets up the desperation of the situation. But despair should never be our strategy, and the poem's speaker then points to a clear example of political commitment and resistance: "but look at Muriel [Rukeyser] I say to my students, / … / her poems have collected our hope and power, to walk with / her and them makes us see bold incorrigible / indivisible Whitman ahead" (*New* 128–29). If, amid the materialism and ferocious blandness that constitute so much of our everyday culture, that same culture can still produce a Rukeyser or a Whitman, then hope and commitment are not mere idle fantasy.

Among Tagliabue's most moving and personal poems are those in the beautiful "Sequence: Poems in Praise of My Father," many of them written during or shortly after his father's dying, some of them drawing on old memories or visits from his father in dreams, as in "Reunion," where his father announces: "I heard you were having some pasta asciutta / and I decided to come back" (*New* 137). The grateful son honours his father's memory: "You were fully here / You were largely present / You do not hang around like a Puritan or a Stoical Corpse / saying do this or finish that" (*New* 138–39), and then promises: "I will dance in your restaurant for the rest of my life" (139). One of the last poems in that series, "Exits, Surprises, Entrances," imagines life, death, and the afterlife as a vast cosmic drama in which "we enter the great galaxy / of the many bees and fish and sandpipers," where "we perform our imitations" amid the myriad others who "are imitating us," and it's really all a marvelous show in which we

> [...] take a rabbit out of a hat,
> invent an alphabet,
> walk on a tight rope,
> make higher mathematics, interpret metaphors, eat,
> sleep, eat, make love[.]

Even the great galaxy itself, like each of us or "like a Troupe of Actors / performs for a few years / (accompanied by saints, angels, imitators, wonderers)" amid "the traveling wind" (*New* 139–40).

In Tagliabue's imagination the cosmic sits alongside the pedestrian and quotidian, which are often depicted with a humor that is unexpected, subtle, sometimes wacky. In one of a series of poems celebrating the fecundity of summer vegetable gardens, the speaker sees a potato as "a Willendorf Venus, / all bumpy, / Bulky, earth mother as the professorial / mythology books say," then pulls back from the image—"I prefer potatoes (to the professorial / abstractions I mean)"—and then lets the phrase "professorial abstractions" coalesce in an image of Wittgenstein, which then combines hilariously with the Willendorf potato: "Wittgenstein and the Willendorf Venus are making out" (*New* 153).

In "just a few scenes from an autobiography," the juxtapositions create a more subtle humour: "I eat noodles with the Emperor's brother / in a school basement," the speaker tells us, and we wonder why he's with the Emperor's brother, and not the Emperor, and why they're eating noodles (the food of the masses) in a school basement. Instead of answering our questions, though, the speaker tells us what they talked about: "he tells me about baseball, / I tell him about Gagaku [a type of Japanese classical music]" (*New* 175), and we're left wondering what in the world baseball has to do with Gagaku, and how the conversation proceeded. It is difficult to imagine a poet less interested in American professional sports than Tagliabue, and the title of one of his late poems is enough by itself to make us laugh: "for Cousin Paul Tagliabue, Commissioner of the NFL" (*New* 363—they really were cousins).

John Tagliabue persuades me that Nietzsche is at least partly right, for Tagliabue's poems are essentially concerned with a consciousness of affirmation and blessing, with what Nietzsche calls "the production of plenitude." In "We picture your migration," the poet begins with a basic question ("Who am I?") that he can answer only indirectly, but in that indirect answer he affirms the existence of a "current" and a "direction" that each of us is connected to, whether consciously or not, and that extends to the earliest members of

our species and, beyond them, to other species: "drifting" late at night amid "books, / stars and the beginnings of sleep," the speaker feels a "current" that at first doesn't seem to reach anywhere, yet nonetheless conveys "a sense of direction" that leads to recognition:

> there is the space within the dreams of the animals
> and I signal to it,
> my brothers at the conclave at Altamira respond
> making pictures on the wall. (*New* 164)

That sense of participation in "the current," that sense of belonging to the world, carries with it as corollary a generosity toward those who don't share the poet's values. Most people would rather watch TV than read poetry, so how shall we interpret that preference? Shall we bemoan it, shall we berate them, shall we pronounce our own superiority? No. In "Where Are All the Poetry Books in Your House?" the speaker explains that it's really OK if "very few people seem to be interested in /poetry" because

> people are really interested in the poetry which is
> before the words and
> after the words of
> the poetry; they have their needs but it takes them a
> long time to get around
> to It; poets don't suffer because of this, they just have
> a certain priestly privacy and
> send their regards and hiccups and prayers to
> future audiences. (*New* 237)

Tagliabue brings that same generosity of spirit, that same sense of plenitude, to his poems on teaching. In a poem that takes its title from Shakespeare, "Sonnet 18: 'So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee,'" the speaker reflects on his final creative writing class and the fecund combination of ignorance ("we don't know"), encouragement, and acknowledgment that animate any lively classroom: "We don't know exactly / what's going to happen" when we do any number of things: "take up the pen," or "touch the woman," or "look at the flowering magnolia / when the sky is all saffron and golden." What's going to happen on the morning when the teacher begins his last writing class? "I encourage them," he tells us, as he wonders "who are they," and then adds,

"they often wonder too." Yet amid that great unknowing, "what is precisely called forth now," among teacher and students, is the "exact beginning of / acknowledgement" (*New* 227).

In "A Not Insignificant Small Part of a Great Fable" the speaker reflects on how literature "extends" and "dramatizes" the lives of its readers, connecting them in one grand mysterious heart. "My heart goes out," he tells us, to Kafka's Gregor Samsa, to Flaubert's Emma Bovary, to Hamlet, "and so I am extended, and so we are dramatized" in the process of reading, with the result that we come to recognize that

> as a matter of
> very complex intimate very fabulous fact it is one heart
> that we are lyrically
> a part of. (*New* 283)

Nietzsche tells us that without the saving grace of art, we are liable to perish from the ugly truths of the world, and William Carlos Williams would seem to agree when he writes, "It is difficult / to get the news from poems / yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there."[9] One aspect of the office of the poet, then, is to offer the reader a way of seeing, a way of paying attention, that illuminates what Nietzsche somewhat extravagantly calls the "deification of existence," which I take to mean an aspect of existence that most of us discern only with difficulty, and often with skepticism, occupied as we are with the mundane, material world that presses upon us so insistently. A poet can lose sight of that aspect of the office. Albert Glover, who was a student in the seminar on myth that Charles Olson taught at SUNY Buffalo in 1964, recalls an afternoon in that seminar when the Beat poet Gregory Corso

> made a disruptive appearance, [...] challenging the assembled students to match him in reciting from memory lines of Shelley (or perhaps by extension any poet) and hearing only universal silence[;] Corso began pointing out with increasing intensity that "we are all on death row" and that he was "Captain Poetry." Finally he turned to Olson: "Aren't I Captain Poetry, Charles?" "Yes," Olson replied. "Then what should I do?" And without missing a beat Olson said calmly and with some humour: "report for duty."[10]

Corso's question ("what should I do?") suggests a poet unsure of his office, while Olson's gentle reply suggests the opposite. The office of the poet entails a duty, even an obligation, not only to the possibilities inherent in one's language and one's poetic tradition (we should all be able to recite from memory lines of Shelley), but more significantly to the kind of awareness and attention that lie at the root meaning of the word *aesthetic*, i.e., the Greek *aisthanesthai*, "to perceive," the opposite of an-aesthetic (anaesthetic), the failure or inability to perceive or to pay attention. In his poems John Tagliabue shows us—amid our confusions and distractions—how to see, and not merely look. He reminds us how to pay attention to what matters, and so fulfills the office of the poet.

[9] William Carlos Williams, *Collected Poems, Vol. 2, 1939–1962*, ed. Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1988) 318.
[10] Kenneth Warren, *Captain Poetry's Sucker Punch: A Guide to the Homeric Punkhole* (Buffalo: BlazeVOX, 2012) back cover.

GREAT VILLAGE HOUSE, NOVA SCOTIA

THOMAS R. MOORE

The house was oxen-rolled downtown
before its present fame, before Miss Bishop

led Nelly past the brook. Tin-roofed,
it sits on the corner across from

the village church. Starlings knock
the cornice trim askew. A crow hops

through blue scilla disturbing April
snow. Rhubarb nubs show.

High tides and spring rivers can
urge Cobequid Bay beyond the berm,

but today the meadows unfold
to the aboiteau. Logging rigs rev,

downshifting for the turn, and upstairs
the scream echoes in the papered room.

FARM DOG

DOROTHY MAHONEY

When the old dog died, another wandered
across the cornfields and stuck around,
so she chained him to the same spot where
he drank from the same bucket, ate from
the same hubcap, slept in the same shadows,
became the old dog by his sameness,
barking at distant trucks and a fox
that would pass, seeking windfalls
beneath the crabapple.

Then, winter,
in her dead husband's jacket and boots,
she wore a path through snow,
bringing more straw from the barn,
breaking the ice like a blind eye over water,
and the dog drew nearer, ducking
under her outstretched arm, catching the chain
around her legs and she fell, the dog
down with her, whimpering, afraid.
She sat there and wept, his tongue on her face,
finding her again.

GEM
MO SRIVASTAVA

I NEVER KNEW WHERE he came from. He just showed up at school one day and hung at the edge of the field, watching the ebb and flow of children at play.

"Whose dog is that?" I asked Googie. I can't remember Googie's real name, but it doesn't matter, because everyone knew him as Googie. Probably even his mum.

"Don't know. Looks like a puppy. Might have rabies."

"What's rabies?" I asked.

"It's a disease. Dog bites you and you die like a zombie. My dad said someone found a dead rabies squirrel last week and took it over for Doc Connors 'cause there's been no rabies round here for years. The doc is trying to stamp it out, to quart … quant … quartermain it."

I had no idea what quartermaining was, and I wasn't sure that Googie did either. I thought about pointing out to him that zombies aren't dead; but he was in Grade 4 and knew more than me. He'd have brought in something like silver bullets or stakes in the heart, and I'd have lost the argument. Googie almost never lost an argument and, when he did, he'd just beat you up anyway. Wasn't worth it.

I was late leaving school that day. A lot of detentions weren't fair, but that one was. I had, in fact, tipped Sandra Rowan's elbow and made her books fall. It was a mistake to have done this in view of the schoolroom window, and the puddle only made it worse. I felt like a sack of shit when I saw her books fall into the mud, and Sandra burst into tears. I tried to help pick them up, but she shrieked and cried harder.

Mrs. Amos beckoned from the window. "Young Mr. Morley, I need to see you. In front of me. Now." She had taught my father. Him being her first Morley made me the younger.

"Your father will be very disappointed in your behaviour." She was right about that. Probably had a hiding coming. "You shall stay after school

today. I will write a note to your mother to explain the delay and the note shall have her signature when it is returned to me tomorrow."

The hiding never did come, because the dog followed me home that day and gave my father plenty to talk to me about. I had given Mrs. Amos' note to Mum, and she had signed it. But she must have decided not to pile on more bad news. The dog was bad enough.

He had started to follow me out of the schoolyard and up the lane to the main road. I turned to face him and told him to shoo.

"Go on! Rabies dog!"

He sat at a distance to listen to me, then stood up and followed me again. At first I turned around every few minutes to shoo him; but he just sat patiently while I talked, and then picked himself up to follow me.

Halfway home I gave up trying to shoo him, and walked the last mile without looking back. I could tell he was closing the gap, because I could hear the crunching of gravel behind me. I was walking on the railroad ties, which I wasn't supposed to do. Wasn't even supposed to be cutting through to the farm along the rail line. But I was already late, and I'd started to think about what to do with the dog once I got home. It would be easier to come in from the back, over the hill, and put him in the barn.

When I set the table for dinner, my father still wasn't in from the fields, and I started to worry that he had stopped by the barn. I'd coaxed the dog up to the hayloft, and put him in a box with a burlap bag for a blanket. My father's late arrival worried me. For him, being late was like one of the Seven Deadly Sins.

After we said grace, I started to chatter about my day, planning to leave out the parts about Sandra Rowan's books and the dog, but my father cut me off. "You got a dog in the barn?" It was framed as a question, but crafted as an accusation.

"He followed me home. I tried hard to shoo him away, but he just kept coming." I looked to my mother, but she'd already read the teacher's note, and wasn't inclined to help me out.

"Greg," said my father. "You can't go bringing animals home. You know these are tough days; you can't expect your mother to be feeding an extra mouth."

"I know. He just followed me. I didn't want him running around the farm and scaring the horses, so I tied him up in the barn."

"That was a fool thing to do. Damned near …"

My mother shot him a look as the profanity escaped his lips.

Chastened, my father calmed himself and continued. "He nearly hung himself when he climbed over the hay bales. I put him in an empty horse stall. He's got water. I'll take him to Doc Connors tomorrow." As he spoke, he placed his hands flat on the table, palms down, thumbs touching, and slid them outward in a sideways motion as if clearing the space before him. I'd come to recognize that gesture as the signal of a final pronouncement, louder than any gavel.

It turned out that Doc Connors didn't recognize the dog. He took care of all the animals in the township, big and small; so he put up a "Found" sign in his window, along with his phone number and a rough description. We didn't have a phone in those days. We maybe could have afforded a party line, but my father didn't like the constant ringing. "Clanging," he called it.

Doc Connors didn't have space or money to board a stray, so he suggested that we take him back to our barn and keep him penned for two weeks to see if he had rabies. My father, who wasn't going to argue with Doc Connors, turned to me and said: "You're not to go in the stall. You're not to treat him like a pet. He's not to get a name. If he's not dead in two weeks, we'll find him a new home." If he'd had a table in front of him, he'd have put his palms on the tabletop and spread them apart.

Two weeks later, I was walking home from school when I saw my father's flatbed rattling toward me, trailing a big cloud of dust. He pulled over and swung open the passenger door. "Taking the dog to the vet. Needs a checkup and a clean bill of health for when we move him on to a new owner." I'd kept to my father's rules and done little with the dog, except to feed him scraps and make sure he had water. But he seemed glad to see me when I approached, and stood up in the box that was wedged against the rear window at the front end of the flatbed. It was the same box I'd given him the day he followed me home, and my father had left the burlap bag in it.

Doc Connors gave him a clean bill of health and suggested we that we put a collar and a tag on him in case he strayed again. "What name you want on the tag?" My father surprised me by answering immediately. "Gem."

On the ride home I asked him why he'd chosen Gem. He explained that a gem is a rare and beautiful thing. "You're a lucky man if one comes to you even once in your life." We rode in silence for a couple of minutes, then he added: "And I do mean YOU, Greg. I ain't taking care of that thing. Your money feeds him; I'm docking your allowance. And you should start saving

extra for when he needs to see Doc Connors. You're old enough to get a job. You need to start looking. You can start down at the grocery store after school. They were going to put in a new floor but can't afford it; so they're going to sand and fix the old one."

My heart soared, and I turned and banged on the rear window to get Gem's attention. He stood up in his box-bed and licked the window where I'd placed my palm.

"And he's a barn dog, Greg. Your mother is busy enough in the house. She doesn't need to be cleaning up after your dog."

We never again talked about finding a new owner for Gem. Mom kept half of my allowance, and after I'd done good enough with sanding the floor, the grocery store hired me for a dollar an hour to stock the counters. Gem got lots of fruit and vegetables that were going soft. He never much liked cucumbers, but was happy with peas and carrots.

He followed me back and forth to school every day. Kept himself busy doing God-knows-what during class time, and was always there at the door when we came out for lunch. He was great at mooching, and kids shared food with him.

He loved shinny, and turned three-on-three ball hockey into a six-on-one game of keep-away. We decided to count it as a goal if Gem could get the ball away from us and off to the edge of the woods. Tackling Gem was fair, if you could catch him before he got to the trees. He loved to be tackled and would hold up if anyone looked ready to sprint after him. Sometimes, we all dropped our hockey sticks, tore off and gang-tackled him. A big pile of fur and hugs, of licks and laughter. Googie pointed out that there was no way for us to score points in this game, and the aim became simply to minimize Gem's score. By the time we started Grade 8, still all in the same one room, we could sometimes keep him to three-zero. Our passes had become long, crisp and accurate. That winter our hockey team won the county championship, even beating the fancy team from Estevan who wore matching uniforms.

In Grade 9 I had to take a bus to the high school at the north end of Estevan, so Gem had to stay home. But he came with me to the bus stop each morning, rain or snow, and was there to meet me at the end of the day. Even when I had detentions and had to take the late bus home, he'd be there. Once when I was at a hockey tournament in Saskatoon, Mum had to fetch him from the bus stop. Gem was waiting patiently for the late bus, and she knew he'd be anxious when I didn't get off.

The start of high school was also when my father relented on his not-in-the-house rule. "He misses you during the day" was the explanation for the about-face. Sometimes, my father just decided to revoke his Commandments.

In the spring of my Grade 11 year, I was up early and ready to start my chores as the sun broke, gold and grey over the horizon. I had known Gem half my life. He usually got up to yawn and stretch with me, both of us taking a look out the window to size up the day. But that morning he stayed in his bed, the old box my father had allowed me to move in from the barn. He was awake, but tired. He picked up his head when I tried to chivvy him along, but sunk back into the burlap as I headed downstairs.

He didn't walk with me to the bus that morning, but had managed to make it halfway up the laneway when I came home in the afternoon. The short walk had clearly tired him, but he made an effort to lick my hand.

That weekend, when Doc Connors came to look at the horses, I asked if he had time to see Gem. "We'll pay you extra, of course," said my father, looking at me, but talking to the vet. "Right," I said. "Let me know how much for a check-up." Doc Connors waved his hand dismissively and said he'd be glad to take a look. "It'll just take a minute. No extra charge; I'm here anyway."

My father believed that doctors, dentists, vets and priests should be left alone with their work, so I'd come back down to the kitchen to wait. One minute turned into twenty before Doc Connors came down. He had two vials in his hand. "I've taken a couple of blood samples so that the lab in Estevan can run us some tests." He labelled the vials there at the kitchen table, holding them at a distance and peering over his glasses. "Should have the results back on Tuesday."

"Well now you really do have to tell me how much I owe you," I said, and my father nodded approvingly. But Doc Connors waved me off again. "I said no charge, Greg. Lab owes me a couple of favours." I didn't see how that worked, and felt sure that he'd cover the lab costs out of his own pocket. I felt badly, but couldn't argue with an adult.

Doc Connors came to my school at the end of classes on the Tuesday and met me as I was waiting for the bus. "Got a couple of minutes, Greg?"

"Sure, the bus doesn't leave for fifteen minutes."

"Just picked up Gem's test results. Here, walk with me."

We strolled onto the empty football field and were standing near the 50-yard line, about as far away from anyone as he could have managed. "Gem's not doing well. He's got distemper. Dogs rarely survive it."

Tears welled up, and I looked around to see if anyone was watching. I realized that Doc Connors had done me a kindness by delivering the news to me at school. I never wanted to cry in front of my father, and if the vet had told me at home Mum would have given me a hug, and that would've been the end of everything.

"Let me know if you want me to put him down. You can be there if you want. Or I can come fetch him. Your choice, Greg. It's a painless end. Like going to sleep."

The next day I begged off when Googie asked if I was coming to lunch. I went to the school library and read up on canine distemper. Dogs died with fluid in their lungs, ending up drowning as much as suffocating. At dinner that night I told my parents what the vet had told me. I was prepared for Mum's hug, and managed to stem the tide of tears. "I'm going to put him down."

"How you going to pay for that? Can't be asking more favours from Doc Connors." Now it was easy to keep my tears back, safe behind the dam of my father's gruff remark.

"I know. I'm going to put him down myself." Mum looked shocked and glanced at my father, an unspoken plea. But he stuck to the hand he was playing.

"How you gonna do that?"

"I'll need to borrow your truck. I'll pay for the gas."

"Need me to start it for you?"

"No. Just leave it parked over by the water pump if you could. Saturday morning."

That morning I had to carry Gem down from my bedroom in his box. His breathing was laboured and there was a milky fluid in his eyes. Neither my father nor mother were around. I figured he'd explained to her that this was something I had to do by myself. He'd parked the truck where I'd asked, and I used the hose to give Gem a bath on the flatbed of the truck. I dried him with my own towel, which he sniffed and tried to lick, then brushed him out as the water dribbled through the floorboards of the truck, running small tracks of mud around my boots.

I let Gem drink as much as he wanted from the hose, then laid him back in the box, on his first and only blanket. It had grown soft over the years, and was now as much a mat of his own hair as it was a sheet of burlap. I detached the hose from the water pump, ran one end into the truck's tailpipe and the other into the box. Used duct tape to seal a canvas feedbag to the

top of the box and the hose over the tailpipe. Then I started the engine and sat on the ground beside the box.

I tore a small opening in the duct tape where the hose ran in, and fed my hand in to stroke Gem's fur, still damp from the bath. I found a place under his chin where I could stroke him. He licked my hand. I worked my fingers deep into his fur and find his pulse.

Leaning my head against the bumper of the truck, I looked skyward as it started to rain. I remembered an inscription I had seen on a gravestone: "Here lies Mary, who died by the roadside at the age of six. And no angels wept." I had asked my father what it meant, and remember that it was my mum who answered. She had a way of saving him from his own pride. He never had to say that he didn't know something, because she would know for him. She explained that rain is the tears of angels. The angels poured forth their grief that morning, and I wept with them. I wanted the whole world to weep at the passing of the rare and beautiful being who had graced my life.

I felt Gem's fading pulse; when it had disappeared completely I rubbed his belly roughly and affectionately, then tried to pick up the pulse again. I couldn't find it, and counted to one thousand. And then again. I turned off the engine, peeled off the feed bag, and felt once more. Nothing. I checked his breathing. Nothing. The rain had stopped.

It dawned on me that I didn't know what to do next. I hadn't thought about where to bury him. I went to the barn for a shovel, but could find only a small one. I brought it back to the truck, and then realized that I'd need both arms to carry the box. I felt stupid that I hadn't thought this through.

"Here, I'll carry the shovel," said my father as he approached from the side of the barn.

"But I haven't figured out where to bury him."

"Here—follow me."

We walked past the barn, up the hill. As we came over the crest and started to drop down to the path that leads to the railroad shortcut, I saw Mum standing there with Doc Connors, Googie and the priest from our church. They were standing beside a freshly-dug hole. My father's work. There was a rough white stone beside the pile of dirt, and someone—surely my father again—had chiseled the single word "GEM" into the rock.

The wind blew through the tree and it started to sound like rain again as water dripped from leaf to leaf. My father put an arm around my shoulder, as I turned into his and wept.

CONNECTIVE TISSUE

BARBARA CURRY MULCAHY

Which spider-spirit waits in the four dimensions,
web woven and interwoven?
Which spider-spirit waits where guy-wires
of ligaments, belts of tendons,
sheaths of fascia wrap all
movement, all purpose, all
intent and accident?

Which spider-spirit, which witch, keen—
and thought and experience, new-caught,
keening.

ALMOST

JANE SPAVOLD TIMS

‘I almost believe in magic ...’
says Pia, a dyer

as twilight fits between tatters
of birch and shadows twitch, she lugs
water to the circle of stones,
peeks into the pot to see if
simmering has ceased, lays her hand
on the curve of the cauldron, fetches
the maple staff from the V of
the branch where it loves to lean, lifts
the wool from the dyestuff, yarn flows
from the stick like water and red
dye weeps from fibre, cinnamon
brown, she says, and wishes
for green

ABRAHAM SNOW AND THE ICE THAT HE CARRIED

J.R. MCCONVEY

"ARE YOU THE CAPTAIN?"

Abraham couldn't place the accent. Toronto, maybe, or Calgary. The man had a beard and was wearing a floppy cowboy hat and aviator sunglasses too big for his face. His head poking into the cabin reminded Abraham of a caribou he'd seen at Hebron once, antlers stuck through the window of a ruined chapel.

"Yeah b'y," Abraham said, nodding. "It's my boat."

"What's your dog's name?"

Course. "Ferrari," Abraham said.

The tourists always fussed over Abraham's dog, a tiny Cocker Spaniel the colour of a new penny. They spent their trips through Saglek Bay scratching the dog behind the ears, coaxing him to pose for photos against the backdrops of plunging orange cliffs and turquoise water. Abraham wondered if they realized they were paying so much attention to the one thing living up here in the Torngat Mountains that came from their own world.

"Furry?" the man said.

"Ferrari," Abraham shouted. "Like the car, eh." The man stared.

"He's fast," Abraham said, shrugging.

"Aww! Cute!" Caribou man poked his head back out to tell his friends.

Abraham liked to joke how his daughter Nicole had given him a Ferrari. She'd surprised him with the dog last fall, before starting university at McGill, where she was taking something called Native Studies. He'd told her there were plenty of natives to study in Labrador, asked why she had to go all the way down to Montreal, such a tough place for a young Inuit girl. But not many kids like her got the chance to go to a big fancy school. Nicole had the brains to make something of herself, was smart enough that they'd given her a full scholarship. Abraham had been happy to see her so excited, even though he was losing both his daughter and his help.

When she was home, Nicole always rode with him out on the boat, talking to the tourists, brewing tea and cutting up pieces of dried char for them to eat. Before Abraham left her in her narrow Mile End apartment with the grimy walls and the sour milk smell, Nicole had told him he'd need someone other than old Mary Merkeratsuk to keep him company while she was gone, and handed him the little red puppy to take back to the Torngats.

"Can he fish?" Abraham had asked her, curling the warm dog in his arm. It reminded him of Nicole as a baby, wrapped in furs.

"You can teach him," Nicole said. "Besides, the tourists will love him."

That was almost a year ago now. Ferrari still couldn't fish or make tea, but Nicole was right. The tourists loved the dog. The dog and the boat.

The *Benjamin Freeman* was the biggest boat in Nain, and one of the oldest. A hundred-foot longliner that smelled like a rusty herring tin, it was a much larger boat than Abraham needed these days, but he liked the heft of it. There weren't enough fish left for Abraham to live off the sea, but he and the *Freeman* still made money together, working with the cruise companies to give iceberg tours through the fjords of the northern coast. The boat had seen visitors from across the globe; a sign taped to the wall outside the head listed the word for "Welcome" in seven languages.

The *Freeman* always felt haunted after Abraham dropped off a boatload of tourists at base camp. Tonight the feeling was stronger than usual. A thick fog had settled in, and as the boat droned northward Abraham felt as though he and Ferrari were the only inhabitants of a lost planet. Inside the cabin the roar of the *Freeman*'s engine drowned out all other sound, but when Abraham stepped out on deck, the moaning of the wind made the boat seem small and meek. The dark mountains rose up all around, spotted with remnants of glacial ice that glowed in the shapes of animals, hunters, hearts.

His world.

Back in the cabin, Abraham sipped hot coffee and scrunched his hand into the warm fur behind Ferrari's ears. They were heading past the Big Island, to where Bear's Gut snaked into the old, stratified rock of the Torngats. Abraham Snow had been traveling the waters around Saglek and Ramah since he was a boy—first with his father, by dog team, over ice, then over years spent hauling in longlines of cod and glimmering char. Now he traveled them as a guide and an elder, or near enough. He'd passed his present quarry dozens of times over the last month, knew its blunt wavelike shape and the spectrum of swirling blues and greens that glowed in its frozen mass.

Abraham slid open the window and breathed in the deep salty musk of the ocean. He could navigate these waters with his eyes closed.

It was probably why they'd chosen him for this particular bit of madness.

"What I'm after, Abraham," said Alain Bourque, tinny voice straining through the connection to Montreal, "is clo*sure*."

Alain Bourque was an investment banker who spoke in fits, like his blood kept surging twice as fast as it should. He had reason. Months back, his parents had been on the Labrador whale cruiser *Go Forward* when it got caught in a heavy fog and the captain, maybe after too much whiskey, steered the boat into an iceberg drifting off Battle Harbour. Eleven people died, Bourque's parents included. Bourque hadn't taken the news well. In a fit of extravagant rage, the Frenchman had hired a crew of Norwegian scientists to track the iceberg and report back to him on its whereabouts.

Over the last few weeks, the thing had taken a curious route, drifting north against the natural flow of the Labrador Current. "Funny," Bourque said. "Almost like it's *running*." Eventually it had swung westward into the mouth of Bear's Gut, where it now sat, luminous in the mists.

"This," said Bourque, "is where you and your boat come in."

Bourque needed someone to tow the iceberg down to Nain, where a big tug would pick it up to take it all the way to Halifax. There, in the harbour, he meant to blow up the iceberg with several tons of plastic explosives—in accordance, he said, with a special set of regulations negotiated with the Port Authority, which in turn retained the right to promote the event to tourists. The banker's voice was like a volley of fireworks as he told Abraham how everyone in the city would be able to raise a glass to the destruction of the *thing* that had brought tragedy down on his family. Abraham imagined the scene, a plume of white crystals evaporating into vapour, a crowd of awestruck *qallunaat* looking on, clapping like dolphins begging for fish.

Bourque said that the Labrador Minister of Tourism, who'd visited the Torngats last summer and spent a few days admiring the scenery from the deck of the *Benjamin Freeman*, had told him Abraham Snow knew the north Atlantic coast better than any other. Besides, Abraham had the only local boat big enough to tow the iceberg, which was still about the size of a small house, even after losing some of its mass in the collision with *Go Forward*, and from melting in the weeks since.

"You're the only one who can help me with this, Abe," Bourque said. "So, I am willing to pay handsomely."

Abraham had run iceberg missions before, working as a guide when the vodka companies hired a fleet of tugs to haul growlers down to the NLC Plant in St. John's. He'd spent his childhood hunting and fishing the land around the bend from Bear's Gut. He knew Bourque's plan was crazy. Even so, he was the best man for the job.

He was getting by with the tours. He still preferred to live simply, using what the land offered, what was left. But things were different for Nicole. She had tuition to pay, the costs of living in the big city. Plane tickets home weren't cheap.

"How much?"

When Abraham heard the number, his heart jackrabbited into his throat.

He made Bourque double it.

Abraham stared out into the distance, the cliffs seeming to warp with the rhythm of light through the clouds and the churning of the *Freeman*'s engine. He checked the gauges, sipped from his tin mug. Outside, fingers of mist coiled over the water like fumes.

He crested the bend of Bear's Gut and there it was, waiting for him. Unearthly blue crag, wreathed in clouds of frost.

Hello, friend.

The boat cruised in slow, wide rings, and Abraham began letting out the sailcloth net threaded with a thick belt of steel cable, expensive specialty equipment Bourque had supplied to transport the cargo. It trailed the *Freeman* like the ribbony stalk of a jellyfish, and Abraham imagined it electrified, sizzling with voltage. A dangerous thing. He curled around the iceberg, letting the net unfurl behind him, surrounding its girth.

The voice came on suddenly, gusting out from a stripe of blue translucence spiked into the wall of white ice looming over the *Freeman*'s port side. When it spoke, Abraham felt as though the ice was expanding to engulf him, filling his head and chest with its weight.

Abraham. I feel the shivering in you.

At first, he reeled. He knew the voice. Stern and measured, with a hint of bitterness.

I felt it before I saw you. Heard the noise of your boat over the water. You don't come with a light heart.

His father had died years ago, when Abraham was still a child, after the relocations. Spanish flu. It took his spirit first, leaving his wasted body to rattle itself to death with bloody coughs. By the time he died he could barely whisper his last words.

But this voice from the iceberg was different. This was the voice his father had used when Abraham was young and his father was teaching him how to hunt, to fish. To survive.

Abraham knew better than to answer the thing. It was trying to trick him—to talk its way out of the deal. He kept steering the *Freeman* in its slow arc around the iceberg, and watched the ice transform, revealing new shapes with every angle: one minute a sharp-beaked eagle, the next minute a sleeping giant; one minute a church spire, the next the face of a bear—or maybe Tungak, god of animals, pretending to be a bear. The boat shuddered as it turned back into its own wake. Abraham went out on deck and fished the loose end of the towing line out of the water with a hook, lifting it onto the deck and looping it into the reel of a power winch bolted to the transom. The iceberg kept changing, taking Abraham's measure.

A trapper now, are you?, it said, louder, the voice stretching out across the bay, pulsing through the valleys and the sky. *Come to snare me like a fox?* Abraham felt the weight of his cargo beginning to pull against the belt, its submerged mass resisting the mechanized tug of the winch. The steel cable whined with tension.

Abraham. You remember the story of Sedna?

Abraham knew the story. Everyone knew it. Sedna, goddess of the sea. She couldn't find a husband at home, so her father married her to a hunter from a distant land, a man dressed in fine furs and feathers. After he took Sedna away, the hunter shed his disguise: this was no man, but a great raven. The life of comfort that had been promised to Sedna was a lie. Instead, the raven kept her confined to a narrow cell, where he fed her scraps and left her alone for days at a time. She was miserable, and her trapped spirit began wailing in sorrow.

Far away, Sedna's father heard her weeping in the wind, and saw wisps of her spirit floating away. He felt guilt in his heart, and decided to set out and retrieve his daughter.

The raven, seeing that he was about to be robbed, became enraged. He waited until Sedna's father reached her, and just as she was stepping into her father's kayak, called forth a devastating storm to drown them both in the sea. Sedna's father feared for his life. He was desperate and confused. So he threw his daughter overboard to appease the raging waters, to give her back to the raven. Sedna tried to claw her way back into the boat, but her fingers froze and cracked off and sank to the depths, where they transformed into the seals and whales. Then Sedna also sank to the bottom of the sea, where she still rages, throwing up storms to punish the world that betrayed her.

And what of your own daughter, Abraham Snow?

Abraham stayed quiet. He didn't like where the iceberg was taking him. He had no love for this job, but the truth was, he was afraid. The last few seasons, the hunt had been thin, the weather unpredictable. Before, Abraham could clean two fish in the water before his hands went numb and he had to stop to warm them. Last year he cleaned four fish before realizing his hands weren't as cold as they should be. Changes were coming. Sedna was probably boiling to death, and though they said the warming was good for tourism, who knew how long the tourists would come? The *qallunaat* loved nothing better than changing their minds.

This job would help Nicole finish school, plus give Abraham security for old age. He could buy a little house next to Mary Merkuratsuk, spend his last winters sitting in a comfortable chair, carving little statues to sell to the Labrador craft council. He'd have the comfort of being around familiar faces, after years cruising the water with a boatful of strangers.

All he had to do was drag this chunk of ice down to Nain. A day and a half, maybe two. If he started talking to it now, he'd be in for a long chat, longer than he liked. There was mischief in it. He was worried it could convince him.

Haven't you given them enough already?

Abraham cranked off the winch and secured the last clasps and cables to thick iron posts on the stern. In the cabin, Ferrari sat waiting in his captain's chair. Abraham pushed the boat slowly into gear, and the dog yipped as the *Freeman* registered its protest at bearing such weight. He tried not to feel the iceberg's cold breath seeping into the cabin, reaching in to tingle on the back of his neck.

It's the same thing, it said, whispering in his ear.

"What thing?" Abraham said.

He grimaced. Now there would be no end to it.

He walked on spongy ground, taking long, weightless strides. The land glowed the colours of a fishscale, green flecked with orange, silver mottled with black, pale purple overlaid with deep yellow, glimmering when the sun came out to blaze over the slopes and ridges rising up from the cobalt sea. Above, clouds swirled like an eddying stream.

His father was beside him. They went together over the soft mossy hills of *Sallikuluk*, Rose Island. Abraham had been born here in a sod house, but he didn't recognize the place they were walking. Two dun-coloured Arctic hare scampered ahead of them, hopping through a circle of rocks, an old tent ring. His father's steps were slow and measured, yet he moved across the terrain at uncanny speed. He said nothing. Abraham knew he was to follow.

They reached a mound tufted with grass and red lichen, facing a pond of deep iridescent blue. In the middle of the pond, radiating light, the iceberg sat like a great silver nugget.

Abraham. Do you know how many years my spirit has lived?

The voice came from the iceberg, but also from his father. His father's lips were not moving, but Abraham could feel the vibrations of the voice inside his chest. Abraham turned to his father, wanting to answer the question: *Yes, father*. But his father was no longer beside him. With a hiss of chill breath, the iceberg drew his gaze, and in the distance he saw his father standing on top, eyes fixed on Abraham alone on the shore. There was another figure next to him, its face turned away, looking out from the icy white plateau across the ocean's distance. The figure turned slowly, and Abraham saw Nicole's face, framed with a fur hood, her eyes sad. Abraham wanted to call her name, but his voice was choked and made no sound.

Below her, in the folds of the ice, Abraham saw the sleek face of the white bear, the bleached skull of a caribou. Now the animals spoke, and the sound boomed out from their jaws to careen through the valley and shake the loam under Abraham's feet.

Ten thousand years, Abraham, the voice said. *Will you help them take more?*

The last word reverberated through the mountains, echoing with such force that the iceberg began to quake and shudder, a horrible groaning sound erupting from its solid girth. A white spike of light flared up through its centre. With a colossal blast, it shattered into dust, millions of powder blue crystals blooming out in a mercurial fog.

When it cleared, both his father and Nicole were gone, the turquoise lake flooded with a cataract of red.

Abraham bolted awake in his chair. The fog outside was so thick it had filled the cabin with haze. The boat bobbed in the waves, and Abraham saw the iceberg looming too close to the stern, like a huge grey tooth in the mist. He rushed to crank the engine into higher gear, wrenching hard at the ship's wheel, trying to put some distance between the boat and the thousands of tons of ice it bore. The *Freeman* listed hard and Abraham stumbled. He gripped the wheel, didn't let go of until he had the ship righted.

His breaths came in deep rasps as he tried to regain his calm, not wanting to admit how close he'd come to a collision.

He looked around for Ferrari, but the dog wasn't in the cabin. Abraham looked out the window and saw him perched on the bow, tail alert, nose pointed southward, like he could smell the *qallunaat* getting closer.

Some partner, Abraham thought. *Maybe he's just been waiting to get back the whole time.*

Abraham went into the galley to brew a fresh pot of coffee. His head swam with images from his dream, nerves buzzing with tension.

I'm just tired is all, he told himself. *Getting too old for this.*

There was a bottle of whisky in the galley cupboard, a gift from one of his passengers. Abraham never touched the stuff anymore. But it had a voice, too.

He thought of Nicole, in Montreal, digging through textbooks, learning to be Native. He thought of her here, on the boat, steering it home to camp on the nights he'd had too much and couldn't finish the trip. Heard her telling him, *It's okay, Dad. I got it.*

Too many voices, he thought, *for such a lonely place.*

Hours passed. The *Freeman* pushed southward through waves that spumed and frothed against the jagged coast, turning back in on themselves. The wind howled a wolfsong, long and hungry. Abraham leaned on the throttle, trying to concentrate on the sounds of the storm, to hear its intent. He scratched Ferrari nervously on the scruff of the neck and tried not to spill his coffee as the boat lurched, struggling forward through the roaring day.

For a while, the iceberg had spoken regularly, arguing with solemn confidence. *Abraham, I am of the North, like you. Abraham, you are headed the wrong way.* Abraham kept his mouth shut. Then, it had begun asking questions, or maybe making threats. *Abraham, are your hands cold? Are*

you sure your heart is still beating? Perhaps it has frozen stiff. Why would your blood turn against you, Abraham Snow?

Now the thing had gone quiet. Abraham tried to tell himself the ocean and the wind were drowning it out, asserting the indifference of the land to such small quarrels as this one. But he couldn't shake the dread that had come over him. He told himself it was all just a trickster's scheme, to coerce him into letting the iceberg go. Still, the silence sat heavy on his head, like drifts of snow piled up around his ears. He almost wished for one more word from it, one more prompt to which he could respond with a reprimand, a defense. He would talk about Nicole. Say her name, speak of her dreams. Make the thing ashamed for putting up such a fight. As if it didn't know.

Just around the bend, north of the frayed hollow in the land that led into Unity Bay, Nain sat perched like a white bird on the coast. Abraham geared the *Freeman* down and killed the engine, giving the boat over to the waves. His ears buzzed from the mechanical noise. He lit a cigarette and watched the tip glow bright orange against the darkening sky, pink and golden and raven-black clouds undulating in the animal wind, the whole world reeling. Abraham blew cones of white smoke out into the darkness to float up and join the tumult. Smoke signals, he thought. But for whom?

Cigarette hanging from his lips, he steadied himself on the lip of the boat and edged over to the outer wall of the cabin, where the axe hung in its cradle. The butt of the handle felt warm in his palm. He lifted it out, laid its blade flat across his free hand. Gauged the strength of its bite.

Behind him, the iceberg glowed a nervous blue in the dusk. Abraham thought he could hear it breathing deeply, the rhythm radiating through the waves all the way back to the glacial valleys and fjords of *Torngait*, the spirit lands. Abraham turned to face it. A cold draft gusted in, surrounding him.

Abraham, the thing said, finally. *Aput*.

He knew the word. Many times, Abraham had heard the myth about how the Inuit have hundreds of words for snow. His passengers, the tourists, lots of them still believed it. But there were really only a few Inuktitut words for different kinds of snow. This was one.

Abraham, *Aput*. Spread-out Snow.

Maybe it was a warning. An insult, an admonition.

Or maybe, thought Abraham, a final request.

The iceberg strained against its net, making the *Freeman* list and wobble under his feet. Abraham stood steady.

"Okay," he said, and stepped toward the ice.

Night settled over the outer bay. A hint of summer breeze teased the cool air, and traces of northern light skimmed across the sky. Abraham hadn't noticed the weather grow calm, but the ocean was still now, and the *Benjamin Freeman* drifted over the black water like a paper boat floating on a slick of shimmering oil. The sensation made Abraham dizzy, tired. He rubbed his hands together and buried them in the velveteen fur behind Ferrari's ears. The dog yipped in consolation.

The drop-off had been accomplished without a hitch. Abraham could still see the iceberg, gemlike against the distant shore. However small and remote Nain was—a little over a thousand people, mostly Inuit or mixed, and the place still only accessible by boat or plane—its presence was enough to hold the iceberg there in the bay rimmed with electric light. Nain: northernmost town in Labrador, southernmost edge of the world his father inhabited—first as a man, and now as a spirit. Gateway to the greater world of metal and concrete, noise and light, that churned away beyond the southern horizon. Toronto, Halifax, Montreal. Alain Bourque's world. Maybe Nicole's, too.

Abraham lowered the *Freeman*'s rusty anchor into the water. Across the bay, the tugboat bound for Halifax was also moored, waiting to start its leg of the journey at dawn. He could see lights twinkling in the cabin. Abraham wondered if the boat had a dog.

He climbed down into his small motorboat, the hull clunking as it knocked against the side of the *Freeman*. Bracing his legs on the metal thwart, Abraham reached up and helped Ferrari into the dinghy, then grabbed the black tub resting on the lip of the deck and hauled it down, too. The contents clattered, casting no light but seeming to glow lightly from within. He pushed off from the *Freeman*, yanked the motor and began puttering toward shore, leaving a wake in the water that slivered the moonlight into a million glittering shards.

Mary Merkuratsuk was at home, watching hockey on TV. She had a thing for the Montreal Canadiens—an obsession Nicole shared. Abraham never understood hockey, but he thought about how maybe Nicole could use some of Alain Bourque's money to go see a real game, where, Mary said, you could sit in the padded bleachers and eat big soft pretzels and feel the cold rising up from the ice.

"Who's winnin'?" Abraham asked, as Mary let him into the warm yellow kitchen. Ferrari scampered in at his feet, sniffing madly.

"Montreal," said Mary. "Nicole'll be happy, eh b'y? Whatcha got there?"

Abraham hugged the plastic tub to his chest.

"You got some room in your freezer?"

"Fer what? Ice? Got lotta that already." Mary looked skeptical, her plump head cocked to one side.

"Just dropped off the iceberg for the French guy," he said. "Chunked this piece off before I handed 'er over. Don't tell no one, though."

"Whatcha gonna do with it?"

Abraham stood there in his thick rubber boots, holding the tub of ice, blinking in the light.

"Dunno," he said. "Share it round, I guess." He put the tub on the counter and picked up a chunk small enough to fit into a cooking pot. The ice was already slick with melt; a droplet coursed down Abraham's hand and soaked his cuff.

"Feel like a drink?"

The Canadiens took the game. Mary and Abraham sat, chipped mugs in hand, watching the players file off the rink. Abraham imagined Alain Bourque in the stands, his face red from shouting, drawing a tiny phone out of his pocket to take the call he'd been waiting for, the one confirming that the iceberg had been delivered, the quarry taken. He'd never know it was missing a few pounds.

Abraham took a sip from the mug, feeling the warmed glacier water slide all the way down his throat.

"S'good, eh?" said Mary.

"Yuh," said Abraham, nodding.

"Ten-thousand-year-old water, eh?"

"Yuh."

The air in the cozy kitchen felt good on Abraham's skin. He thought about Nicole standing in the same crowd as Alain Bourque, cheering along with all those people, thousands of voices speaking dozens of different languages, like the tourists who came on Abraham's boat, but multiplied, so that all the differences dissolved into one voice, something joyous and huge. He imagined her raising her hands and letting a whoop out over the ice, mingled in with all the other hoots of the crowd, reverberating through the rafters of the massive arena.

He wondered if the ice would answer her.

EXTINCTION, SPIRIT BEAR ISLAND

BRIAN BURKE

chasing ghosts all summer
spirit bears tumble white
down avalanche chutes & between creek beds
wrestle over salmon spawning in the fall
the jaw to jaw war or rip of fist-paw
the scarlet feast that ends a generation
far from ice cliffs calving

in my dreams
ghost bears strip the green branches of huckleberries
red in their slack soft-season mouths
plunder rotting deadfall for grubs
they sniff the winds
shifting
a mother & two cubs trail through clear cuts
test the air for alien scents
a cathedral sky above the treeline receding
test for the whiff of in-season
for the retreat of out of season

spirit bears heavy with sleep
lumber with their last hundred-plus pounds of winter salmon
seek dens
snow falling
perpetual
between the trees

snow
fog & bears
shifting through their ghost season

through more fog
forest
& fog again
snow-fringed & spectral forest fading
the denning season begins
in white winter light
a birthing of cubs
believing
in another spirit bear spring

ELEGY FOR WLC

DAVID LIVINGSTONE CLINK

1.
A photo brings you back to me. It is 1949.
You have not met the woman you will marry.

Funny how the men in those old photographs
look like they are on furlough.

You are 25, in short sleeves, a short haircut.
Those glasses are back in style, now.

2.
You could design and build a house yourself.
Your motto: measure twice, cut once.

A Cessna 172 pilot and a career meteorologist,
you loved the sky, wondered if it felt the same way.

A genealogist, you hunted down your ancestors,
pinned them to sheets like Gypsy moths.

3.
You made a lifetime studying the sky's lungs,
its clear days, its drizzle, felt something alive there.

Each cloud contains a molecule of the last breath
of every cruel and good thing that has ever lived.

I feel your last exhale in the air around me, the wind.

WINTER THAW

NANCY BRANCH

THE TRAIN HAS HALTED somewhere between Dalhousie and Jacquet River, the last stop before Pine Ridge, where I will get off. I'm not sure where we are, for I am on the wrong side of the train and see no familiar landmarks. Outside the warmth of my sleeper, the sun creeps above the tops of frozen tree branches. Pale light falls across the clearing, tranquil and hushed with a powdering of new snow. Whatever lives here lies sleeping or hidden beneath the winter chill.

The train finally pulls into the Pine Ridge station, its brakes dumping air with a loud hiss into the frigid morning. Struggling with a suitcase full of Christmas gifts and hard-to-find baking items, I step down from the coach. For a moment, I imagine that I see the tall, lanky figure of my father—dead some ten years ago from Parkinson's—reach to retrieve my luggage in one easy motion. The vision fades, but the ache of memory remains. No one is here to greet me. Mumma is at home with her caregiver, and none of her neighbours has thought to pick me up. The tightness in my throat abates as I hail a cab and head to the rental car agency.

From the outside, our house has changed little in over sixty years. It sits tall and square on a hill, buffeted by the relentless northwest wind. As the rental car crests the hill, I see that someone has rebuilt the deck flush with the side door, no doubt to prevent my mother from stumbling as she steps outside. A new handrail runs along the steps.

"I'm home," I call out as I key the lock of the former shed, which was converted into a hallway and ground-level bedroom and bath for my mother.

In the overheated kitchen, Mumma does not rise from her lunch to greet me. Instead, her caregiver, Mrs. Hinton, advances to shake my hand. We exchange pleasantries while I cast sidelong glances at Mumma, more shrunken and stooped than she'd been six months ago during my summer visit. I give her hug and kiss the top of her head. The stale odour of unwashed hair wafts upwards, and she smiles, a small tug at one corner of her mouth.

"I'm not hungry for my dessert," she says as she pushes her fruit salad away.

Later that afternoon I call my husband. “Oh, you know,” I say in response to his query. “Changed. Older. And it doesn’t seem to matter that I’m here.”

It is dawn. I rise from restless slumber to morning silence. The wind that had moaned all night has finally subsided. Today is Sunday, and in the implacable routine that has become my mother’s life, that means going to church. I descend the creaking staircase into the kitchen. Although church is not for another two hours, Mumma sits, coated and booted, beside the door.

“You’d better hurry,” she urges. “We’re going to be late.”

Half an hour before the service, I help Mumma up the vestibule steps into the care of a sidesman. In the kitchen, I fill plates with the sweet breads and cookies that will be served after Holy Communion. Pecan squares, plum bread and ginger creams arranged on serving trays, I move through the back doors to join my mother in the nave.

Settling into the cramped space beside her, I sense that something is off. For the first time in sixty-five years, Mumma has sat in the wrong pew. Several times during the service, she leans into me and whispers, “When do we go out for coffee?” And each time she asks, her body grows a little tighter, her eyes a little more frantic. I lead her into the back hall to calm her.

In the kitchen, the tension eases from the sides of her mouth as she falls into the familiar routine. She hums and removes Saran Wrap from plates of cookies and, with exaggerated caution, shuffles towards the serving table in the next room. The cookies slide and teeter on the plates’ edges.

“Let me,” I begin, but my words trail off when I catch the determined set of her mouth. Turning from her, I rearrange her ginger creams, which years ago had taken first prize three summers in a row at the Gloucester County Exhibition. These are misshapen and splotched with flour from the dipping glass she has used to flatten them.

“Nice to see the Bobbsey twins working together again,” says the choir director, who has poked her head through the kitchen doorway. “Just like old times, eh?”

“Yeah,” I say as I watch Mumma through a sliding service window pick up a cookie from the floor.

A week into my visit, the weather shifts. The wind, which has raged with icy fury since my arrival, has finally relented. Outside, the window ther-

mometer registers plus eight degrees Celsius. Water drips from the eaves, and sunlight spills onto the tiled floor.

By the time I finish brushing my teeth, I have made a decision. I will walk to the river after lunch. Already the landscape's contours have changed. The barn that stood for over a hundred years is newly flattened, its massive beams salvaged by local barn busters, the remains bulldozed beneath the earth that had once put forth corn and potatoes in profusion. The basin field has been sold: an elementary school now rises from its hill on whose steep slope my uncle once baled hay in the August heat. And from the upstairs window, I can no longer see Robin's Pond, where we skated in the blood-red glow of the afternoon sun. The pond is now choked with cattails, their headless spikes tangled and heaped like an oversized funeral pyre.

I find Mumma seated beside the kitchen table. I boil an egg and place a plate of blueberry muffins on the counter. A smile seeps across her face.

"Grammie Eastland used to make cupcakes for your father when he was courting me," she says.

I know the story well. But I am a willing audience, so I settle into the worn comfort of the press-back rocker.

"The night your father returned from overseas, Grammie baked a batch to celebrate. She left them on the dining-room table to cool, but when she went to get them for tea, that useless dog of ours had eaten every last one, paper liners and all. And them hard to come by after the war."

Mumma's smile grows wicked. "Your grandmother *never* swore, but when she saw what Rowdy had done, she let out a furious oath: *That damn dog! I hope he doesn't SHIT for a week*!"

Gleeful, complicit, we laugh until tears run down our cheeks. The story strikes me as doubly funny because Mumma is a more pious woman than my grandmother ever was.

"Tell it again, Mumma," I urge, hoping to prolong the happiness I see sweeping across her face.

But the light in her eyes fades like a pebble dropped into dark water, and she looks suddenly stricken.

"What was I talking about?"

After lunch, I lock the door and set off for the riverbank. The sun strikes warm on my face, and a light breeze stirs my hair. Hay stubble dotting the field is still ringed with snow, but the ground beneath is sodden. Following

ancient wagon ruts, I cross the field to a break in the split-rail fence and stop to listen to the sound of snow dripping from boughs of pine and balsam fir. Farther along, where the undergrowth thickens, wet branches slap me in the face, sending droplets of water showering down my back.

Through mossy birch and tamarack, past rotted deadfalls and a rusty-hinged gate, I approach an older stand of trees. Broken and misshapen, many of them, with trunks furrowed by burrowing insects, or single outstretched limbs that implore the sky. And yet they endure.

Close now to the steep drop of the riverbank, I pick my way along an old path, spongy with layers of fallen pine needles. Instead of retreating to more solid ground, I move to the edge of a gully that careens downward and twists darkly out of sight towards the river. Impulsively I grab an overhanging branch and lean forward to peer into the chasm. My stomach clenches and I jerk back onto the safety of the path.

Anxious now for a better view of the river, I hurry along towards a place where the undergrowth thins. From beneath a snarl of branches a winter wren flits. Its high tumbling trill fills the air with tremulous sound, and is gone. The song is pure and beautiful while it lasts.

In a clearing, I sit on a rotting stump and scan the Nepisiguit. For the most part, it is as it has always been—silent and serene. But at its centre, where the current is strong, blue-black water rushes through a ragged break in the ice. The sun arcs westward and casts indigo shadows across the river. Now only the uppermost tips of trees on the opposite bank are still touched by light. As the sun drops in the afternoon sky, the air cools and I return home.

"I'm back, Mumma," I call into the stillness.

There is no response. The kettle is boiling and I cross the kitchen to unplug it. A chill colder than ice water shoots through me. But I find Mumma softly snoring in her La-Z-Boy. Unwilling to disturb her, I tiptoe to the sink to get a drink. There on the counter is the silk flower arrangement I gave her for Christmas. I wonder why she has moved it from the middle of the dining-room table. It is only when I spot the empty two-cup measure she uses for watering flowers that I understand.

Both hands against the counter for support, I lean my forehead against the cupboard door. Behind my closed eyelids, an image floats into view: Mumma on her hands and knees in the summer garden, weeding the churchyard ivy gone rampant among her tiger lilies. Dark locks of hair straggle

from beneath her sun hat, and her hands are streaked with dirt. But her eyes are luminous, joyful as she urges me to join her. "Come," she beckons. "Come feel the good earth between your fingers."

Looking again at the drowned silk flower arrangement, I feel the warning prick of tears. The familiar thump of the La-Z-Boy against the wall causes me to stiffen. Feigning a sudden interest in the breadbox latch, I do not turn as Mumma scuffs into the kitchen. In a display of affection so uncommon since her illness, she hugs my waist and presses her cheek against my back.

"What's that for?" I ask.

"Because you need it."

Turning, I see her eyes are no longer glazed, but clear and startlingly blue. Something powerful passes between us and, for a moment, Mumma is keenly present. I wrap my arms around her and rest my head on a thinning patch of her white hair.

"Oh, Mumma. What are we going to do?"

She does not answer me, for what is there to say? Instead, she pulls me closer and fists my back with a fierceness that renders me almost breathless. And there we stand, the two of us, in the middle of the kitchen floor, rocking each other against the deepening winter twilight.

Later that evening, Mumma retreats once more into silence. She dozes in her La-Z-Boy while I watch TV. Glancing sideways at her bowed head, I wrestle with the weight of sadness. I think then of the winter wren at the riverbank, trilling wild and beautiful beneath a tangle of fir. And for the first time I begin to believe, really believe, that somewhere deep inside the shadowed passageways of her mind, Mumma's spirit still resides. Vital and aware.

Reaching towards her sleeping form, I place a hand over her arthritic fingers. Gently, so not to startle her. Her lids flutter open. She looks at me, blankly at first, and then with eyes that grow warm and lucent in the lamplight.

THE NAMES

KRISTJANA GUNNARS

do not tell me their names
their special hue, evanescent scent, brilliant
lighting up of the dusky grass,

the courtyard of your graphs and shapes,
lines explaining the distance from
balcony to balcony, the exact number of stairs,

the time it takes to remember just one
moment: to re-light an old candle, to
catch a glimpse of the sun against a window

pane: do not tell me the geometry
of a whole lifetime, now gone, now
remembered, beautiful, blood-spattered—

a rounded cupola roof, a clay-encrusted
building, a wrought-iron railing, black
as shadow, as tar, as forgetting itself

but they are roses, roses of all names
profuse and daring and overwhelmed
and the sky is white as a shroud

BRAQUE
FRANCIS BLESSINGTON

He flattened the earth to his tablecloth,
more Mercator, more order,
masonry mere geometry,
something stronger pressed his will.
He didn't make a mistake for
He didn't yet know what he was making.
But the eternal over the perpetual:
his horse is iron, his fish stone.
The crushed violin plays again.
The glue is poetry. He brought
birds, air, light, churches.

POLARIS
JACK HOSTRAWSER

THE DAY BEGAN QUIET and still, punctuated by a sharpness of the air. He scraped his way out of the sleeping bag and stood. He picked up the rifle, stepping over her, and walked to the window, leaning carefully on the sill to avoid the racoon scat. Leaning back on his elbows he looked out at the yard. The rear wall of the house lay broken on the ground behind her, making the ruins into a stage. Like a sitcom.

When she woke they ate some of the Cheerios he had and drank from his water bottle and then they packed and left. She brushed her hair as she walked, picking out the greys. He thought of making small talk but they had said it all last night. The road was quiet but for birdsong.

It might have been ten o'clock when she spoke again. She commented on the vibrant colour of a maple tree.

"Yeah," he said. "I always liked fall."

"But not anymore."

He thought for a moment. "No," he said. "I still do."

She picked a leaf from a low-hanging branch as they passed, turning it in her fingers. It danced for her as they walked, but she grew bored and began tearing it along its veins. He watched and wondered about her name, probably a fake. He often used a fake name when he met people.

They stopped at noon and sat on a picnic bench in a wide front yard. The windows were unboarded and the back door left unlocked. The wilting grass was waist-deep. Cirrus clouds had moved in from the west and mottled the sky. A breeze came with them, full of moisture. It would rain tonight. He told her this and she looked to see.

"Mind if I stay with you for a while?" she asked.

He looked at her. "Sure."

She seemed embarrassed. He pulled out the Cheerios and they ate the last of them. After a while he spoke again.

"How long do you think it'll take to get to Mexico?"

"Two months, by the interstate."

"You don't have any closer relatives?"

"A woman my age doesn't walk to Mexico for the exercise." She smiled a little.

He tried to share her smirk, but she was distracted. The rest of the meal passed in silence and he listened to the breeze. You could set your breath to it, in and out. Meditation was a technique used to induce a dream state from a waking one—directly, like sublimation. Somehow the body fell asleep and grew numb while the mind stayed, imagining new limbs to fill the void. He had wondered long ago if heaven were a lucid dream, formed in a wash of endorphins by the dying brain. Perhaps everyone met their own judgment.

She scratched her nose, stretched and asked to see the map. He asked why and she said it was to make sure that at least one of them knew the way. He put away the bag and smoothed a mapbook across the table. It would get them to the border. Then it would only show them an approximation of interstates. Mexico was barren.

Their path would shadow those highways and the interstates mostly, keeping from cities and towns. Today they expected to take a section of railroad because it seemed more direct. Sometimes they saw others walking, but neither party ever acknowledged the other. He would have kept his distance from her, too, had he been more aware. She had jumped out at him. He'd managed to stay the blade and they had declared a truce. Neither was sick, that much was clear. She kept the knife inside the sleeve of her old coat, in a makeshift canvas sheath.

Sometimes there was food, occasionally bullets. Sometimes he found a barn full of carcasses. But even when stock had been set free they were dead. Dairy cattle couldn't live without their farmers; they produced too much milk, mastitis progressing slowly to ulcers and septicaemia. Other animals did better. Once, a mottled brown horse had watched him from a ledge as he passed below. It had shied when he approached and he gave up. It watched from the cliff as he walked away, motionless until he passed from sight.

The railroad intersection was two lanes of salt-and-pepper tarmac bisected and signed with lights. They turned onto it with little ceremony. The side roads became a pattern as they walked, strips of civilization breaking into alternating fields and forests.

In the evening it started to rain. He rubbed his stomach under his

coat, thinking they should stop and make camp. Soon the track broke free of the trees and set off in a gentle sweep around a small farm. In the adjacent field, a man and two horses were trudging, turning the earth by the light of lanterns. She was climbing over the fence before he could argue.

The horses noticed the strangers first and stopped ploughing. When the farmer looked up he pulled out a break-action hunting rifle and levelled it at them. He stood like old wood. She raised her palms and declared them both friends, naming herself anew: She was now Jennifer; he was Matt.

The farmer lowered his gun slowly and motioned them forward. "I have nothing to give you," he said.

"We don't want anything," Jennifer replied. "We're just looking for a place to spend the night."

The farmer deliberated. "Go up to the house," he said at last, "and say Jakob sent you. My wife's name is Mary. She'll give you a bed."

They thanked him and he dismissed them curtly. He watched until they were nearly at the house.

The farmstead was higher than the surrounding land. As they reached the edge of the field he noted that no power lines had ever climbed the hill, and he knew the people they had found.

The house was white and brown, clad in siding that reminded him of his parents' second home, after his dad lost his job. Jennifer climbed the steps and rapped on the door, which sounded loose. A woman opened it, holding a .22.

"We're just looking for a place to stay," Jennifer explained. "We don't need your food."

The farmer's wife led them into the kitchen, orange and walnut in the firelight. They sat at a heavy table and were brought small bowls and thin soup as their coats steamed on the hearth. He raised the spoon to his lips before she could stop him. Mary shook her head with a smile and returned the pot to the stove. She took a seat across the table and clasped her hands in prayer, reciting without flair. When she finished she winked at him and he busied himself with the broth.

"Where are you from?" she asked.

"Barrie." He motioned to Jennifer. "She's from Brampton."

Mary seemed to know these places. "That's a long way to walk."

"We've got a long way to go."

"Florida?"

"Mexico."

The farmer's wife was impressed. "How will you eat?"

"We eat what we find."

"You must be hungry then."

He smiled. "Usually."

"And are you heading to the same place?"

Jennifer answered. "No—I don't know."

"You should stay together. It's safer." Mary turned in her chair and plucked a bauble from the table behind her, handing it to Jennifer. "I have a brother who went to Mexico. He brought this home."

Jennifer held it up and saw it was a shell, spiralling like a pinwheel.

"This is beautiful."

"Take it. Last time I heard from him he was still living down there." She chuckled to herself. "Maybe you could give it back."

"Don't you want it?"

The woman shook her head and began to tell a story. "When he left they would have called it Rumspringa. Do you know what that is?"

Both nodded.

"He always wanted to leave. This wasn't for him. I thought for years it wasn't for me either, but things change. He's a priest now, working with kids. He tries to keep them clean and show them the Word. How is the soup?"

"It's good," Jennifer said. Matt nodded, swallowing.

"It was always funny when Peter, that's my brother, when he came home because he always brought these shells. Bags of them, all the colours you could dream. My father would never dare keep them—he thought it was vanity—but my brother kept bringing them. This was the only one my father kept. Temptation, I guess …."

At this she paused and stared at the wall, biting her lip. "It's funny," she said at last, "How things work like that. Anyway, if you're going that way maybe you could take it to him." She inhaled. "He doesn't know about his father."

Jennifer looked at the shell. "How could we find him?"

"He's in Tampico. If it's out of your way, don't worry. I'd never know."

Matt thought he saw something in Mary's eyes when she smiled, but her husband's knock at the side door—a code, he noticed—whisked the thought away. She rose and took their bowls to the sink before hurrying to open the door. Jakob nodded at them as he entered and shed his sodden clothes. Mary took some candles and a lantern and led them outside around

the puddles to another, smaller house. She opened the door quickly to escape the rain.

"This was Jakob's parents' house," she explained. Then, with a smile: "Don't worry, they didn't die in here. The bedroom is on the left."

They thanked her and were left alone in the flickering dark.

The bedroom held only a bed, a dresser and a small stove. He found some wood to start a fire and she sat down on the edge of the bed to rub her feet. He took the other side of the mattress, giddy to be between warm sheets again. He imagined staying here for the winter. The patter of rain on the roof grew stronger with bouts of wind, and then waned into silence, as if listening. She lay facing the wall, spinning the shell in her fingers.

"We have to do it," she said.

"Eh?"

The bed creaked. "We have to take the shell back."

He yawned. "Come on, even if he's still alive the odds of finding him …. And if we keep running up to people, eventually we'll get killed. You've seen it."

"It's that kind of thinking that got us where we are."

"I know."

"No, I mean as a species." She propped herself up on her elbow. "What do you expect people to do when you carry a gun all the time?"

"You tried to shank me."

She was quiet.

He smiled. "It's natural. We're all scared."

"It is not natural! Coping is natural. This crap you're giving me is learned. How are we ever going to fix things if we kill each other on sight because we're scared? What if I had killed you?"

"You'd have more Cheerios."

She shook her head at him and faced the wall again, spinning the little shell.

"Look," he said. "I'm sorry. I'm being a dick. I'll come if you want."

"I'm not some fucking damsel for you to protect," she said.

He mulled over possible answers. The stove popped and cracked. The quiet grew uncomfortably large. There seemed a place in it from which there was no return. He said some inconsequential thing and then he told her how he killed his daughter. She turned and stared at him and once or twice moved her mouth, but he couldn't stop. Then he turned over to hide his face.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean …."

She was quiet, trying to order her words. "We all had children."

He brushed at his face and coughed. Guided by a candle, he went into the kitchen, where he worked the hand pump until it sprayed clear water into the concrete basin. He put his head under the tap and rinsed his hair and face with the stinging, frigid water.

When he went back to the bedroom her eyes were closed. He put a new log into the stove and climbed into bed, first brushing off his feet.

After a while he felt her hand touch his shoulder and he let it rest there.

The morning brought a hint of frost and bitter wind. They accepted some cakes from the farmer's wife and a nod from Jakob. Their farewell was brief.

The wind eased as the sun rose higher, but still they clutched at their coats and hunched their shoulders as they navigated the shadows of racing clouds. She stopped when the track emerged from a balding spread of deciduous trees and ran across a pasture laid over a drumlin. They climbed the fence and stood at the summit, and she breathed in the scene. He wanted to move on.

"Wait," she said, shivering. "it's nice up here."

He made himself appreciate the patchwork fields and the rustic barns. To the north and west the horizon ran smooth and forever. He looked at her to see her thoughts, but her eyes said nothing. He caught a glimpse of cotton white as a deer leapt the far fence and vanished into the trees. It was still too early for lunch so they moved on, talking little.

They rejoined a highway south of London. The road led through a small hamlet that wasn't on the map, and then up a hill past a rust-coloured farmyard that overflowed with junk. He stopped her and went up the drive. There were mounds of scrap peppering the long grass between dilapitated outbuildings. The house was no better, black with grime. In the kitchen they found a vintage gasoline pump and various car parts in soggy boxes. Rats fled into the deeper shadows. There were cupboards filled with plates and crumbs and a single dusty can of tuna.

The barn sheltered vending machines and record collections and furniture and bicycles. He contemplated a complete V8 engine resting on a skid. He had hoped to buy a muscle car and restore it, but other things had got in the way.

"Check this out," she called.

"What?"

She held up a tacky figurine of an angel. "There's a million of these," she said. "What a weirdo."

He smiled and pointed to the stairs behind her. She looked up.

"Oh yeah, there's lots more stuff up here." She started climbing and he was alone in the pale light beneath the hayloft. He hurried to follow her.

The hoard upstairs dwarfed everything below. She was making her way through to the other side of the loft to peer into what once was a granary. He picked up a Beatles record: 1970, their last album. From across the mow she cried out, and he looked up to see a man throwing her to the floor. A sound caught in his throat and he ripped the gun from his shoulder. He fixed the man in his sight. She was losing the struggle and he saw that her assailant had a knife. He was yelling. She had her thumb plunged between his sclera and skull and his yell became a shriek. He fired the gun and the man fell away, scraping himself backwards with one hand clutching his stomach. Cycle the action, fire again. Cycle the action, fire again. The man's movements slowed to twitches.

He ran to her and saw blood drooling from her breast. She coughed and murmured something. He asked her what she'd said, but she frowned and started to cry without noise, heaving slightly. The sound in his own throat escaped at last, and he punched the wall before turning and kicking at the dead man's ribs. He stopped and paced and began to speak, but didn't know the words. Eventually he crouched against an ancient washing machine, cradling his bleeding hand, and said nothing.

When he left the barn he took her body. He wanted to dig a grave in the long grass, but could not find a shovel. He settled with laying a sheet of corrugated tin over her to keep the coyotes away. Then he dumped her kit into a little pile on the grass and poked at it. She carried a wooden cross with a symbol that he didn't recognize. A worn-out toothbrush. Flint and steel. A tattered picture of people smiling awkwardly in front of a small suburban home. The shell.

The wind was stuttering on the razor edge of her tin shroud. He picked up the shell and rolled it between his hands, unable to make out the hidden fault lines along which it would crack if he crushed it in his fingers. Then he placed it gently on the sheet of corregated tin.

He lit a fire nearby, feeding it with wooden furniture from the barn, and kept a quiet vigil as the evening came on in oranges and silver and bruised purple. He warmed the can of tuna on the embers and bent the tearaway lid into a spoon. The wind kept blowing the shell off its resting place, skipping it down the metal ridges into the long grass, where he had to fish about to find it. Finally he just put it into his pocket. She had once almost eaten human meat—she'd said that.

What's life worth? she had asked him in the dark on that first night. Does a corpse have rights? He didn't have an answer then. Her decision had been to starve. I felt, she'd said, like choosing to die was the most … alive thing I could do. He'd looked at her and said nothing.

When the last of the daylight faded he kicked the embers. He looked once more at the sheet of corregated metal before going into the barn and laying down on a bed of straw bales. His dreams, when they came, were full of horror.

He rose without eating and continued up the road. The temperature had dropped significantly and the air smelled of pine and cold water. That evening he camped in the shell of someone's home. His shoes crunched glass as he entered. The doors were gone and the windows were spilled onto worn floorboards. The wind delighted in the shape of it all. He went upstairs and found a girl's room. Posters of horses had peeled like paint and lay damp and curling. He pulled the sticker-covered closet doors from their hinges and took them downstairs to dam up the wind. Then he made an open fire on a sheet of metal in the living room and ate the farmer's cakes.

Just before dawn he woke up, shivering in the darkness. The fire had gone out. He reached out to stoke it with more wood then lay back, trying to remember what woke him.

The wind had died, but the air was biting cold. He watched the firelight cast elaborate shadows on the ceiling, then slid out of his sleeping bag and put on his shoes. He walked outside and stood on the step, looking up at the sky as he rubbed his arms. On the horizon the gibbous moon was settling into the trees. He told himself that the footprints were still there, even if he couldn't see them.

Somewhere, deep in the past, the zodiac danced soundlessly around the pole star, predicting entropy.

ADAM
GLENN HAYES

You ate a steak tonight, a slab
Of brother meat, a cut of cow
But might have been a flipper fried
By some blood-lusty Fogo boy.
And yesterday you gobbled down

Some shapeless knobs—real chicken meat
The label said—but could have been
A rattlesnake. Hell. On Easter
You'd gladly trade your chocolate eggs
For rabbit simmered in Chablis,

And will confess a sizzling mess
Of stir-fried tripe or sautéed brains
Sets you to drooling like a dog.
You look askance at those who'd set
A sacred hedge around the cow,

Or drive swine screaming over cliffs.
Or chat like Francis with the larks.
(You'd spit them, oiled, over coals.)
When laying leg to leg with lamb
You lick your knife while grace is sung.

Tonight, awash in garlic slick
And peppered pools of juice, you pick
Your teeth. The animal domain
Belongs to you—dumbbeasts.com—
Both recipes and naming rights.

THE KING
SCOTT RUESCHER

For a minute there, squinting up at Elvis's mansion
Through the padlocked iron gate of Graceland, *closed*
O*n Mondays and holidays,* I imagined myself
An iron-red Choctaw brave, young, proud, and virile,
Body rubbed down with a thin coat of bear grease,
Moccasins and loincloth embroidered with seed-beads,
Out on a hunting trip one innocuous Monday
In January, at the turn of the sixteenth century,
Around the time the Spanish have conquered the Caribbean
And are settling New Orleans, exploring the Mississippi,
When he sees the padlocked gate, the blacktopped driveway,
And the portico of the house with the four white columns,
And thinks he must have stumbled upon the hogan
Of some prophesied king they haven't told him about yet—
Not the Corn King, the Sun King, the Tobacco King,
Or the Rain King, or any one of those other kings
Of any of those other indispensable earthly things
From Egyptian, Greco-Roman, and Mesoamerican history
Whom we've read about in college in used mythology books,
Unforgiving authoritarian superhuman beings
Who demand the sacrifice of infants, heifers, and virgins
(Because they would never live in palaces like that
With a manicured lawn and a limousine out front),
But not the Muffler King, the Burger King, or the husband
Of the Dairy Queen, either (because those divine beings
Have yet to be born, have yet even to be conceived
By Madison Avenue marketing departments
At Monday-morning board meetings), but, from the looks
Of things, as the chubby night watchman appears on the scene,
Coming around front in his polished, steel-toed shoes,

His dark blue uniform, and his plastic-brimmed watch cap,
At the end of his shift, jangling his key bangle,
Tucking in his shirt, whistling Dixie, and checking doors
For signs of intrusive burglars and deluded groupies,
Then the king of drab, all-too-terrestrial beings,
Of middle-aged white men who never made much noise,
Caused much commotion, or took complete advantage
Of their many opportunities—of guys who found their voices
As grandfathers and work buddies, military grunts,
And third-base coaches for Little League baseball teams—
Someone a Choctaw hunter assumes he's supposed to kill
If he can't quite account for what exactly he's the king of
If he ever runs across him on his monthly hunting trip,
Sliding with a noiseless over-the-shoulder movement
A sleek hornbeam arrow from his rawhide quiver,
Drawing his ash bow, and aiming the flint arrowhead
At the cheap tin badge that the poor unwary guard wears
On his heart like a target, as he would at the heart
Of a buck nibbling saplings at the edge of a meadow—
Killing him instantly, in the middle of a nice routine
That has made his long workday just fly right by
Since he quit that dull job guarding the bank last summer.

BOY WITH A PROBLEM

CHRIS BENJAMIN

DURING THE YEAR FOLLOWING the accident, the year he turns fourteen and moves from a tiny Nova Scotia village into the capital, Dan's favourite place becomes Aunt Chelsea's kitchen. He often sits at her round laminate kitchen table and listens to talk radio. The deep-voiced shock jocks make him laugh. They're verbal bullies—he can barely tell their voices apart—and he's a safe bystander, unseen and unheard, too young and unknown to be their prey. On a hot summer day when the sun through the window makes him sweat, they go on about drugs in the north.

"Here's a story from today's *Chronicle Herald*," one of them says. "Says half of all teenagers up in Frobisher Bay are addicted to alcohol, gas or glue."

"What are the other half addicted to?" asks the other jock.

Dan can tell by the jock's tone that it's a witticism. He obligingly laughs. Aunt Chelsea whips her head around and shoots him a look. But her shoulders stay square to the counter. She's working on her latest batch of sweets. "This'll cheer you up," she says, every day it seems, handing him a heaping plate of cookies or a steaming piece of pie.

"Dan," she says now. "That's not funny."

"Yes, Aunt Chelsea."

"I told you to drop it with the aunt stuff. No titles in this house."

"Seriously," the first jock is saying. "And if half of them aren't hooked yet, why aren't they doing something to stop the other half?"

"Here's what ticks me off," the second jock says.

Aunt Chelsea and Dan stare at the radio as if it's a charismatic guest.

"These so-called experts, these social-policy wonks, are so fond of whining about *systemic* this and *systemic* that. Never is there any accountability on the part of the individual. What I'm saying is"—here the jock pauses dramatically—"Where does the buck stop, y'know? I'm sure the socialist media will blame the system … or the white man. But hey, are we the ones drinking Frobisher Bay's babies to death?"

Dan looks away from the radio to Aunt Chelsea. She's stopped mixing whatever's in her bowl and stands still as a photo, except her mouth is opening and closing, like in a silent film. He notices now that she has the phone held to her ear. Aunt Chelsea still has her old rotary phone, but it has a long chord.

"I'll hold," she says.

She shuts off the radio and turns to Dan. "Go listen to this in your room."

He runs up the stairs and flips on his ghetto blaster.

"Anyway, moving on," jock one says, "The city is facing yet another shortfall thanks to the big spenders at City Hall."

"Wait a minute," say jock two. "Before we get into that I'm told we have Chelsea MacDougall on the line from Halifax, and she wants to talk about the Frobisher Bay situation."

"Holy shit," Dan whispers.

"Mrs. MacDougall, go ahead. What do you know about it?" jock one asks.

"It's Ms. MacDougall," Aunt Chelsea's voice says through the radio. "And I don't know anything about it. I've never been there. Have you?"

There are a few seconds of dead air. "Well no, Ms. MacDougall, I haven't," jock one says. "But why would you call in about something you don't know anything about? I mean we get a lot of, y'know, with all due respect, Ms. MacDougal, *morons* calling us with two-bit opinions … and we're always happy to tear them a new one. But most of them at least have an opinion, Ms. MacDougall."

"You a little bored all alone at home today, Ms. MacDougall?" the other jock says.

"If you've never been to Frobisher Bay," Aunt Chelsea says, "why should we give a tiny shit about anything you have to say about it? Your opinions about the place—and mine—amount to absolutely nothing, you … you pompous asses."

There's a loud click and a few seconds of dead air, followed by an outburst of deep laughter. "Well, sir, looks like we've been told by the bored spinster set," the first jock says.

"Dan! Supper!" Aunt Chelsea hollers, her voice cracking.

Dan switches the radio off and runs back downstairs to the kitchen, where a tenor's bombastic voice fills the air. It's the first time Aunt Chelsea's

changed the radio station since he moved in, right after the accident and his hateful last words to his parents.

"There's goulash on the table," Aunt Chelsea says.

He almost cries this time, having allowed himself to remember them. His dad used to make goulash for supper too. Instead of crying he smiles at Aunt Chelsea, sits down and takes a bite. Dan hates goulash. But it doesn't matter like it used to.

Dan's problems start with the November writing thing, his English teacher's idea. "You're a good young writer," Mr. Lee tells him after class in late October. "Every November writers from all over the world try to write 50,000 words. Lots of young people do it. It's not competitive, just a chance to practice the art of writing. Wouldn't it be great to have written a novel at your age?"

His father is the novelist, and he doesn't want Dan to suffer the same fate. "Writers are the most miserable, insecure people on the planet," he says. But it's no surprise when he encourages the November novel idea. Dan knows the pattern well. His dad will be full of suggestions, euphoric at the chance to mentor his only child. Soon after, Dan will try out his father's proffered wisdom, but will screw it up somehow. His father will lose interest and grow distant again. Same as when Dan was a boy scout and his dad became a leader for exactly one camping trip. Same as when Dan took up the clarinet—his dad's old instrument—and his dad showed him how to care for the reeds, and when Dan left one attached to the mouthpiece his dad got mad and never went to any of his concerts. Dan is as powerless as his father to prevent the pattern's endless repetition.

"I don't know where to start, Dad."

"Boy with a problem," his father says.

"Can you help?"

"I am helping," he says, straddling a chair at the kitchen table. Dan has his laptop open to a blank document. "The basis of every great story is simple," his dad says. "You need a protagonist with a problem. Establish the problem on page one. Solve it by page three hundred. The rest is tension." He smells of aftershave and coffee and is wearing pajama bottoms and a white tank top, ready for bed. Dan's father is pretty much immune to caffeine.

"Why a boy then?" Dan asks.

"Write what you know."

Dan works on it for half the night.

There was a boy named David. And David loved Lucinda. Lucinda did not love him back.

No. He can't bear to write about unrequited love—too close to the bone.

Lucinda loved David as much as he loved her. The problem was, Lucinda was Catholic and David's parents were fundamentalist … atheists.

"A satisfying twist to an old meme," he says to his dad in the morning, having rehearsed the line.

His father hates the idea. "That won't carry you to page fifty. A cliché in a mirror is still a cliché."

"But you said all I needed was a boy with a problem."

"Different boy; different problem. Try again."

Dan exhales and slouches.

"Think about real boys you know. What are their problems? What are your problems?"

At lunch Dan walks one of the trails through the woods around his school, hoping for inspiration. Everyone else on the trail is smoking. At the end he finds a half dozen smokers leaning against the property-line fence. "Hey," he says. They are grade twelves, three years older, gigantic.

"Hey," one of the girls says back. She doesn't look up. There are three girls and three boys. "What's wrong, buddy?" the girl asks, smoke rolling from her mouth. She's looking at him now, half smiling.

"Me?" he says. "Oh. Uh. Homework."

They all laugh.

"Can I ask you something?" he asks the girl.

"Shoot," she says.

"What are your big problems in life?"

They all laugh again. She doesn't answer at first. "Seriously?" she says.

"Yeah."

"You a social worker?" one guy says. More chuckling.

"No. Kind of related to my homework. I won't use your names."

More laughter.

"You sound like a social worker," the guy says.

They all nod except the girl. "Well, if you really want to know … my biggest problem is my asshole boyfriend can't stay away from Earla White!" She shoves the guy who spoke and the other four make a big show of laughing hysterically.

The guy shrugs. “My problem is I’m dating the second hottest girl in school with the first hottest temper.”

She shoves him again, flicks his cigarette out of his hand, and storms away. “Come on, kid!” she shouts.

Dan looks at the guy with pity. “Sorry,” he says.

“Come on!” the girl shouts.

“I think she means you, bud,” the guy says.

“Oh,” Dan says. He turns and runs to her.

“Men! That’s my problem. Men,” she says when he catches up.

“Really?”

“Really.”

“Oh. But I need a guy’s problem.”

Without turning to face him she says, “A guy’s problem? A guy’s problem looks like this. He can’t keep it in his pants; he gets two girls pregnant and tells them both to have abortions. And the nice, smart one agrees. But the slutty stupid bimbo says no, so the guy has to help raise a kid with a stupid slut he doesn’t even like.” She’s crying as she speaks.

“Sorry,” Dan says.

She turns around and hugs him. “You seem nice,” she says. “Don’t ever force a girl to make a choice like that, OK?”

He nods as she turns and runs away. He is unsure of her meaning, but feels excited by her story.

Dan’s father hates the abortion storyline. “It’ll come out preachy,” he says. “Use the one about the atheists.”

There it is; his father has dropped the project, and Dan with it. Dan shoves his laptop across the table. “You do it,” he says.

“What’s the point of that?”

What’s the point of any of it? Dan’s father would just be disappointed or worse, disinterested, whatever the outcome. How can anyone grow up in this godforsaken hellhole and be expected to come up with a novel anyway? Anyone with half a brain is bullied or ignored. It was Dan’s father who dragged him here and Dan’s father who dismisses his best ideas. Dan sits there shaking, unable to articulate any of these things to his father. Instead he shouts the least intelligent thing he can think of: “Fuck you, Dad!”

His father winces when he hears Dan say “fuck.” Dan can’t stand that look of agony. He stands and goes to his room, locks the door behind him and crawls into bed. A few minutes later his father pounds hard on his door,

threatening to kick it down if he doesn't open it. Shocked as he appeared by Dan's use of the f-word, his father is using it liberally now. He's lost his temper like this before. Not often though, and usually at his wife.

Dan's mother intervenes with a gentle knock. "Dan?" she calls. "You got two options, pal. Apologize to your dad or we don't pay for your Christmas band trip. No Toronto."

And she starts a slow count to three. As if he's still a baby. They've been using this trick all his life. Making him choose between what they want him to do and some unfathomable alternative fate. You want the bullet to the temple or the knife to the throat? Choose.

He has to go to Toronto. He's been waiting all his life.

"Two," she counts.

He spits a one-word apology through the locked door. "Sorry!"

"Come out here and look in his eyes when you say it," she says, calm but firm.

He gets out of bed, walks slowly to the door, opens it and looks directly at his father's feet. "Sorry," he mutters, and closes the door.

She knocks again. "Enough. Apologize with respect or lose the trip."

He manufactures just enough respect to calmly apologize, saying the words his mother needs to hear, like he always does. It doesn't make him or his father happy, but he gets to go to Toronto.

The perpetual avalanche of humans rushing through downtown Toronto makes him painfully anxious. He's so been looking forward to this trip, and rehearsing at Roy Thompson Hall with a professional conductor. But mostly it's the city he wanted: the size, the life. When their bus rolled through an eternity of superhighway he started to feel it pulsing, something super-electric, a billion megawatts burning at once. But cold. The sun is only visible by its reflection in the banks.

Following his classmates around the sights has been awful. These backwater bozos have a better knack for navigating the anthill than he does. The pulse paralyzes him. And the sights: the Eaton Centre shopping spree; a basketball game; a communications tower resembling a monolithic phallus. Everything turned up: too big, too loud and too fast.

His parents. He can't stop thinking about them. How they hate Toronto, take every opportunity to delight in its failures, yet keep checking its concert and gallery listings. "Why can't we get art like that here? We have enough artists you'd think we'd merit a Modigliani show, just once!" Dan

has never forgiven them for taking him away from the city before he was old enough to archive its smells. And he can't stop thinking about them, how he cursed them to hell before he left. He's still angry, yet he knows he is at least partially responsible.

After they leave the CN Tower he falls behind the group, feeling woozy. He stands on Front Street in the cold, is nearly trampled by masses of strangers. He looks at his home number on the screen of his phone. He imagines his father's hello, and what he should say. "Sorry, Dad. I know you were trying to help." But he puts the phone back in his pocket.

She's a peculiar creature, this Halifax aunt. He'd met her a few times before the accident and she seemed like a person who could be busier than anyone else and have less to show for it. She's forever cleaning a filthy house, working on an incomplete masterpiece, complaining about a world that's lost its way.

That's the most entertaining part: her arguments with the news. As far as he knows, she's only actually called into one of these shows the once, when she told off the shock jocks. Mostly she's content talking to Dan or to herself, chastising the politicians of all partisanships, the reporters for their lack of affiliation, and occasionally the current affairs hosts for their faux objectivity. "Who picked these two extremists? What a bunch of ugly nothing. There's no nuance when a cat fights a dog."

Sometimes she apes a politician, the mayor being her favourite. Her impression of the mayor is a cross between a tongue-tied silver-spoon conservative Quimby and Elmer Fudd. "Er uh, ba-daa ba-daa, I uh, I stick to what I said before about not saying the thing that, uh, ahh, is being said that I said." She makes him laugh with that. She's the first to make him laugh after the car accident.

He came home early, alone on an airplane, no Roy Thompson Hall rehearsal with real conductor. He went straight to Aunt Chelsea's, practically a stranger, but he came to her weary and she put him to work assembling an old cot she bought at the Army & Navy. "The deals you get there—and good stuff too. I got all my kitchen knives there. I don't know why people buy all this made-in-China stuff from Walmart. A million square feet of hell that is. Look, Dan. Still in the box. Help me put it together."

And it hasn't stopped—her tongue, the work. Constant as the radio playing in the background.

"How am I supposed to work on my writing if I have to sweep the floors every night?" he complains.

"I thought you wanted to be a photographer."

"I'm not good with machines," he says.

She laughs. "So much like your father. And our dad and him used to *fight*, oh my."

"What about?"

"Everything. Politics. Chores. Art. By the time he was eighteen your dad couldn't wait to flee. Halifax wasn't even big enough anymore, or far enough away. Keep in mind your grandfather didn't see a car till he was ten years old. Anyway, you know the rest."

"Tell me anyway."

She whacks her nose side to side with her index knuckle, a habit he can't figure out if it's nervous or excess energy. "Anyway. The irony is if not for all those farm chores I don't think your dad would have finished his novel."

"He wrote what he knew, and he knew farming because of Grandpa."

"The chores taught your dad discipline. He would always say, 'A novel's a marathon.'"

"How come he never wrote another one?"

"What's this story here, Dan? Turn up the radio now." She shuffles around him and does it herself. "Twinning the highway. What a waste of millions. And still no abortion clinic in rural Nova Scotia for God's sake."

It's ten months since the accident. Ten months of sweeping and washing and gardening and raking a ramshackle house that never looks clean. And finally he cries. She's on him with the speed of an insect but with hugs and kisses for his hair. "Dan, we should make some cookies," she says.

"Maybe if the roads were better they wouldn't have died," he says, scarcely a whisper.

"Oh, Dan." She hugs him, head to chest. She doesn't list them, but he can hear her counterarguments, the big-picture reasons why the road shouldn't be widened, all that money to maybe, maybe not, save a few lives. He's heard the speech on other issues: spraying pesticides, building skyscrapers. His parents would agree with her.

"I should write a letter," he says.

"If you think it'll help."

"To the radio station."

"Sure."

"And I should finish my novel."
"You have a novel?"
"Sure," he says. "It's about abortion."
"Your father would be so goddamned proud."

SHADOWGRAPH 139: AFTER ALL, WE HAD A BOMB

SEAN HOWARD

—poetry detected in Frederick Reines' 1995 Nobel Physics Lecture[1]

'engine trouble': *icarus air*... (*science* the national carrier?) if only! 'the atom sewed-up.' un-recallable products. ('countdown'; *everyone intensely remote, brashly sparring* ...) chargrill

phoenix. physicists? *bomb parts!* (stockholm streetwalkers ...) 'pauli effect': poltergeist, little boy in the lab. apocalypse, *controlled* blaze! eniwetok, bikini; the scenic crimes. ('after the ex-

plosion,' *feeling nice & clean again* ...) 'modern eye'—*fireball*. descartes' bodyguards. *blood-wino*; the devil's shaking hands .... (war, the cheap shot.) lab—'feathers everywhere ...' *dis-*

couraging? 'silence coming from the master.' america, man & god in congress! *angelus dominoes* ... exam room, 'a vivid schematic/of the capture technique.' cool? *cats in school!* the nec-

romantics. the river's bankers. (pandora's box? *los alamos, p.o. #1663.*) 'last epic'—*parasites lost*. *flash!* 'to ash the specimen ...' sepia, *savannah buffalo*. (atoms: pearls before swine ...) 'si-

lent spring'? *geigers clicking* ... (*craftsmen furnishing the flood.*) 'too late'; *the day after*, 'arriving at the earth ...' oppenheimer yielding the ghost. (sunset, *western fragments*.) 'the bomb'—

nervously, i approached my boss ...

[1] Frederick Reines (1918-1998) was awarded the 1995 Nobel Prize for Physics "for the detection of the neutrino," a highly-radioactive, 400-liter water tank. His lecture was titled 'The Neutrino: from Poltergeist to Particle.'

RANDOM ACTS OF NATURE

MAIA CARON

JOY CAME UP FROM the beach and stood for a moment with closed eyes. "Paul says he wants a native ceremony."

Paul was Joy's husband and Mary's brother. He had been dead six months, which did not deter Joy from knowing his whims. This was because she was a psychic healer and kept in regular contact with disembodied entities. She referred to her clients as "Dear Ones," and had much to say about the disintegrating state of mankind. Joy was also an interspecies expert. This had something to do with communicating with dolphins and whales. And she was a spiritual trainer, teaching people to read auras. If people still did that. Mary thought it was a hippie thing.

"We'll need an eagle feather," Joy said.

When pressed, she admitted that an owl's feather might do. If it weren't for the smug manner in which Joy talked about these things, Mary would have asked to hear more. She happened to be an amateur expert on eagles. After discovering a nest on her headland, she studied them through the telescope in her great room and contributed to eagle cams across the world.

Paul had been a life-long bachelor, but in his last years, he'd married Joy, eighteen years his junior. When Paul died, Mary attended his funeral in Chilliwack, where Joy had clutched his ashes, contained in a jar with a prehistoric beetle etched on the side. Paul had often said he wanted his ashes to be scattered on the Pacific, and finally Mary e-mailed Joy, suggesting a small ceremony, a blessing at high tide at her house in Qualicum Beach on Vancouver Island.

"You can't keep him in that jar forever," she wrote. "You know he was claustrophobic."

Mary added a smiley face to the end of this sentence, thinking that Joy was the kind of person moved by emoticons. When the communication went unanswered, her next e-mail mentioned a time when Paul had suffered an anxiety attack in a crowded elevator. That e-mail included exclamation marks—punctuation she despised.

Just as Mary became distracted with the demands of her own life, Joy called to say that Paul had contacted her from beyond and said he was finally ready to *leave*. Because of solar flares or an auspicious alignment of planets, a weekend in August had been chosen to give his spirit to the waters.

"It's the last vestige," Joy said. "He must go home."

Mary hadn't bargained that Joy would bring her brother Darren and his son, and her seven-year-old daughter. Before everyone arrived, Mary Googled Joy, not expecting to find much, but up popped a slick website, featuring pictures of Joy looking glowing-eyed. Mary spent half an hour paging through her blog, listening to something called *Satsang With Joy* on podcast, and watching video poems on the subject of Core Galactic Gnosis. All quite professionally done.

Joy was a large-boned woman with frowzy brown hair and arms and legs that were attached loosely to her body. She insisted on wearing her flip-flops in the house, although Mary encouraged guests to remove "outside" shoes. Mary herself had "inside" shoes that she changed into at the door. Joy's wide bony feet gave Mary the willies. *Peasant feet*, she thought. Not to mention what was on the bottom of those flip-flops—disgusting goop from the ferry, men's spit, dog pee—the works.

Mary's guests gathered in the great room, which afforded sweeping views of the sea. She had the gas fireplace going from dawn to dusk, so that her guests would feel as if they were at a resort. She also lit candles in the hurricane lamps and tuned the TV to a spa music channel, appealing to all the senses. But such efforts were lost on these people, who slammed doors and shouted to each other across the table.

Joy's daughter Greta stood too close to the fireplace, puzzling over the fake rocks inside. She cocked her small dark head at the marvel of Mozart issuing from hidden speakers, accompanied by ocean waves, and she seemed to appreciate the floor-to-ceiling windows—the wonder on her face mirroring the feats of engineering involved.

Mary thought of her own daughter, Jenny. She had wanted children—a child—but when one came as planned, she had not known what to do with her. It didn't help that Jenny had emerged from the womb screaming and did not let up for her entire childhood. Jenny had a rebellious mind and was considered by one high school principal to be "an evil child." She had been expelled from several schools, been arrested for shoplifting, and had dropped out of school in grade eleven to cross the country with her anarchist

boyfriend in a bus that ran on corn oil. Just before Jenny moved out, she and Mary had argued and almost come to blows. When Jenny ran into her room and slammed the door to call her boyfriend, Mary picked up the extension and heard Jenny say, "I should have knocked her down."

Mary thought that if she'd had a daughter as good as Greta, she would have been a good mother. You could only work with what you were dealt.

In the morning, Mary was up early and standing with her coffee at the bank of windows facing the rocks that ran down to the sea. The neighbour's cat—named "Kitty" out of some attempt at humour, or in the lowest common denominator of cat names—trotted across the front deck with a bird in its mouth. Even after years of living on the wild Pacific, Mary could still be caught off guard by random acts of nature. Often she would find bits of fur on the headland, where an eagle had dashed a rabbit to death on the rocks, or discover that an otter had devoured all the goldfish in her garden pond.

Joy appeared on the beach below in a hand-knit poncho, and Mary went down to meet her. They walked toward the headland through a steady wind that blew through the bracken above the high-tide mark, bringing with it the acrid smell of the sea. Bald eagles in the treetops called to each other in their shuddering cry, and Joy turned her face to the sun.

Mary said, "Greta is an unusual child."

Joy's expression changed—the effect of a door slamming. "Unusual?"

"Reserved for her age, which is a good thing, I think. And curious. Too many children have their noses buried in computers." Mary hesitated, thinking of Cole, who was most likely in a corner of the house, doing just that. "It's not healthy." She had gone too far and was compelled to blunder on. "She must benefit from your sensitivity."

A strong wave came up the beach, foaming at their feet before dragging back. Joy stared at her wet shoes. "Aren't you afraid sometimes, out here?"

Mary snorted. "Afraid of what?"

"I don't know, a woman alone."

She said that she felt safer alone, and wondered if Joy considered it a weakness. "Are you *reading* me?"

"You're difficult to read."

While she disliked the idea of being read, Mary disliked the idea of being *difficult to read* even more. Perhaps Joy glimpsed her disappointment in clouds of grey, or her anger in red, or worse, no colour at all.

When they returned to the house, Joy's brother Darren was in the great room, leafing through a self-help tome that Joy had been talking to him about earlier, a book called *Deep Truth*. Darren was a thick man with a belly that he sucked in at intervals. He had just come from the hot tub and was stretched out on her sofa, his prune feet on the pillow that she sometimes rested her head on. There was a moment before he realized that they'd entered the room, and his face was bitter—wiped clean of its perpetual smile.

Mary wondered why he was here at all. Joy had obviously asked him along as a sort of mixing agent—if there was any way that oil and water could mix.

The three of them discussed the logistics of the ceremony that would take place after dinner. They would strew Paul's ashes on the ocean and release him to heaven for the spiritually aware. Because it was his last weekend in corporeal form, Joy got it in her head to bake Paul's favourite pie, and Darren was sent on a special mission to town to find blackberries, coming back instead with blueberries. This put Joy into an odd mood that wanted to be upbeat, but more resembled a barely managed depression.

It had socked in since lunch—the cloud ceiling an oppressive five hundred feet above their heads. Because Joy had insisted that the family be together, Darren's son Cole was slumped in one of Mary's antique wingbacks in the living room, his thumbs moving with terrible dexterity across his phone. Greta sat on the sofa in her pink dress, watching cartoons on the big-screen TV above the fireplace. Although Mary encouraged her to use the mute button, commercials blasted incessantly.

Joy hadn't the foresight to bring a pie recipe, so she borrowed the new iPad Mary had given herself for Christmas, on which she'd been writing poems.

Joy was one of those cooks who made an unholy mess of a kitchen. Mary turned from clearing the sink of dishes to catch her stashing the knife block in a high cupboard.

"Bad Feng Shui," said Joy by way of explanation. Mary edged her iPad out of range of the milk carton, which balanced precariously on the edge of a spoon. The screen was smeared where Joy had banged away at it with her greasy fingers in a futile attempt to keep it from going into rest mode as she read the recipe.

Darren came in to the kitchen, rubbing his hands together, saying, "A little of this, a little of that."

It was like an English play: the frazzled widow baking her dead husband his favourite pie, her oafish brother pretending this wasn't insanity, the sullen teenager texting his girlfriend, and the other-worldly child watching it all with a surreal calm.

Mary had gone out of her way in life to avoid such people, moving to the ends of the earth to be alone, living a peaceful, gluten-free life, and yet here in her kitchen these Philistines stood, as if they had rented a beach house for a week and taken it over, fantasizing that it was theirs.

Joy grew flustered in her pastry making and knocked over the milk. Mary snatched up her iPad and mopped at it, sure that it was ruined. She suspected that the whole pie scene, the spilled milk, was another way of Joy expressing some unacceptable emotion.

Taking up a dishcloth, Joy began swiping at the counter. Hair had come out of her braids and her face was flushed. The slapdash baking, the sense of danger in the kitchen, put Mary in mind of her own mother, who had been perpetually on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

Jenny had agreed to come home for Christmas a few years before and they had baked cookies. Somewhere between the mixing of dry ingredients and wet, they got on the subject of nature vs. nurture—how a child's personality could be formed by random negative emotions rinsed through her mother's womb. Jenny had wanted to know what her parents' marriage had been like at the time Mary was pregnant.

"Were you happy?"

"Of course we were happy." She couldn't admit that Jenny's father had embezzled money from his firm and they'd had to declare bankruptcy—how she had got up in the middle of the night weeks before Jenny's birth and moaned, staring out of a dark window into nothing.

Mary caught sight of the pie before it went into the oven. Joy had plunked the pastry into the pie dish haphazardly, as if she couldn't wait to be done with it. She hadn't rolled it wide enough, and there were tears around the edges that she had patched raggedly. Her mother's pie crusts had looked like this: dough cemented on at the last minute so the filling leaked; bits jutting out at odd angles to catch the heat of the oven and burn.

Mary had driven in to Nanaimo yesterday to pick up sliced beef for the Chinese Fondue, as the butcher insisted on calling it, although there was nothing Chinese about it. After gin and tonics on the deck, it was decided that

nothing would be more perfect than dinner on the beach. Her guests had not experienced this type of free dining. Mary laughed when they laughed, enjoying the false sense of exhilaration that came from alcohol.

Greta sat primly on the sand, examining her fondue fork with an exquisite curiosity that Mary found admirable in so small a child. Joy fidgeted and twitched, watching her daughter with apprehension. Did she think a seven-year-old would stick it in her eye?

After dinner Joy and Darren wanted to get into the hot tub, so Mary went back up to the house. Cole and Greta had gone up without offering to carry their dirty dishes, Cole charged with watching Greta.

Mary wrestled with the fondue pots. Her gin euphoria was wearing off and the world had come back into focus. As she neared the stairs to the deck, Kitty shot out of the bush in front of her, yowling, then staggered up the path. Mary immediately thought of rabies, but when Kitty turned her head, she saw that her whiskers had been cut off close to her muzzle, and the cat was having trouble negotiating space.

She stopped and let out another howl. Mary approached her slowly, horrified to see that whoever had cut Kitty's whiskers had also snipped off part of her left ear. As she crouched there, the bushes parted and out stepped Greta, holding Mary's kitchen scissors. The girl looked down with her wan blue eyes. Laughter drifted up from the hot tub on the other side of the house. Kitty attempted to walk again, but became disoriented and fell over. Greta watched the cat with curiosity, as if she were conducting an experiment. Without warning, she launched into a run.

Mary followed, but the girl was too quick and she found her with Darren and Joy, who had got out of the hot tub and were reaching for towels. Mary had planned to be calm, but outrage got the better of her, and she grabbed the girl's arm directly under her armpit, twisting the fragile skin.

"Why did you hurt Kitty?"

"What's going on here?" Joy cried. Somehow Cole, in the way of teenagers, had come down from the house, just in time to involve himself.

"Your daughter," Mary said, "has cut the whiskers off Kitty. And damaged her ear."

"I was giving her a haircut," Greta said.

Mary was aware of Darren beside her, towel wrapped around his gut, toes gripping the deck like spiders.

"Kitty said it was alright," Greta said in her small, measured voice. "To do it."

Mary released her grip on Greta's arm. This was surprising. She would not need to threaten or cajole. The child was willing to admit her crime.

"I had to save Kitty from dying—like daddy did."

"Ah," said Darren.

Mary tried to remember the psychology course she'd taken during her first year at university. Was it normal for a child grieving her dead father to cut a cat's whiskers, and almost remove its ear in the process? She had a pretty good idea that it was not normal at all, yet Joy and Darren and even Cole were nodding and sighing, as if the child's explanation was enough.

"I'd like to talk to your mother and Uncle Darren," Mary said to Greta. "Go up to the house." Joy took a step forward, but didn't object. The four of them watched the girl smooth her dress and go down the stairs, dark hair cut straight across the nape of her pale neck. Cole followed her.

Mary could see now that the elegance, the gravitas she had admired earlier in Greta, was in fact a morbid coldness. Joy's assailed expression betrayed the fact that there had been incidents before this. And yet she had let the child loose without so much as a warning. Mary wondered if Joy dismissed Greta's behaviour with some incredible explanation of past lives, if she thought Greta had been Genghis Kahn and was just letting off steam.

"She should be punished," Mary said.

Joy clutched the towel to her, suddenly sober. There was a hunted look behind her eyes. When Mary said she would take Kitty to the neighbours, Joy did not volunteer to go along.

Mary turned in disgust. "You can send Paul to heaven without me."

As dusk came down, Mary carried a glass of wine to her front window and looked down at the sea. On the beach, Joy was offering the scarab urn to the sky, her wild hair thrown back like a priestess, incanting some prayer.

Mary turned on the fireplace. The music on the television suddenly turned dirge-like. Despite their fights, she had resisted her daughter Jenny leaving home. The experience was akin to reverse birth. Sitting in the car, she watched the ferry pull away with Jenny on it, and howled with agony.

She had poured out her heart to Jenny in a letter—admitted mistakes, pleaded forgiveness, fearing she'd lose her forever. She'd given the letter to Jenny days before her departure, but it had surely been thrown into the first garbage can her daughter had passed walking on to the ferry.

This child, who only twenty-five years before had been an idea with a name she'd picked from a book, was now living her own life in a city far

way, with other people who loved her. How fast water boiled if you didn't watch it, how quickly children grew up when you were just trying to get a moment to yourself.

Rain threatened from across the Strait, a gray squall darkening the waves. As Joy continued her invocations, Darren and Cole clasped their hands respectfully, as if they were praying. Greta stood a few steps outside of the circle, staring off into nowhere.

Mary was reminded of the mothers and daughters she would sometimes see on the beach in Parksville. The child playing by herself and the mother standing apart—perhaps on her cell phone—holding a pail of sea stars or rocks, the child's hat or jacket. Burdened by things not her own and with a private life unspooling in her head. Mary remembered that deadness in the chest, an inability to bridge the wide chasm. She had very much wanted to be a good mother and, at the same time, to escape to a quiet room with a book. When she saw these women, she hesitated, wanting to tell them they should try harder, they should do more. But what would she have done if an older woman with the benefit of sleep, time and books had said that to her?

After the last of Paul's ashes flew into the air, Joy broke away from the others and walked the beach with weariness in her step, as if the sand conspired to pull her under. She climbed the stairs to the front porch and looked up, startled to see Mary at the door.

"I thought you'd be in bed."

It was on the tip of Mary's tongue to retort, "I would have thought you'd *sense* I'd still be up," but she kept it back.

"Well, we did it," Joy said. "Paul is released."

Emotions crossed Joy's face like clouds threatening storm. Mary saw how much pain it caused her—the enlightened healer—to have a child such as Greta. She wondered what it was like to have faith in another side, a magical place. What it took to believe that in the face of reality.

It began to rain, and the darkness pressed in on her and the endless headland, the Garry Oaks silver against the invented horizon. Those trees had been here long before her and would exist long after she was gone. Her daughter would inherit this place and what then? All that she had sacrificed, the quiet life she had shaped for herself, might be sold in a moment, for children could not be trusted to have the same dreams, the same yearnings.

I should have knocked her down. Mary thought she would have pushed Jenny to the ground before allowing her daughter such power. But to let her do it would have fixed everything.

"Where's Greta?" Mary asked.

"At the beach. Darren's watching her."

Perhaps Jenny thought of her more than she imagined. It was very likely that she had kept the letter, maybe even read it. What if children were meant to level you? What if having a difficult one earned you some kind of gold star from God?

She stood with her hand on the doorknob. Greta was coming up the stairs with Darren and Cole. Mary did not believe in God and, at that moment, she could see that Joy didn't either.

"You'll spend a lot of time in principals' offices," Mary said. "Probably already have."

"Yes," Joy said, her head down.

"You can plan and plan. You can become a fucking saint for all it matters, and still be asked to suffer."

Joy stared at her, stricken.

"But she'll somehow manage to become the love of your life."

A moment later, Darren and Greta and Cole silently filed in, their heads wet with rain. Joy laughed. "Let's have some of that pie," she said, and kicked off her flip-flops at the door.

SHOEBOX VIGILANTES

MICHAEL J. HESS

THERE IS A SHOEBOX OF PHOTOGRAPHS in most homes. This shoebox can be literal or digital, can live under a bed or on a hard-drive, be neat or messy. Its purpose is to keep memories alive. It doesn't matter if the snapshot is of a child at a birthday party or a corpse at a murder scene. The image allows one to remember and interpret—and re-interpret—what happened. The picture helps to guarantee that at least part of the story was true. There *was* a birthday party on the lawn, a white cake with five candles, presents wrapped with bows. Someone cared or appeared to care. The woman in the hotel room, the one with blood on her nightgown, *was* punctured in the stomach with a knife or a bullet. There was blood in the centre. At least one person had stopped caring, or maybe cared too much.

I'm looking into an old shoebox. There's no label other than the manufacturer's sticker (Nike, 7.5, Daybreak), nothing to let me know what shots are inside. When I pull off the lid, I know conclusively what is inside—photographs from a Halloween party, 1994. I was coming of age and therefore just coming into my sexuality, which included, but was not limited to, "coming out." Coming out involved telling my close friends that I was gay. They already knew. Telling my mother that I was gay, which happened in a mall parking lot in a Chicago suburb. She already knew. I didn't tell my father. He already knew. Moving forward, it involved not hiding my sexuality in professional or social situations. This would prove an impossible and, at times, absurd task.

The costume I donned that night was composed of a leather jock-strap, a ripped white t-shirt, a red bandana and biker boots. A "Leather Man." I—an un-inked man standing 5'6" with fair hair and freckles and no interest in the mechanical arts—chose the costume because I wanted to appear (and be) more masculine. Taller, darker-featured, musky. A brute with an uncompromising attitude and appendage. I did not yet understand that wearing treated hide and the attendant accessories did not make one any more or less masculine. "Leather," as it pertains to a lifestyle in certain

segments of the gay community, in fact, was more or less about costumes and performance, drag shows for those too frightened or forlorn to put on a gown.

During the party I danced with a man in a pink antebellum dress. I ran after a fickle kitten screaming, "You will love me!" After too much to drink and too many conversations about the impossibility of being free, I lay face-down on a bed and allowed party guests to draw hearts and smiley faces on my legs and exposed butt cheeks with a black mascara wand. It was a night that reached its fullest promise in the early morning, when the peripheral friends peeled away and the close network, those of us who knew each other, the ones who lived and rhymed and bled together, decided to stand on the rooftop, shed our clothes and dance under the stars.

My friends and I loved the idea of freedom, even though our understanding of its terms was clouded in our own fierce personal logic. *You're only free if you can listen to The Smiths with the volume cranked at 3 am … if you are able to make a living working on impenetrable art films that may never get played for a general audience … if you can take to the road and never turn back*. Perhaps this is how it is with everyone. Freedom only maintains its allure because no one can really define its terms. I'm speaking, of course, of a time before the towers fell, before we would all start to question the costs of our perceived freedom. A time when we seemed quite willing to let go of certain freedoms. 9/11? How did I get there? That night on the rooftop happened many years before the cells coalesced, before that morning with the perfect blue sky, before the first hit and then the second, the grounding, the emergency state. Shoeboxes can make you remember things. Dangerous things.

Why do I keep looking into them? Because the next view always offers a new read, like going back to review a well-written book. You see things that eluded you on the first view. The boy in the leather jockstrap had scratches on his arm. The cat didn't like the love. The girl who drew a heart on my butt cheek had an engagement ring on her left hand; she was married the following year. The marriage would end in divorce, but no matter. This was the same girl who would lend me a CB radio for a road trip to New Mexico. I would end up not going and instead meet my mother in a Chicago suburb to tell her something that she already knew. I would attend a rooftop party. Expose myself first to the magic and then to the mourning.

On the morning after Hallowe'en, All Saint's Day, the music faded out. I remember lying on my back, watching the sky turn early-morning Chicago

blue and my eyes, bleary in communion and consummation, finally closing. I woke in the afternoon with a slight hangover, sunshine on my cheeks and a warm feeling that I would be with these people forever. We would lunch on cakes and meats and Bloody Marys in the late afternoon, and a week later we would meet up for another adventure. There would be a graduation, a trip to the shore, a cat burial. On and on we would go.

That few of us who took off our clothes that night in late October and writhed to the rhythm still speak to each other should be seen as a cautionary tale. Maybe there are only certain places that one can go with a group before the symmetry ruptures. The clothes must be put back on and the dance will change. How does it feel? Our lives change after rooftop ceremonies, just as they change after terrorist plots and shoebox retrieval.

The birthday party on a lawn, a white cake with five candles and presents wrapped in bows—that is from another shoebox (Adidas, 7.5, Samoa). It is a picture that my grandmother passed down to me. It is of her daughter's (my aunt's) fifth birthday. The cake is homemade, lopsided, beautiful. Her son (my father) runs through the frame, blurs. That picture tells me that there was a time when they were a young family who believed in wishes and parties on the lawn. It reminds me today not just of that innocence, but of how we outgrow it. The birthday girl would grow obese, join Weight Watchers, get thin on caloric counts and frozen broccoli, and grow fat again. The blurred young boy would become a hellion and then a raging cop and then a depressive. The mother would try to control both the girl and the boy as she tried to control what came into and went out of the picture's frame. Her efforts could break your heart; it is hard to see someone who cares allow her children to go their own ways. They are so easily snapped up by the predators that run free in the open fields of our lives.

Free children will turn up their own truths in these fields. Creatures, too. If they are out in the natural world, they will invariably come upon a dead bird at some point. The same shoeboxes that store our photographs can be used for a backyard ceremony, nicely entombing an avian find, providing a lesson for the innocent or affirmation for the mature. The shoebox that I use now could not be used to bury a bird. It is not a shoebox, but a file. The photographs are in a folder on my desktop. The last picture I took was this: Lake Ontario at Cherry Beach. I remember the day I snapped the picture. It was windy, starting out at 52° and ending at 30°, a day with a five-minute window, that's all, when the breeze had died down and the sun shone, *that*

moment when one could mistake this day in fall for a day in early spring. There was a whiff of childhood in that day, the crowning of hope and loss, a measure of these human times.

That's not the last picture in the folder. Another has crept in. A picture of a corpse. She has bushy red hair. She is bleeding from the centre. Three men on their knees surround her, each with a camera to his eye. It is an awful image, an abomination, and I cannot wait to drag it into my trash. But I know that deleting this image, in a world of connections and digital transfers, does little to remove it. It is out there. It is in *here*. It is not going away. No matter how vigilant I am, similar pictures will pop up on my screens, again and again, offering unwanted glimpses into my fears, fantasies and failings.

OVERTURNED

JONATHAN GREENHAUSE

The mountain hides itself beneath an overturned cereal bowl.

  If you press your ear
against the cold ceramic, you can detect its upper-altitude winds.

You can sense something's not quite right.
  Inside, you hear
the faint thud of an avalanche & the muted gasps of alpinists.

The local paper doesn't mention the mountain's disappearance,
  but the international news is abuzz with this:
A flat terrain left behind a mountain gone, as if abducted by aliens.

The village that basked in its comforting shadow now melts in the sun,

& the members of the town's tourism board are laid off
  & must search for some other mountain;
but inside your kitchen, you possess the enormity of what's gone missing.

  You tap the ceramic with a sterling silver spoon
as if the echo against rock slabs & forests could fill the room.

  You build a shrine around it,
your miracle situated in a single breakfast serving.

You're sure they'll find, blame, & imprison you for having taken it;
  but the mountain came to you.

It snuck in while you wept the loss of your parents
  & presented itself as consolation.

  This was its gift to you: An entire mountain,
but, of course, even this will never be enough.

THE HEN

DAVID SAPP

Soon after Hoover
promised “a chicken
in every pot,” the hen
embarked upon a grand adventure,
a ride into town in
the farmer’s jalopy, rust,
bailing twine, and fence wire
strung together like the leather
and laces of a loose-jointed shoe.

The hen sat up front beside
the farmer’s dog, a venerable geezer,
an odd couple that got along
in a curious unison, cocking
their heads at passing sights;
she clucked as a fretting wife
in low, wary comments
and the occasional, excitable cackle,
from him, a growling “humph.”

Long before the farmer’s
dentures rattled in his mouth,
like a clacking tractor engine,
he needed a tooth pulled
and didn’t have a quarter;
the hen became the barter.

In the dentist's waiting room,
in her cushioned chair, she
gracefully laid an exquisite egg,
warm, smooth, spotted, and tanned
like a girl's freckled shoulder;
she seemed to know—she seemed to ask:
"will you pluck my feathers
to the skin for a single meal or
fry my lovely, yellow yolks
forever in your skillet?"

NEW LIFE

MARIAM PIRBHAI

A CO-WORKER'S BIRTHDAY held the promise of cake. One hoped for chocolate. Today it was carrot. Apparently chocolate constituted an indulgence that the company could ill-afford during what the boss referred to as a temporary dry spell, a comment made with her characteristic optimism, which bore little correspondence to the recession that most companies were managing by cutting personnel like buccaneers ordering their stowaways to walk the plank. The captain at the helm of our sinking ship had taken the time to bake a cake. We were the lucky ones.

We were served our square morsels straight from the baking pan. Candles were withheld out of respect for the birthday girl's right to conceal her age. The birthday anthem was sung ceremoniously off-key. We stood around the receptionist's desk, riding out the awkwardness of professional camaraderie, some of us wishing our figures were sleeker, our pay cheques fatter, the workday shorter and, perhaps more than one of us, the icing sweeter.

"And she can bake a mean pie, too!" the kiss ass piped up.

The commander-in-chief doled out another piece to Kiss Ass. "Have another! Just don't tell Gerald. You know how Gerald can't be trusted around cake."

No one laughed. A pall descended over the cramped room until someone teased the boss, suggesting that she start a tradition of giving the birthday girl or boy the day off. Hopeful laughter ensued and the comment about Gerald, the human resources assistant director, was glossed over.

But the comment stuck like icing on grubby fingers. Had they laughed, my reaction would have been different. But their silence betrayed a shared insight into Gerald to which I, in my recent adoption into the fold of the New Life Insurance Co., was not privy.

Perhaps it was out of my sense of exclusion as the newbie, perhaps it was my inability to suppress a wayward imagination, but the boss's comment eventually morphed into a question that persisted throughout the

day. Why can't Gerald be trusted around cake? He was a slender man, and concern for his waistline or cholesterol levels seemed unlikely.

Why can't Gerald be trusted around cake?

The question emblazoned itself in three-dimensional gyrating graphic patterns on my screen saver.

It appeared between the lines of the rejection letter I was composing for a client with breast cancer. Going through her original application I found that she had received treatment already, and the policy strictly excluded duplicate claims. Besides, New Life had agreed to cover the cost of two ambulance rides in the event of an emergency, a semi-private hospital room, and a list of other luxuries to which the general population were not entitled. Our clients could hardly complain. With the customary thud of the company's seal stamped on the bottom right corner of the letter, I was relieved to call it a day.

As I made my way past the doughnut shop on the mezzanine, the Gerald-comment was reawakened by the aroma of freshly-ground coffee beans and banana muffins. Why can't Gerald be trusted around cake? The doughnut trays reminded me that I had seen him order a maple-glaze on numerous occasions, so diabetes was out of the question.

Why can't Gerald be trusted around cake, I wondered, as I waited for the Number 14 east-bound. The question followed me onto the bus, settling in the carbon monoxide haze of rush-hour traffic.

It followed me into the twenty-three-storey building I call home. It entered the elevator and made its way up to the thirteenth floor, eclipsing my habitual recollection of the concierge's sales pitch the day I'd come to view the apartment: *The thirteenth floor's popular among the Chinese, you know*, winking conspiratorially. *One man's albatross is another man's turtle dove!*

The analogy struck me as both odd and misplaced. Don't you mean *one man's trash is another man's treasure?* I had wanted to ask. I had also wanted to point out that I am not Chinese, so technically the albatross was still an albatross, and that I'd only heard of mourning doves, which didn't sound lucky at all. But seeing as everything else about the apartment satisfied my list of must-haves—square footage, laundry facilities, location—I had overlooked this foolishness and signed on the dotted line.

The question shadowed me into my apartment, somewhat muddled with images of albatrosses and weepy pigeons. It lingered as I changed out my work clothes. By the time I started rummaging through my pile of

take-out menus, I was so wrapped up in the mystery of Gerald that I could hardly focus on the simple task of ordering dinner. Of course, my mood was generally synchronized with the second number on my speed dial: Lucky Seven Restaurant and Bubble Tea Café, a place I had come to value for its twenty-minute delivery policy and generous dishes with a penchant for the literal. Tomato Beef or Shrimp and Snow Peas left little room for surprise or confusion. There was also a list of dishes featuring the Special House Sauce, a secret recipe that no Lucky Seven server had been able to identify. Normally I would have distrusted any establishment serving mystery sauces, but I appreciated the organic laws of superstition. After all, regular patronage of a Chinese restaurant surely entitled me to some fortune-cookie crumbs of good luck, a circuitous way of accepting my lot on the thirteenth floor of a poorly managed high rise.

Squeezing plum sauce on an egg roll, I was reminded of the sweet orange tint of the glazed carrots in the boss's cake. Now I recalled the humourless bite of the boss's tone, the almost imperceptible downturn of her lipsticked mouth, and the palpable discomfort of my usually disaffected coworkers.

Gerald can't be trusted around cake.

The comment slipped down the ebony spine of my chopsticks and sullied my appetite for Chicken and Vegetables with Cashew.

The next day I found an excuse to pass by Gerald's office.

"Uh … hello … Gerald?"

"How may I help you?" Gerald replied without looking up. I was reminded of the officious tone with which he had welcomed me to the company.

"Um, Gerald, forgive the intrusion. I don't know if you remember me—you called to tell me the good news about my position a month ago."

"Five weeks, actually."

"Uh, right, five. Well, again, I'm sorry to bother you, but I was just wondering"—and here I paused to consider the approach I might take: spontaneous abandon, casual curiosity, petulant prying ….

"What is it?" Gerald's impatience was whittling away the armour of my courage.

"Well, I …"

"Are you unhappy at New Life? You've found something better, but you still need references, is that it?"

"Oh no! This has nothing to do with me. Actually … well, I didn't see you at Crystal's birthday celebration yesterday, so I thought I would …."

Gerald's fingers froze over the function keys on his laptop. "Go on."

"Well, I … never mind. I'd better get back."

"It's true."

"Excuse me?"

"The cake thing. It's true."

"Oh. Um …."

"Is that all?"

"Yes—I mean no! I mean, thanks. Thanks for … your time." I was going to say 'thanks for clearing that up,' but nothing had been cleared up. Gerald went back to his typing and I to my rejection letters.

Much to my relief, another three months passed before I encountered Gerald again. By the time my own birthday rolled around—almost five months to the day since the cake coment—thoughts of Gerald were all but stricken from my mind.

There we were again, gathered around the receptionist's desk. My boss was cutting into a dark chocolate cake, layered with passion fruit and acai berry compote, with serrano chili chocolate icing and brazil nut shavings, a hint of Jamaican rum in the afterbite. The company was flourishing. We had received nothing short of a blood transfusion: a new lease on life, in keeping with the company motto. The recession had been good for us. Although stress-related illnesses, gum disease, heart attacks and prescription use had risen dramatically, many of the large companies whose staff we insured had gone belly-up, leaving us with no obligation to honour their policies. On top of this, the recession justified drastic cutbacks to our plan, which meant we could push up deductibles for clients' out-of-pocket expenses—basic things like consultation fees or eye exams—before we paid out a penny in benefits. These savings were diverted to administrative salaries and expenses. My lavish birthday cake was a sign of the times.

I was too young to warrant the customary retirement jokes, but everyone was in high spirits. Half-assed attempts at humour seemed redundant in an atmosphere brimming with the delectable prospect of hefty bonuses handed to us alongside designer pastries at the annual Christmas party.

My colleagues were in the second verse of the birthday anthem when Gerald appeared. The older voices petered out almost instantly, while the new hires completed the song with gusto.

I nodded at Gerald. What was I to do—single him out or afford him the dignity of inconspicuousness? He seemed not to require my attention. Crossing self-assuredly to the receptionist's desk, he used her letter opener to cut a manifestly too-large slice of cake.

When he made his way over to me, the party took it as a cue to disperse under the pretence of vibrating cells, incoming text messages and the pressing business of the day.

"Gerald," I ventured feebly. "I am so glad you're here."

"Are you sure you can trust me around it?" He gestured toward his cake, taking a generous bite and licking his icing-tipped finger with exaggerated relish.

"Of course! I mean there's plenty for everyone." Feigning selective hearing was a skill I had nurtured during my time at New Life. It had proved effective in warding off intimate disclosures by desperate clients, who were wont to divulge excruciatingly private details of their ailments, information best left in the paper shredder.

"I'm here to give you a birthday present," Gerald declared, impervious to my obvious distress.

"Really, Gerald, there's no need—"

"Oh, but there is."

By now he and I were the only ones left in the lobby. Even the receptionist had run off on some imaginary errand. The remainder of the cake had absconded as well.

"It happened when I was seven."

"Seven?"

"My mother was throwing me a birthday party. She made my favourite cake. It was magnificent. Three layers of white and chocolate cake with strawberry filling and chocolate fudge glaze—her own special creation. Then she realized that she'd forgotten the candles, and what's a birthday cake without candles, right? So she ran out to the store. It wasn't until four or five of my friends had arrived that everyone started to wonder why she was taking so long. She had found the candles easily enough. She just never made it home with them."

Gerald popped a last piece of cake into his mouth before he continued. "The store was held up while she was paying for my candles. Just punks with guns. They panicked, apparently. Five shots were fired . One smashed through the Slushy machine. Two hit my mother. The first punctured her right breast

and the second hit a major artery. It could just as well have been her left leg and her right arm since they were such lousy shots. She bled out on the vinyl floor where the police found her."

"Oh my god!" I gasped.

"My mother was the only fatality that day. Lam, the owner, survived. He told my father that he was going to get rid of all those funny mirrors—*bagga* or *bagua* or something—he kept for protection, since they obviously hadn't done much good. I thought he was only being polite, because he not only survived the shooting with no more than a graze, but the insurance paid out for damages afforded him a brand new Beamer."

"Gerald, I'm so—" I started.

"You probably never met Eileen Summer. She was before your time." Gerald reached for the paper napkin to wipe a chocolate shaving from the bottom of his lip.

"No, I never … I've heard lots of nice things about her though," I added pathetically.

Nonplussed, Gerald continued. "Let's just say that when word got around that I was absent for most of these celebrations, a few eyebrows were raised. Maybe if I wasn't in Human Resources … anyway, to stop drawing attention to myself, I made a point of attending Eileen's fiftieth. It wasn't my fault that our new Director cornered me publicly into explaining why I stayed away. How did she put it?" Gerald made an unconvincing show of trying to recall the exact words. "'Nice of you to join us, Gerald. We were beginning to think you were allergic to cake'."

I didn't think there was anything so obnoxious about the boss's comment, but Gerald had a different view.

"All eyes were on me," he continued. "She left me no choice. After I got through the part about the shooting, Eileen started to cry. And the rest of them just disappeared. That was the end it, I thought, relieved not to have to attend another one of those things. But when I was given the task of firing Eileen soon after her birthday, rumour got round that it was my fault, like I was some kind of a curse."

My fingers were wrapped so tightly around the paper napkin holding my cake that it was no longer an identifiable solid.

"The boss really splurged on that one. The powers-that-be must like you!" Gerald added cheerfully, before turning to walk out of the room.

"Uh, thanks …."

Aside from the hum of the receptionist's computer, silence pervaded the office. I felt resentment toward Gerald for having robbed me of the one day that I got to be the centre of attention, lapping up the dark chocolate-laden symbol of my superior's affections.

When I got back to my cubicle, feeling distinctly out of sorts, the red light was flashing on my voicemail inbox. I couldn't recall my password, and tried various permutations of my birthdate together with the year I had started working at New Life: 1407, 4170, 7014, and so on. Then an angry male voice almost shattered my right eardrum: "What good is your insurance! She needed chemotheraphy, not breast implants! And it wasn't even a recurrence. Just look at the medical records we submitted. It was a new round of cancer. In her *right* breast this time. But you denied her on a technicality about duplicate claims, and now she's dead." Each subsequent message was a variation on the same theme, from incoherent ramblings to idle threats: "I want to speak to your manager!" or "I'm going to sue!"

I wasn't certain which of our clients the man was referring to as we denied hundreds of such claims in a given month. Then I remembered the rejection letter I had written for a Ms. Janice Lam several months before. Lam? It couldn't be. I shrugged off the coincidence, focusing on the particulars of the case, which had seemed straight forward enough. We simply did not cover the same condition twice. Had I overlooked something? She'd been lucky to have any coverage considering her medical history, especially ar a time when even simple claims like knee replacement surgeries were being denied. We weren't miracle workers, after all. And we weren't a charity! Why didn't people understand that?

I didn't call back right away, as I was still feeling unsettled from my encounter with Gerald. I couldn't afford to display any trace of weakness over the phone. The company had already lost a corporate malfeasance suit because an agent had come across as too sympathetic to the plaintiff.

When I finally got round to returning Mr. Lam's calls, I was relieved beyond measure to get an answering machine: "Hello, Mr. Lam. New Life offers you and your family our sincerest condolences. I see that your late wife also has a life insurance policy with us. We will be happy to address any of your questions and concerns regarding this matter. Please note that our business hours are Monday to Friday, from nine to five, although we have a 24-hour hotline, at 1-800-7755 …."

HAY MAKER

CULLENE BRYANT

Be still my soul for God is on your side.
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.

SIX MEN BELONGING to the Mennonite choir stood by the fireplace and sang. Jeans freshly washed, shirts buttoned right up to the neck. They stood apart, but their heads leaned into one another as they sang in close harmony. The Mennonites lived on the other side of the highway just before Milk River. When Hans phoned and said they wanted to console her with music, Ethel had hesitated. She belonged to the United Church. Yet she was moved by the word "console." That they wanted to commiserate with her was a kind of balm.

"How very thoughtful," she said.

Ethel had been stirring soup when the call came. Even though money was no longer a problem, she still boiled the chicken carcass overnight. She wouldn't throw away bones when there was another meal to be eaked from them. In the morning, she had washed and peeled carrots and potatoes from her garden and added them to the broth. She was measuring herbs when the phone rang.

"There's been an accident. Come quickly," said Hillary.

"What's happened? Is it Greg?

"He's been knocked out. A concussion." Ethel heard the panic in her daughter-in-law's voice. It only took a minute to find her car keys, sling on her coat and run to the garage. She pressed the gas pedal to the floor.

Her granddaughter Janet met her at the entrance to the Emergency. "I found him behind the hay maker. Something must have gone wrong. He must have gone back to look. Turned off the switch, but left the engine running." Janet led her behind a white curtain ,where Greg lay on a steel cot.

"Is he asleep?" There wasn't a mark on him. They had cleaned him up.

"The ambulance driver said that the hay maker's arms were probably still rotating. Clipped him on the side of the head. It would have been so quick; he couldn't have felt a thing."

Ethel nodded as Janet appeared with a tray of fresh sandwiches: tuna, egg salad and sliced beef. The ladies from the United Church Women had prepared the food. The gathering was supposed to be just family. Then it grew to include close friends. Now the room was full of people. She watched Janet set the tray on the coffee table and glance at her mother, sitting upright and stiff in the chair, shoulders back, hands folded, long tapered fingers resting in her lap.

Janet's gaze moved to Joe, her boyfriend. He stood near the china cabinet, talking with some men. His father owned a small farm and the hardware store in town. As soon as Joe finished college, his father was going to hand over the family business. He caught Janet's eye, left the circle of men to stand behind her chair and squeeze her shoulder. She tried to smile up at him, then fled to the kitchen. Joe went after her. Ethel smiled inwardly. He'll be good to her.

She lifted her eyes to the faces of the singers. No one could tell that she wasn't concentrating on the music. She looked past them to the big picture window, through which the purple hills in the far distance were lit by an early setting sun. The scene has always quieted her soul.

Greg had been a breech delivery. Instead of having him at home, as planned, Ethel had to be driven into the city. The labour room smelled of disinfectant. The sounds of a woman screaming in another room unnerved Ethel as she tried to practise her deep breathing. When she moaned with pain, the nurse treated her with diffidence. Returning from the hospital, she held Greg closely and cried, his soft four-day-old cheek pressed against hers. One day he would have a beard. She drew away and traced his skin with her fingers. The underside of a rose petal.

When her husband died, Greg took on the responsibilities of the ranch. Ethel stayed on even after he married and brought Hillary home. It was years before she consented to move and buy a small house in town.

"You don't need to work so hard anymore. Take it easy." Greg lifted her heavy brown suitcases into the back of the truck.

Ethel climbed into the passenger's side with a sense of relief. "Hillary will take good care of you." She meant what she said.

At first she had worried. Her daughter-in-law, raised in Calgary, had never lived on a farm. The first time Greg brought her home, Ethel noticed Hillary had painted fingernails.

"Look at the silver medal she won in the jumping contest." Greg flashed it before Ethel's eyes.

"At the Equestrian Centre." Hillary retrieved the medal and put it carefully in her purse.

"How lovely." Ethel tried to sound impressed.

The first time Hillary had joined them on a cattle drive, it rained endlessly. Her horse slipped in the mud and needed to be prodded past the clump of trees near the creek.

Water leaked into her riding boots, dropped from her yellow plastic hood on to her chin. "Can't we just rest under a tree for a moment?" Ethel and Greg plodded on. At the end of the week, Hillary was nursing a cold. Ethel put her to bed with a hot toddy of scotch and honey.

In the early years of their marriage, Ethel undertook Hillary's "post-graduate education." She taught her how to make bread, prepare a hearty spread for the ranch hands, and pack lunches that would fill a man's stomach and warm his heart on even the coldest days.

Ethel stood beside Greg's cot for a moment and then crumpled into a nearby chair. The scene felt as unreal as if she were at the theatre. She watched Hillary kiss Greg's forehead; pull back the crisp sheet drawn over his body; touch the muscle of his forearm; nestle her head into his shoulder the way she did when they watched TV. He would pat the cushion beside him and say, "C'mon, girl." He loved sports. Hockey in the winter, baseball in the summer. Hillary preferred comedies. When they were first married, they argued about their television selections right in front of Ethel. She tried not to notice, calmly knitting socks and sweaters or newborn outfits. Most of these she gave to the thrift shop at the church. The sweaters and socks for "the less fortunate." The booties and bonnets gifts for new mothers.

"Come sit near me," she had said. "I'll teach you how."

But Hillary wouldn't give up her place beside Greg and the warm comfort of his embrace. She never learned to knit or do the embroidery that kept

Ethel's hands busy and her spirit at peace. During the commercials, Ethel made popcorn or scones with homemade blackberry jam. The three of them would snack until the CBC news came on at eleven o'clock.

The nurse ushered a chaplain into the room.

"The doctor told me about the accident. May I be of some help?"

"I'm too young to be a widow." Hillary threw herself into his arms and nearly knocked him off balance.

"What happened?" The champlain led her to a chair beside Ethel and Hillary told him how Janet had found Greg lying beside the hay maker. After a few moments, he invited them to stand together around the bed and hold hands. They said the Lord's Prayer.

Ethel couldn't reach the sandwiches on the coffee table. Her stomach growled. Her coffee cup was empty. She tried to lower it to the floor, but when she leaned over the arm of the sofa, the cup rattled on its saucer and the dregs spilled on to the carpet.

How could this happen? He was always so careful. Taught everyone to be safe.

Hillary stood up quickly and offered the tray to her mother-in-law. Ethel picked out a tuna sandwich and bit into the crust. She choked.

Hillary rubbed her back.

Ethel gazed again over the shoulders of the singers to the scene framed by the window. As a young bride, it had taken Hillary some time to win Ethel's confidence and affection. The second spring of their marriage Greg went to a rodeo in Montana, leaving the two women in charge. Ethel drove into town to pick up some mail and a surprise snowfall started. When she arrived back at the ranch, Hillary was nowhere to be found. Ethel checked the living room and the bedrooms, then ran outside, her calls muffled by the curtain of snow. In the barn she found Hillary kneeling by a heifer who had just delivered an early calf.

"I did it," she said. "I called the vet but he never came."

"They put the snow plow away too soon," said Ethel.

"I got the chains around its legs. I pulled it out all by myself."

The calf attempted to stand and fell down in the soft hay. The exhausted cow still lay on her side. "Good job. You're a rancher's wife, now."

The hymn filled the room. Ethel recognized the melody from *Finlandia*. How fitting. She continued gazing out the window, studying the shades of green: the stiff spruce needles, the lime-green of aspen leaves, the darker blue-green of the hemlock. One spring, spider mites killed most of the spruce trees that lined the driveway. They turned brown almost over night. Greg had to call in a arborist. They saved only a few of them.

Later that night, after the guests have left and Hillary has taken a sleeping pill, Ethel will notice Janet and her boyfriend strolling arm-in-arm. She will watch them from behind the bedroom curtains. She will see them linger by the barn where the accident happened, where Janet had found her father face down on the ground behind the hay-making machine. Her fingers clawed at his bony shoulders like a frantic robin after the first frost trying to wrest a worm from the hard earth. But he did not wake.

Ethel will watch the couple move from the barn to the Quonset where the tools are kept. Joe will unlock the door and Janet will follow him inside. Should she go after them? She never let Hillary and Greg sit too long on the sofa watching television. She used to flick the light switch, signaling that it was time for Hillary to go sleep in the guest room. Ethel will feel like a small twig on a dying tree. She will close the curtains and crawl under the bed sheets.

As the men began the final verse, the music rose to a crescendo. *Be still my soul, the hour is hastening on when we shall be forever with the Lord*. Ethel knew that the rolling landscape of his country inspired Sibelius. She scanned the room and realized that the only people present who did not belong to the land were the doctor and the chaplain. Some of her friends nodded and tried to smile comfort. The hymn ended. A hush fell over the assembly and all was still.

BEFORE WE KNEW OUR LOSS

SHARON LAX

THE PORTENT OF WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

so much upon the red
the wheel and barrow.

an uncertain temperature
the means to an end
but I've forgotten
the road.

needs some paint, some grease
slackened body
no summer reprieve
bring some wood fire's dyin'.

slash along the side
bitter feud

so much
upon
a wheel
barrow.

proper bend
the handle and mud
the rust like blood.

but the rain came down
nothing new reflected
‘though moon is to steel as whisky to ice.

the tawny indecision
of the dirt-encrusted left front wheel
and already too much said.

so little
on when we’ll see
the light of day
or hold our children close again

nothing on return
or when
taking tool to tin
a wry trust in deceitful things.

THE RUINS

In place of fields

Grasses
high as thighs
corralled
by pines, birches, oak
colonies of sugar maples.

Once a farmhouse claimed this skeleton.

Now dying summer
has laid down her throttled planks.

Farming tools
bones from a lost era
post guard at the crossing.

Palaeozoic monuments
necks bent under weight of sky.

Limbs rusted

Waiting for the driver
to come
and relieve them of their station.

Book Reviews

INTO THE BLIZZARD: WALKING THE FIELDS OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND DEAD.
BY MICHAEL WINTER.
TORONTO: DOUBLEDAY, 2014. VI. 326 PAGES. $32.00.

ON JULY 1, WHEN MOST Canadians celebrate Canada Day, Newfoundlanders think instead of a military action that took place during the First World War on 1 July 1916, decades before Newfoundland and Labrador joined Canada. That day, the first day of the Battle of the Somme, the Newfoundland Regiment fought at Beaumont-Hamel. Of about 1000 men in the Regiment over 300 died, most within minutes, and over 350 were wounded. For Newfoundland and Labrador, July 1 is Memorial Day. As we reach the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the First World War, we have also reached the end of living memory of the war.

Into the Blizzard is a war memorial for the 21st century, a time when we are skeptical of grand public gestures, of official monuments and the public discourses that accompany them. There is an official history of the Newfoundland Regiment (Nicholson, 2006); this is not one. *Into the Blizzard* looks at the soldiers who would shortly die, or survive to be veterans, as ordinary men. Winter presents their facts and stories, which start long before the battlefields, in their banality, uncertainty or humour. He reminds us of their sexuality, as traced through medical records (43). He presents them as tourists in Egypt. He considers the man who grew up next to his own house. Some stories are moving, some are absurd. By layering them he builds something of significance: a sense of pathos, a terrible sense of waste as we come to feel, not merely know, the effects of the loss of these individuals to their families, communities, and their nation—the Dominion of Newfoundland, as it was then. He is a Chaucer for the Newfoundland Regiment, focusing our attention not on the shrine (though he does get to the battlefield and the monument) but on the road stories along the way. He is a war correspondent amongst ghosts, getting the human angle beneath the press releases. By working on this scale Winter makes history accessible in the best sense of the word.

Moreover, a large part of the book is about the relevance of Beaumont-Hamel to us today, close to a century on. This idea, that the war ought

to be relevant to us, is something official voices worry over and trumpet. We are expected to bow our heads gravely and be thankful—and for the most part we are—but that gratitude is abstract and its objects are alien, ancient heroes. School children hear talk of sacrifice and squirm through a minute of silence. Winter takes up the difficult work of making history "real" by literally making the book about himself as a way of illustrating history to us, his readers. A skeptic who opens the book by observing the utility of the war memorial in St. John's as a skateboard park (3), Winter grounds his acts of memorialization in his own flesh. How can we understand the world of these soldiers and their sacrifices after a century of such swift change? How will we remember them? Winter answers with a contemporary pilgrimage: he travels their path; he finds the villages and fields they trained in, the pubs they drank in; he sleeps in barracks; he walks their battlefields. He tells us how these journeys feel to him today: the waiting, hunger, fear, grace or cruelty. Winter measures time using the scale of our own bodies, our senses and experience of space, our human needs and discomforts and dis/connections. The direct parallels he draws between his own peacetime travel experiences and those of the soldiers are often inadequate and unconvincing—waiting to deplane is hardly disembarking after a ten-day ocean crossing haunted by U-boats. But this is, eventually, the point: we fail to know them; their experience is beyond us, even as we try to feel it. It is a truism now that all history is subjective, but few approaches are so self-aware, so determined to highlight this subjectivity to readers, and use it to spark our own reflections.

Winter addresses the problems of memory and inadequacies of memorialization directly throughout the text, challenging conventional approaches to the war. He interrogates the truism that Beaumont-Hamel forged a national consciousness amongst Newfoundlanders, and reinterprets symbols like the caribou, emblem of the Regiment and subject of the official memorial in France, as an animal at bay, scenting danger, not as a proud part of military heraldry. He talks about the half-models of the caribou built for towns across Newfoundland, where children swing on them: "something monumental brought back to normal dimensions" (309). What ought to be normal, heargues, is a sense of horror at the senseless sacrifice of the young, instead of the platitudinous language of official memorialization that often uses war to propagate simplistic ideas of nationalism. Winter's tone moves from observational to angry and fearful as he contemplates both the war and our contemporary world through the lens of his own relationship with his son.

Winter is particularly suited to present his subject in this manner. He has been circling nonfiction for years: the fictional works for which he is still best known (*One Last Good Look*, *This All Happened*, *The Architects Are Here*) are autofictional, drawing upon and adapting his own life through the persona of alter-ego Gabriel English. 2011's *The Death of Donna Whalen* is "documentary fiction;" a found narrative, it is constructed substantially from reshaped transcripts of court hearings, statements, and other documents addressing the central figure's murder. The foreword of that text notes the model of Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology* (1915), a poetry collection that presents a small American town through poems written from the perspectives of its dead citizens. Masters' influence is even more clear here, in *Into The Blizzard*. Winter's work is always about the chime and echo between things, whether within lives or between eras. Here, his precise language and his careful, cadenced phrases connect us to the long-dead young men at Beaumont-Hamel, and ask us to consider the world being crafted for us now. Hours spent at this memorial are well worth it.

SUSANNE MARSHALL
HALIFAX, NS

SINGED WINGS.
BY LOLA LEMIRE TOSTEVIN.
VANCOUVER: TALONBOOKS, 2013. 112 PAGES. $16.95.

LOLA LEMIRE TOSTEVIN'S NEWEST collection of poetry, *Singed Wings*, is a quiet triumph. Inspired by the lives and works of "women who practiced their art under unfavourable social or physical circumstances, such as Camille Claudel and Frida Kahlo, or into advanced age, such as Louise Bourgeois and Betty Goodwin" (Acknowledgements 109), Tostevin creates a collection that is at once meditative, invective, wry and wrenchingly personal. To call *Singed Wings* an homage or 'portrait of the female artist' is to limit the intimacy and communion that the bilingual poet shares with her polyphony of muses: she visits Camille Claudel in the asylum "where memory slept" (19); she goes for drinks with Hannah Arendt; she takes "Betty Goodwin at her word" (27). Tostevin sculpts, photographs, paints, writes and dreams the female artists who died in the past but lived in the future, "The paradox of lives held / Between/*Hier- /Aujourd'hui*" (33). There is love in these poems—love for

the artists, love for the art—but there is also enduring pain.

At times Tostevin's poetry seems suspended on air, unfettered and effervescent, yet her lyrical wings fly only so close to the sun, close enough to singe but not to burn. The poet is tethered, weighted, by the body of language and the language of bodies:

> The body withdraws
> To rethink itself
>
> The spotted and wrinkled skin
> Slips like a glove onto the writing hand
>
> Touches on the strangeness
> Of this otherness (44)

Bodies are bound to their corporeal and temporal cells, to their assigned physical, social and linguistic territories. "How did age steal womanhood faster / Than womanhood stole childhood?" (40) the poet asks, equally bitter and mystified. She longs for the aged skin to slip off the writing hand as easily as it slips on, for words to touch something other than "this otherness" (44) of being. The artist ascends and descends, but never fully transcends: life and death are unavoidable—"the rest is painted bread" (97).

Despite the poet's anxiety about the "inherent impossibility of writing / Poetically about bodies and landscapes" (89)—which borders on a kind of post-modern neurosis—the tentative self-consciousness and reflexivity of *Singed Wings* plays well against its sharp and sudden humour:

> Standing in line at Union Station
> When a young man in railway uniform
> Tells her, "C'mon, move it up, granny"
> Livesay answers, "Fuck you, sonny" (49)

Wit is a rebuttal: it is the poet's defense against the young man who snickers with his friends when she tells him "He has beautiful eyes" (48); it is the ache of desire that pervades the "cracked nipples … brittle nails / Wet kiss a drool" (105) of an aging body that struggles to accept its place in "the matter of time" (105); it is the old women who "look at old men and conclude that / Not hankering is the gentler thing" (40). Wit is a rebuttal, but art is

a strange refuge. As the poet stands before Claudel's *Torse de Clotho*, she marks her allegiance to the decaying half-figure of Fate: "Old Woman, you are my guardian now / Let the damn body hang" (18), she declares, at once defiant and despairing.

Pained and desperately lonely at times, humorous and cutting at others, *Singed Wings* is a collection that thinks and feels deeply about "the thinking thing / the body thing" (50), the living thing and the dying thing. A beautiful and nuanced work by a poet of considerable skill, intelligence and depth.

BRITTANY KRAUS
DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

ALONGSIDE.
BY ANNE COMPTON.
MARKHAM, ON: FITZHENRY & WHITESIDE, 2013. 80 PAGES. $14.95.

THE FINE PRINT ON THE COPYRIGHT page of Anne Compton's *Alongside* categorizes the collection as "Love poetry, Canadian—21st Century." It appears that the cataloguer took the publisher's squib, which describes the book as "an unexpected love story," too much at its word. This is not love poetry. There is not much talk of a lover or a beloved. In fact, its most striking quality, which is decidedly uncharacteristic of "love poetry," is restraint. As Jeffery Donaldson puts it, Compton's language is "carefully controlled."

Indeed, Compton's word choices are extreme in their precision. For example, in a single poem ("Beatrice," 62), we have "a trestle table," "mirror carp," and "cheval glass," capped by this mouthful of a final line: "Seckel pears on a credenza, her only concession." Another poem contains a similarly conspicuous, decidedly un-English word: "ghazal," which is a type of Persian love poem. Such vocabulary is usually nestled within poems composed of simple syntax and few strong verbs, or poems that dispense with verbs altogether. In "Beatrice," for instance, the nouns and adjectives (quoted above) are bold, but the verbs are ordinary: "wants," "are," "can," "is." Another poem begins without a verb, opting instead for a carefully chosen adjective: "The vulpine light of a full moon in February" (39). What's true of the types of words Compton uses is true of the poems in a more general way: they tend to be weighty, a little opaque, and static.

It's obvious that a lot of care has gone into Compton's choices. And while precision is a good thing, it comes at a cost. Some of the lines are over-crafted. Their language is sometimes a dense net of weighty nouns and adjectives in which meanings get caught. So the reader has to work to remain inside the poems. Jeffery Donaldson calls Compton "a wonderful poet of word textures, language textures." But Donaldson is an English professor; he devotes a lot of time to analyzing poetry and is Compton's ideal audience. There is no invitation to the more casual reader, a creature at risk of becoming extinct.

The most interesting poems depart from the static and opaque modes mentioned above. For example, in "John and Me, Skating" (51), Compton pays homage to Gerald Manley Hopkins. The poem, which describes her and presumably her brother pond-skating as twelve- and fourteen-year-olds, "lank-limbed lovelies," "wonders of muscle and bone," is hyphen-filled, and bounces along with a rhythm uncharacteristic of her more syntactically simple style. The typical observational skills and controlled word pairings present in the other poems are here in a louder form, emphasized by the many alliterations and hyphens. "John and Me, Skating" still exhibits some of Compton's characteristic restraint, but its contrasting quickness of rhythm helps to maintain a sense of wonder without masking the poem's meanings.

While there is nothing wrong with difficulty in itself, the effort required to read a difficult poem should be rewarded. What I mean is illustrated by one of the more accessible poems, "Cab Ride, Paris" (54), which maintains a level of precision while being clear about the emotion it is trying to convey. In it, the speaker observes some boys walking their bikes along the sidewalk. The poem moves compellingly from casual observation to an urgently personal reflection on sons. She then addresses the boys, and in doing so produces this lovely last line: "the world a backdrop to your inscrutable bearing." The strength of this collection rides on poems like this, which exhibit restraint and humility, but which are also suffused with wonder. Rather than shut you out, these poems pull you in and catapult you up.

LAURA BAST
TORONTO, ON

Contributors

CHRIS BENJAMIN is the award-winning author of *Indian School Road: Legacies of the Shubenacadie Residential School, Eco-Innovators: Sustainability in Atlantic Canada,* the novel *Drive-by Saviour*s, and numerous works of short fiction in anthologies and literary journals.

FRANCIS BLESSINGTON is a poet, critic, novelist and translator. His latest book is *Euripides: Trojan Women, Helen, Hecuba: Three Plays About Women and The Trojan War* (verse translations). He teaches at Northeastern University.

NANCY BRANCH teaches at Bishop's University in Quebec. Her short fiction has appeared in *The Mitre*, *Found Press Quarterly*, *Taproot* and *The New Orphic Review* (forthcoming). Presently, she is at work on a collection of inter-connected short stories entitled *Journey Home*.

CULLENE BRYANT is a retired minister in the United Church of Canada. The Books Collective in Edmonton have published her two books of short fiction: *Llamas In The Snow* and *In The Dry Woods*. Her stories have appeared in various literary journals.

ARTHUR BULL lives on Digby Neck in Nova Scotia. He has published two books and three chapbooks, and his poems and translations from Chinese have appeared in numerous journals. He is also a musician.

BRIAN BURKE's recent and new work appears in *The Fiddlehead*, *The Nashwaak Review*, *The Prairie Journal* and *Weber Studies* (USA). He is a graduate of the writing programs at York University and the University of British Columbia.

MAIA CARON is a Métis writer living in Toronto. She has a short story appearing in *The Nashwaak Review*, an essay published in the book *Women Awakening*, and a book review in *Skeptic Magazine*. She is currently at work on a novel set during the 1885 North-West Resistance.

DAVID LIVINGSTONE CLINK has three collections of poetry in print: *Eating Fruit Out of Season* (2008), *Monster* (2010), and *Crouching Yak, Hidden Emu* (2012). His poem "A sea monster tells his story" won the 2013 Aurora Award for Best Poem/Song.

JONATHAN GREENHAUSE received a 2014 *Willow Review* Award and was a finalist in the 2014 poetry contests in *Naugatuck River Review*, *River Styx* and *Peregrine*. His poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *The Dark Horse*, *Sterling*, *New Millennium Writings* and *Potomac Review*, and he was a contributor to the Autumn 2013 issue of *TDR*.

GARY GRIEVE-CARLSON teaches English at Lebanon Valley College in Annville, Pennsylvania, and is the author of *Poems Containing History: Twentieth-Century American Poetry's Engagement with the Past* (Lexington, 2014). His wife Bridget was born in River Ryan, Cape Breton Island.

KRISTJANA GUNNARS is a writer and painter working out of British Columbia. She is the author of six books of poetry as well as works of fiction, non-fiction, and cross-genre works that are part essay, part fiction and part prose-poetry. She taught creative writing at the University of Alberta for twelve years.

GLENN HAYES' poetry has previously appeared in *The Dalhousie Review*, and in journals including *The Antigonish Review*, *Vallum*, *Descant*, *The Fiddlehead* and *The Malahat Review*. It has also been published in the anthologies *Christian Poetry in Canada* (1989) and *Larger Than Life* (2002).

MICHAEL J. HESS is a filmmaker and writer living in Toronto. His films have been played at the NYU Directors' Series, NewFest, the American Cinematique in Los Angeles, and the Kansas International Film Festival. His writing has appeared in *Shenandoah*, *Glassworks*, *Red Savina Review*, *The Outrider Review*, *AlleyCat News* and *Glitterwolf Magazine*.

JACK HOSTRAWSER is a past recipient of the York University President's Prize in short fiction. His prose and poems have appeared in *In the Hills*, *The Fieldstone Review*, *Steel Bananas*, *Existere* and *The Quilliad*.

SEAN HOWARD is the author of *Local Calls* (Cape Breton U Press, 2009) and *Incitements* (Gaspereau Press, 2011). His poetry has been published in numerous Canadian and international magazines and anthologized in *The Best Canadian Poetry in English* (Tightrope Books, 2011 & 2014). He teaches political science at Cape Breton University, researching the political history of 20th-century physics.

SHARON LAX's poetry has been long-listed for CBC's Canada Writes award, and a short story was short-listed for *Tiferet Journal*. Her prose has been published in Montreal's *Serai*, in the Quebec Writers' Federation's *carte blanche* and in Montreal's *Rover*. She has a tweet-length story in oneforty-fiction.com. Currently she's working on poetry and short story collections, as well as a novel.

DOROTHY MAHONEY has two books published by Black Moss, and her work appears in several anthologies by Cranberry Tree. Her book of dog poems will be published in 2016 by Palimpsest Press.

J.R. MCCONVEY's stories have appeared in *Joyland: A Hub for Short Fiction*, *The Puritan*, *The Danforth Review* and as part of House of Anansi's Digital Singles series. He is also a producer of documentaries, including the cross-platform project *Northwords*, for which he was privileged to visit northern Labrador. He is on Twitter @jrmcconvey and online at jrmcconvey.wordpress.com.

THOMAS R. MOORE is the author of *The Bolt-Cutters* (2010), two poems from which were featured in Garrison Keillor's Writer's Almanac, one of which received a Pushcart nomination, and another that appeared in Ted Kooser's *American Life in Poetry*. His work has also been published in several journals.

BARBARA CURRY MULCAHY's book of poetry *The Man with the Dancing Monkey* was shortlisted for the Pat Lowther and Gerald Lampert awards. Her poems have been published recently in *The New Orphic Review* and on Leaf Press's webpage Monday's Poem. Others are forthcoming in the *Prairie Journal of Canadian Literature*. Barbara lives in Slocan, BC, where she writes for *The Valley Voice*.

MARIAM PIRBHAI has published numerous works of short fiction in anthologies such as *Her Mother's Ashes: Stories by South Asian Women in Canada and the United States (Vol. 3),* and refereed journals such as *Jaggery: A DesiLit Arts and Literature Journal*. She teaches in the Department of English and Film Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University.

SCOTT RUESCHER has been working on a series of poems inspired by a visit to Graceland on a day when the house-museum was closed. In addition to the poem found in this issue, others from the series can be found in *Agni Online*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *In My Bed* and *Tower Journal*.

DAVID SAPP is a writer and artist living near Lake Erie. He teaches at Firelands College in Huron, Ohio. His poems have appeared in a number of venues in the United States. Additional publications include articles in the *Journal of Creative Behavior*, chapbooks *Close to Home* and *Two Buddha*; and his novel *Flying Over Erie*.

MO SRIVASTAVA lives in Toronto: a dad, a geologist and a statistician who started writing at fifty. He was the 2013 winner of the Canada Writes Non-Fiction prize for his story "The Gods of Scrabble," and was long-listed for the Close Encounters with Science Challenge for his story "The Latent Heat of Fusion of Ice."

JANE SPAVOLD TIMS is a botanist and focuses on natural themes in her poetry. Her poem 'Almost' is one of a series of poems about using plant dyes, funded under an artsnb Creations Grant. She has poems in *The Dalhousie Review*, *The Antigonish Review*, *Fiddlehead*, *CAROUSEL* and elsewhere.

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