EVENT

poetry and prose

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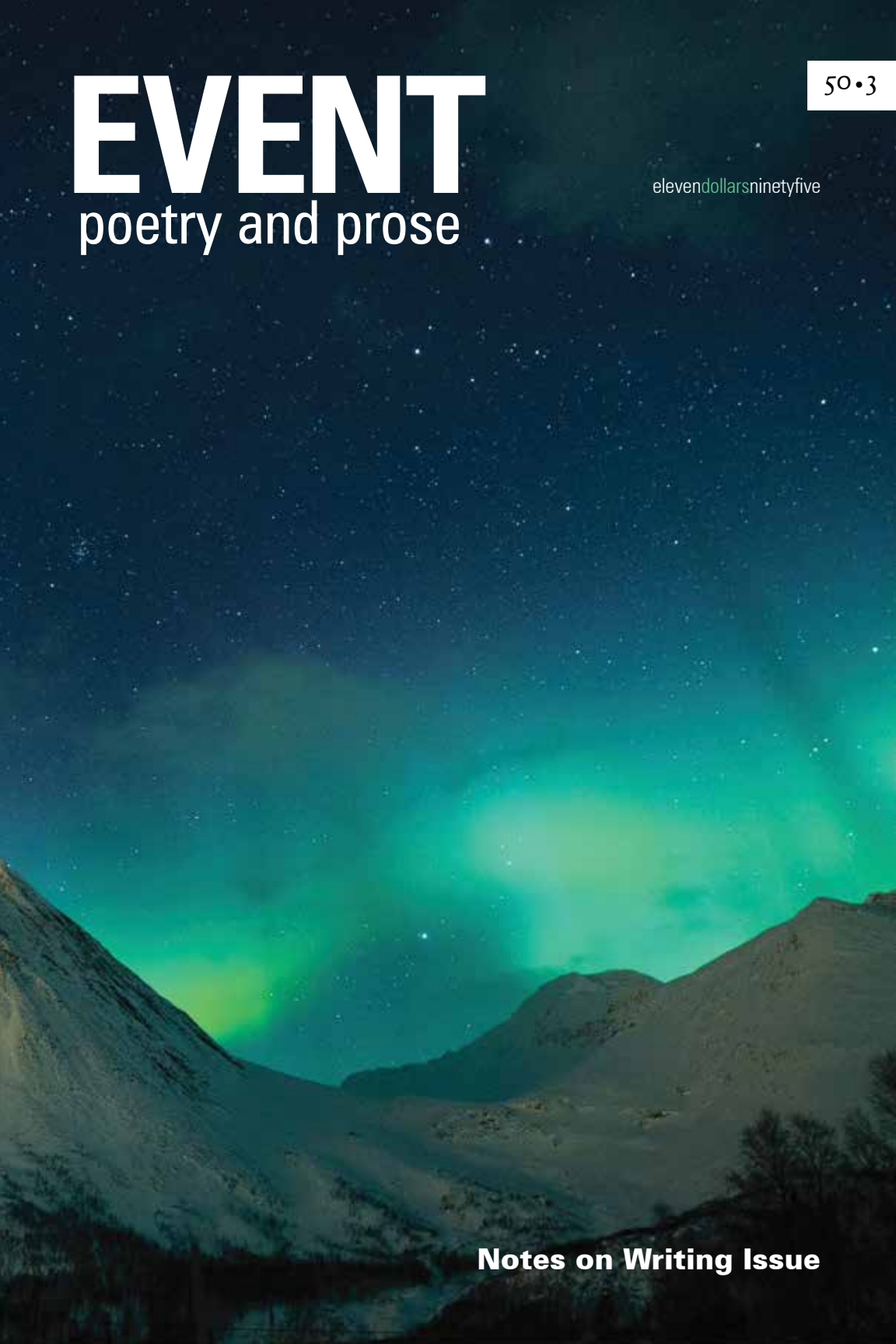

Notes on Writing Issue

EVENT

Celebrating 50 Years!

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ABOUT:
EVENT is published three times a year by Douglas College, PO Box 2503, New Westminster, BC V3L 5B2, Canada.

EVENT is a member of Magazines Canada and the Magazine Association of BC, and is indexed in Canadian Magazine Index, Canadian Literary Periodicals Index, Humanities International Complete and Index of American Periodical Verse. ISSN 0315-3770

SUPPORT:
We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts. *Nous remercions le Conseil des arts du Canada de son soutien.* We also gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, Province of British Columbia and the British Columbia Arts Council toward our editorial and production costs.

Printed in Canada by Hignell Book Printing.

Canada Council for the Arts | Conseil des arts du Canada

BRITISH COLUMBIA

BRITISH COLUMBIA ARTS COUNCIL
An agency of the Province of British Columbia

Funded by the Government of Canada | Canada

DOUGLAS COLLEGE
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SUBSCRIBE:
Print edition: one-year $29.95; two-year $54.95; sample copy $9. Prices include applicable taxes and shipping.

US subscribers: one-year US$39.95; two-year US$64.95; sample copy US$12. Overseas: one-year $49.95; two-year $74.95; sample copy $15. Institutions: one-year $40; two-year $70; sample copy $15.

Digital edition: one-year $18.85; single copy $7.95.

Occasionally EVENT exchanges subscriber lists with other literary and cultural magazines for one-time mailings. Please contact us if you prefer not to receive these mailings.

Publications Mail Agreement Number 40064616

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COVER: 'NORDKJOSBOTN,' BEN VON JAGOW, 2021

Nordkjosbotn is a small village in Northern Norway, 300 km north of the Arctic Circle. I spent a winter working near there as a northern lights guide. The village is tiny, less than 500 people, but since it sits at a crossroads between two major European highways, it receives upwards of three million visitors a year. As a result, the good people of Nordkjosbotn have stocked the town with gas stations, convenience stores and the world's northernmost brewery—all of which emit light. Light, and light pollution, have no place in northern lights viewing. As a guide I want darkness. But sometimes, as was the case that night, an aurora show starts and all you can do is find a seat. I pulled off onto a small side road and found myself staring up at that mountain. The symmetry, the clarity, the fact that the lights shimmered as a backdrop, it all just spoke to me on some spiritual level. The photo serves as a reminder: reputations can be dangerous; sometimes true beauty reveals itself in unexpected places.

—B.v.J.—

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TIFFANY S. DANG

EDITOR'S NOTE:

EVENT's beautiful 50th anniversary *Collected Notes on Writing* anthology is trapped somewhere in a warehouse in Manitoba, delayed by supply chain issues and stranded by flood damage, but we are forging ahead! This last issue of our 50th year features brand-new Notes by Anna Ling Kaye, Amanda Leduc, Rob Taylor and Brandon Wint, writing about inspiration and self-doubt, voices and silence. I like to imagine these essays published in the opening pages of a future anthology, perhaps in 2071, when the second half of EVENT's century has passed.

We would like to congratulate Alice Gauntley, whose story, 'Stripped' (EVENT 49/1) appears in *Best Canadian Stories 2021*, and Jason Jobin, whose story, 'Over Kawaguchi' (49/2) was listed as a notable story. We also congratulate the following writers, who had pieces listed as notable poems in *Best Canadian Poetry 2021*: Bára Hladik for 'Telephone' (49/2), Dominik Parisien for 'Make Your Poems Voyagers' (49/2) and Shazia Hafiz Ramji for 'Dear Kin' (49/3). Thank you to Biblioasis and to the editors of these anthologies for recognizing this work.

—Shashi Bhat

For the latest EVENT news, contests and announcements, please visit eventmagazine.ca.

AnnaLing**Kaye**

FINDING A VOICE

A year ago, in the early waves of the pandemic, deep in the muddle of an unending novel project and navigating long-term concussion recovery, I sent out a message in a bottle. It was in the form of a submission to a literary award, a chapter from the desert island of my novel-in-progress. I sent it as a standalone piece called 'East City.' Against all expectations, the bottle was seen. It placed on the short list, which was all I had hoped for. Even more of a surprise, it won the award. This is a small sharing on how that piece of writing came to be.

The spark of life came from an actual newspaper in my hands. Phones had not yet taken over; in fact that wave was only beginning to crest. It's hard to realize that this wasn't so long ago, little more than a decade as of this writing. The article that caught my interest was about a Taiwanese factory in China that had engaged an exorcist to combat a series of setbacks. It was a one-paragraph newspaper article in a Canadian newspaper. There was no more information than this. Curiosity and imagination rushed in to fill the void. I didn't have the presence of mind to clip the article, but I nestled the interesting occurrence in my memory.

We had recently moved back to Canada, my husband and I, to support his family through an elder's long illness. At the time, we had started our own new family. I had left Asia, but I found it wouldn't leave me. My childhood and coming-of-age years were spent in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and India. My foundational mythology is as much Monkey King and the *Mahabharata* as it is the classic Greeks and Aesop's fables. The Asia of my childhood became a through-line for my writing and community work. Missing the sound of the language and diverse representation in the North American media around me, my writing kept gravitating to stories that contained Chinese language, customs or settings. I especially loved writing about food. For three years I edited a Chinese Canadian literary magazine, which was like a DIY master's degree of sorts in that genre. Along the way one of my early stories, 'Red Egg and Ginger,' placed as a finalist for the Journey Prize. The task I had set myself in that story was whether I could introduce a Cantonese naming tradition in a way that was unobtrusive and essential to the structure of the story.

Encouraged that the story had found some success, I decided to get serious about a novel. The ember kindled by that newspaper article had never faded, and I began producing pages that built out the world of a Taiwanese-owned electronics factory. The narrative voice was from

the factory management side. It was hard writing, like wading through thick mud. But one day an amazing thing happened. A small, clear voice sounded in my head. A young woman. She said, 'Some dreams are big, some dreams are small. My own dreams are no bigger than a dragonfly.' The voice was strong, but not insistent. Yet it had urgency. I wrote down whatever that voice said. The words came quickly and were full of energy. This was the voice of Lan Lan, a young migrant worker. She became a major character in the novel.

What an incredible experience to have a voice travel through you! To be a conduit. It is the stuff of myths and mysticism, but the visitation felt very real to me. Still, for a long time I worried about whether it was my place to share this story. I have Chinese heritage, I speak Mandarin fluently, and grew up in numerous places in Asia, but I was hesitant to occupy a perspective that isn't my lived experience. And especially I didn't want to misrepresent, take space that isn't mine, or worst of all, mistakenly over-exoticize. It is the classic conundrum of fiction writers: It is our task to make things up, but how far are we allowed to take this liberty? The most compelling guidelines I've found are from Colson Whitehead's AWP keynote 'I Have Been on a Fried Chicken Journey.' Whitehead puts it plainly: 'No one's going to call you out if you get it right. They call you out if you fuck it up.' He continues, 'If you do fuck it up, do better next time.' I love the multiple prongs of this advice. The cautionary tale. The permission to make mistakes. The admonishment to get up and get back to work no matter the outcome.

Still, when visiting family in East Asia, I took a number of research trips to factory cities in Southern China. I tagged along on a family friend's supplier visits. I carried equipment as a photographer's assistant in factory commercial shoots. I wandered the dusty and alien streets of a factory city the way a new worker would. On occasion I was taken for a worker from the outskirts, and asked if I was looking for a job. In this way I was able to meet and interview factory workers and management. What I found through this ground research and conversation was that of course there is a multiplicity of viewpoints. There are more than 200 million migrant workers in China. Each is a unique individual. Lan Lan's voice was one of many. The research trips also provided an infinity of sensory details. I was able to confirm many of the details that I'd conjectured, and correct some of what I'd gotten wrong.

Research has the tendency to take over, as easily and eagerly as the tropical vines that smother buildings in Southern China. The chapter that formed the piece 'East City' is an early one in Lan Lan's journey, before she arrives in the high-tech environment of the electronics factory. I knew I had found the right setting when I stumbled onto a National Geographic short on the making of polyethelene dolls in Yiwu, China. The piles of plastic bodies, limbs and heads. The bright golden

hair and sparkling blue eyes of the improbably proportioned and aggressively oversexualized dolls. I trusted that with visual juxtaposition, readers would make their own inferences. Once I had Lan Lan in place in the workspace, I became curious about who else might be there. The friend Ke Ke showed up. This character had been present in past drafts of the novel, but in this version her eyes sparked with life, and a real connection formed.

And of course there is the love interest. I started from a personal memory of eating wonton noodles alone in a Hong Kong street-side stall. I was young, navigating a difficult new job, and had just received news that signalled the end of a long-distance love. Something in me was dying. I couldn't hear or taste a thing. I now know that when true heartbreak occurs, the brain tells the body it is in physical pain. Food becomes secondary, and the body floods with the stress hormone cortisol. The heart rate increases and adrenalin surges. One goes into freeze or flight mode. It was the most overpowering sensation of immobility I have ever had. It was also one of the most fully present moments I have ever had. I channelled some of this energy into the final scene of the chapter. When those emotions were matched with imagery from the doll factory, the chapter became fully illuminated. I sat back in my chair, surprised by its light.

In her TED talk, writer Liz Gilbert speaks about the muses, and how inspiration is only part of the process. The rest is showing up and doing the work. Honouring, if you will, the inspiration. For me, it is a kind of energetic work. A sounding of the depths. Following sonar. When I get to a certain level of emotional and conceptual connectedness, the piece feels finished. This takes such a long time. I go through draft upon draft. Without supportive friends, family, mentors and community, I doubt I could sustain the process. Twice, the Writers' Trust picked me out of writerly oblivion and parted the clouds such that I could glimpse the possibilities ahead. I am unendingly grateful for each encouragement. It has given me the stamina to continue. Writing is a privilege, but it is one that can be spread through support for each other and for diverse work. One of my core values as a member of this community is to pay support forward whenever I have the chance.

In the case of 'East City,' once I trusted the sound of the piece, with apprehension and perhaps some desperation, I let it out to test the waters. Luckily the writing made contact, and this has allowed some people to read it. The rest is now between the words and the readers. It is a new and exciting energy all to itself.

Amanda**Leduc**

THREE FAILURES

1.

The first time I knew that I was never going to be a writer was the winter of 2009. I was living in Edinburgh then, one year on from finishing a master's degree, living on a two-year graduate visa and trying desperately to extend that visa into permanent status.

I lived in a studio apartment a 30-second walk from the beach. I had no money. When I was younger and pursuing undergraduate studies the notion of being broke and living by the beach had seemed indescribably romantic; the reality, to my unending surprise, was at once filled with anxiety and yet somehow so boring I could scream. I often did—to myself, in my apartment, after another weekend spent inside because I couldn't afford to go out for long stretches of time. You had to pay to use public washrooms there and I rarely had the correct change; add this to a bladder that even then seemed on the suspiciously small side and it meant danger any time I was out in the world for longer than half an hour. I spent 25 pounds a week on groceries and bought the same thing every time I went: two cans of kidney beans, a bag of lentils, a bag of rice, a bag of apples, celery and carrots and green peppers if they were on sale. Two cans of pasta sauce, a bag of noodles, oatmeal and sometimes a can or two of soup. Sugar. Milk. Strong black tea. Once a month I bought a bag of french fries[1] and parcelled the fries out so that they'd last four weeks. I lived across from a grocery store that sold day-old croissants and chocolate eclairs for 10p a piece; I'd walk over to the store with handfuls of pennies and pay for the pastries by counting the pence out on the counter.

The section of the city that I lived in, Portobello, was sleepy and sand-crusted and filled with young families with dogs. I ran on the beach in the mornings. It was beautiful—the kind of beauty that hurts the heart beating in your chest. When I looked at the horizon it hurt; when I returned to my apartment it hurt. In order to keep my apartment and pay my student loans back in Canada I worked full time as an admin assist-

[1] During a particularly *skint*[2] stretch of weeks in the summer of 2010, I ran completely out of money and ate until there was nothing left in my house except for a few french fries and half a can of powdered gravy; I ate the fries and gravy and went to bed at 6 p.m. because my stomach hurt too much when I was awake.

[2] *Skint*: Scottish vernacular, exaggerated: *fucking poor*.

ant at a charity that provided support services to disabled people, and then part time (Sundays) as an arts fundraiser at a church and part time (lunch hour) as a dogwalker and part time (contract, basically any other time I could do it) as a proofreader for ESL students at the university. I grew so thin my mother cried when I went home to visit at Christmas.

I wrote on Saturdays—that was the only day during the week that I could fit it in. I'd wake up at 7 and make myself tea and sit on my little couch with my little computer and write doggedly until 4 or 5 in the afternoon. I was working on the expanded draft of my master's thesis, which would eventually become *The Miracles of Ordinary Men*. One morning I made myself tea and balanced the cup on the arm of the couch while I sat down. The cup tilted and spilled, soaking my sweatshirt in boiling water that then got plastered to my skin. When I jumped up, sobbing, and tore my sweatshirt off, layers of skin came with it. My forearm bubbled up like melted cheese.

I want my mother, I remember thinking as I stumbled to the bathroom and tried to figure out what to do. *I want my mother and she's a whole ocean away*.

I had come to Scotland to get my master's degree in writing and then fall in love and get married. The master's degree materialized and the falling in love did not. (Which is to say: I did fall in love, first with a man and then with a woman, and nothing came of that either time.) The plan had been to emigrate to Scotland so that I could live and write all over Europe, but in 2008 the Conservative government came into power, and suddenly maintaining employment that qualified for visa purposes became extremely difficult. It didn't matter that I was working four different jobs—none of them were making me enough to allow me to stay beyond the end of 2010. It didn't seem to matter that I wanted to be a writer in Europe and was working harder than I'd ever worked before in order to bring this about. My romantic (and hard, and lonely, and mundane, and anxiety-riddled) time in Scotland was marching toward its inexorable end.

In the early fall of 2009 a friend back home in Canada published her first short-story collection. A mutual friend of ours bought me a copy and mailed it to me in Portobello; I pulled the book out of my mailbox and brought it down to the beach and cried to myself while sitting on the sand. Here it was: the dream. The book had gotten glowing reviews, all of which were well deserved. My book was still just a jumble of papers on my computer, a jumble of hours every Saturday where I dreamed and drank tea and hurt myself in ways that involved boiling water and questionable mug-placement decisions; not the stuff of literature at all. Did Writers work envelope-stuffing admin jobs? Did Writers walk dogs on their lunch hour? They did not, I told myself. I was an imposter. I

couldn't be the Writer that I really wanted to be until I'd lifted my way out of this. I was so tired and yet could see no way forward except that I somehow wasn't working hard *enough*. I needed to do more, write more, send things out more. I needed to survive on less sleep. I needed one more job, or perhaps two. I needed to go out more so I could meet more people. More, more, more. Always more.

Maybe, said the friend who had sent me the book in the mail, *maybe this just isn't meant to be. If you're working this hard and things still aren't coming together, maybe it's time to think about something else. Why is that so hard?*

It wasn't hard, I wanted to tell her. It was impossible. Impossible to consider a world in which I went home, in which I gave up. But also impossible to imagine a world where the jumble of words on my computer became the something that I wanted it to be.

'Maybe,' I whispered to myself, 'maybe this novel won't go anywhere.' Maybe I'd wasted all that money on a fancy degree from abroad. Maybe every choice I'd made up to that fall had been the wrong choice. Maybe I was never going to publish, or publish in the way that I wanted. Maybe I was never going to be the writer I wanted to be.

But what kind of writer did I want to be, anyway?

2.

The second time I knew that I was never going to be a writer was the summer of 2015, six years later. I'd moved home to Hamilton in 2010 and had even managed to finish and publish that unwieldy, messy novel I'd been working on in Scotland. I lived in an area of Hamilton called Locke Street Village, which I hadn't known about growing up, and which seemed to find a new way to surprise me every day. I lived five minutes from a bookstore and six minutes from my favourite restaurant in the city. I had a tiny attic apartment that was so hot in the summertime I sometimes got mild heatstroke just from being at home.

The hospital where I worked—another admin post, only this time in the Emergency Psychiatry ward, which made up for menial work with a great sheet of bulletproof glass through which I could see patients being brought into the ward in all manner of crises—sat a 10-minute walk away. I buzzed patients and doctors onto the unit and answered the phone and did paperwork for patients who were brought in by police. I alternated between two shifts: 7 to 3, or 3 to 11. After 7 p.m. the unit got quiet. Sometimes the nurses napped in extra rooms if the unit wasn't full. Some nights there was nothing to do. I read books and watched *Game of Thrones* on the computer and coloured a whole book of mandalas.

Sometimes—a lot of times—I also wrote at work. I was working on a sequel to *The Miracles of Ordinary Men*. The psychiatry residents were

fascinated by this and asked me about my books all of the time. *A writer!* they would say. *That's so cool. That's so cool that you're doing what you love.*

I wanted to say *yes* to them, but the truth was that most of the time I didn't love what I was doing. I hated the hospital, despite how fascinating the job could be and how much I liked the people. (Once a young man came onto the unit and sat in the waiting room with the police and barked at everyone who tried to talk to him for seven hours straight.) I was struggling with the disappointment of putting out a novel only to eventually watch it disappear—I didn't know, yet, that this is eventually what happens to all novels. I didn't know so many things. Once again I'd found myself in what felt like a dead-end job, only this one was built from a strange mix of boredom and security. I made more money at the hospital than I'd made anywhere else in my life up to that point, even working part time, and it felt foolish to contemplate a life made of anything else when my future could roll forward at the hospital until I was 65. Why bother writing, really?

I finished the sequel anyway and sent it to my publisher. They turned it down and refused—politely—to give the rights back to my first book so we could try and sell the two books somewhere else. I sat in my tiny attic apartment and absorbed the news as failure rang through my ears. I felt the months and years stretch out before me, empty of ideas.

All that work, I remember thinking. All that work, and nowhere for it to go.

What kind of writer had I wanted to be? Certainly not a writer of dead books. That had never really been part of the plan.

3.

Being a writer and *writing* are, in some ways, two different ideas. Certainly *being a writer* means you have to write. But in 2009 and 2015 *writing* meant less to me about the day-to-day work of it—although that was certainly part of things—than it did about what writing might one day become. Every minute, every grudging hour of careful words on my computer was useful only insofar as it might, one day, add up to something. My lonely writing Saturdays in Scotland meant something to me at the time because I was—so I thought—creating a novel that would go out into the world and Do Things. My trudging time spent writing at the hospital computer meant something in turn because I thought, having published one novel, that it would somehow be easier to publish Book Two.

Looking back on it now, I wonder how my outlook might have shifted had I been consumed not with the desire to publish, but simply with the desire to write just because. Those sunup-to-sundown writing days

in my little Scottish apartment were filled with joy when I look back on them now, not because they eventually led to a novel but because—imagine!—I lost myself in those words for hours at a time. The days at the hospital (yes, even those) have a faint tinge of rose nostalgia now because even in the midst of my misery over a job I wasn't crazy about, I was reaching for words in some way. Even if they weren't words that ended up in the shape I might have wanted them to be. Even if they ended up being words that never went anywhere at all. What happens when your failures, such as they are, lie not in failing to be the writer you want to be, but in failing to *play*?

In the fall of 2015, after the dead novel was put to rest, I found myself back in my little attic apartment, spooling stories out on my computer. They were strange stories that made almost no sense, worlds that held talking hyenas and half-human creatures and slippery endings that maybe—possibly, probably—wouldn't sell. I didn't care. I wanted these stories to find homes, but I wanted to get lost in them even more. I sat at my desk and looked at my little fridge, filled to the brim with food (no more lentils and rice, in 2015 or ever), and felt like I'd returned to a first truth about writing, something that I'd known about the practice even before I'd launched myself across the ocean and back, chasing the dream of a book that would always prove elusive. It was something about writing that mattered even more than making books. Something about the joy of getting lost, as opposed to the terror of feeling like you'd never find your way.

Those strange little stories have yet to go anywhere—even now, in 2021, six years after that sequel died. But another novel came out of what was dead, and from there, other stories. These days I try to remember what seems so obvious now as to be almost cliché: writing is nuts and bolts and word counts and bum-in-chair and all of those practical, sensible, necessary things.

But it is also magical; it is also about play. It means something more than the books that you may or may not publish. It transcends your terror of failure and holds you even on those days when you are crying on the beach. It is, in every sense of the term, a long game—one that isn't always beautiful, sure, but one that holds the spirit of joy down deep, even on those days when you can't see it. Books may come and books may go, but writing is forever.

These days my writing path is littered with dead things: dead books, dead stories, dead dreams. Ideas that come half-formed and never quite make it beyond that. In 2009 this felt like a failure to me; now I see a life filled with richness. The ideas are still there—even the ones that go nowhere inevitably contribute in some way to something that comes next. Is the worry of failure still constant? I don't think any of us would be writers if this fear didn't dog us on some level. But at the end of the day,

I still get to sit down and write, even if it's only—sometimes—on Saturdays. I still get to build this writing life for myself, even if it doesn't look like what I might have envisioned back in 2009, or 2015, or even (let's be real) on the gloomy days of 2021. There will be dreams that get to come true even as there will be dreams that won't. I will *always* get to write, even if that writing life is never quite as romantic or as dashing or as free of regular real-world boredom and obligation as I might have imagined it to be.

And really, at the end of it, what could be more magical than that?

Rob**Taylor**

ON SILENCE

Writing something
To leave behind
Is yet another kind of dream:
When I awake I know that
There will be no one to read it.

—Ikkyū (trans. John Stevens)

In May 2020 I wrote my last lyric poem. It was my first in over a year, coming to me unexpectedly during final edits for my fourth poetry collection, *Strangers*—a book I'd written slowly over the preceding decade, which maps my life from age 3 to my son's third birthday. Entitled 'Are your flies grass, like mine?' the poem riffed on Japanese haiku master Kobayashi Issa's: 'last time, I think,/I'll brush the flies/from my father's face' (trans. Robert Hass). Issa's poem is drawn from his *Journal of My Father's Last Days*, which documents Issa's attendance at his father's side immediately before and after his father's death. My father died when I was 11; my making sense of his legacy is the invisible (and, often, visible) thread running through all my books. With Issa's help, I too was putting my father to rest.

In addition to writing poetry, I am a frequent interviewer of poets. Around the time I wrote 'Are your flies grass, like mine?' I began asking my interview subjects a question I would have only a few years before considered insensitive: Do you think you'll ever stop writing? (A question easily misinterpreted as 'Will you shut up already?') When possible, I concealed my question behind a quote the interviewee had previously given on the subject, such as Steven Heighton's 'the natural medium of the achieved spirit is silence' (*Workbook: Memos & Dispatches on Writing*, ECW Press, 2011). My subterfuge, of course, went further: I was asking these poets a question I was avoiding asking of myself.

My father was born in 1915, my grandfather in 1871. I'll give you a moment to process that (my elementary school teachers rarely did, twice sending home my family tree projects with failing grades). When I was born, my father was almost 70 and my grandfather, who died in my father's first year, had been dead longer than most newborns' grandparents had been alive. So my paternal lineage reaches back like few others, and also barely at all. My father had no time to inherit the wisdom of his father, only enough to be held a while as an infant in soon-forgotten arms, and I had little more: When you're 11, a father's more myth than man. Many of us have felt the clarifying shock that comes with losing a

person of formative importance to us; how easy it is in those moments to separate the vital from the frivolous. But this clarity arrives misshapen when that formative person dies in your own formative years. The loss zooms you ahead too quickly, into a pre-teen midlife crisis you spend the rest of your years resolving. I sometimes envy friends who lose their parents in midlife, as one is supposed to. I envy them for the obvious reasons, but also because they got to spend their early years industriously accumulating comforts, convinced that in the end they would provide them just that. By the time they become disillusioned, they've all but paid off the mortgage. Though it took a decade to manifest, my father's death propelled me into the life of a poet: a minstrel wandering the master's fields, singing while there's still sun.

There were good reasons for my becoming a poet, reasons I stand by. Chiefly the opportunity for communion with my fellow human beings, which I both give (as a writer) and receive (as a reader). In this I am following the path my father, a United Church minister, lit for me. But he also left a shadow from which I haven't fully escaped: death and the false rescue of 'eternity,' in my case embodied in literature. Sappho's resilient fragments, Shakespeare's sonnets, Shelley's 'Ozymandias' (the poem, for now, doing for its author what it mocks in the statue). Singing and singing without sunset.

Though I deny it if asked, I want to last—for my children (to make legible our long, elusive lineage), but invariably more so for me. On a subconscious level a fear of death drives my art, as it does for so many (Miroslav Holub, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, described poetry as 'almost the instinct against death crystallized'). I've made a little machine of my life—this relentless writing of poems—which helps me avoid thinking about death at all, the machine too loudly whirring and clanking in its making of death-obsessed poems to notice the real thing's nearing.

My mother is still alive. Thirty years younger than my father, she's approaching his age at death. Her condition, though, is far different, diagnosed with dementia soon after the birth of my son. Her losing her language and memory as my son acquired his is the preoccupation of the closing section of *Strangers*, which includes 'Are your flies grass, like mine?' My own mind, too, feels in flux, as any parent of young children can attest. With the chronic sleep deprivation that comes with early parenthood, the mind slips more and more. Whole years disappear, an infant's first as much a mystery to parent as child. I believe my mind, unlike my mother's, will recover. I believe that in the near future I'll be able to hold together multiple abstract thoughts over extended periods of time, as I did in writing my lyric poems. What I am less sure of is whether I will want to write them.

When I wrote that last lyric poem a shift was already underway in my writing. Haiku, once a target of derision in my poems ('I can't help

but hate/haiku. They end abruptly/just as they're getting,' I wrote in my 2011 debut collection), had become my closest companion. With the exception of 'Are your flies grass, like mine?,' since the birth of my daughter in 2019 I've written haiku exclusively. I've found myself moving toward the form out of necessity: one scene I can hold in my unsteady mind, editing it as I spoon applesauce or push the stroller ('too cold to write down/the poem about clouds/keeps changing,' read one of my early efforts). But more than these practical restraints, I feel compelled toward haiku because it represents a narrowing—a simple moment stripped of the musical concerns that plumped my lyric poems. Looking back I realize that even those larger lyric poems were part of a longer narrowing away from my father's sermonizing and my own youthful rhetoric. Poems, with their line breaks and blank space and open-ended logic, bring us, as Matthew Zapruder puts it, 'up as close as possible to silence, absence, nothingness, so that we can start to feel what it means to live our lives so close to the abyss' (*Why Poetry?*, Ecco, 2017). Lorna Crozier, in one of my recent interviews, reinforced this idea: 'One of the reasons I love poetry is that it bows to silence.' And Alice Oswald, writing in *The Observer*, pressed it further: 'Poetry is only there to frame the silence.' Zapruder is wrong, of course, in saying that poetry brings us 'as close as possible' to silence. We can go further; we can leave poetry behind. I see now that each form I've practised has been a step toward dismantling the frame and letting silence spill everywhere.

In the titular essay of Tim Lilburn's *Going Home* (House of Anansi, 2008), he describes building a root cellar at a time when he was at his 'most confused with the land':

> I began the whole thing on little more than a whim late one afternoon when I started to dig into the south face of a low hill behind the house; I kept digging for three weeks, into the time of the earliest frosts, until I could no longer throw the dirt high enough to make it over my growing mounds.

I remember thinking little of this section of the essay when I first read it, shortly after the book's publication. Now, near Lilburn's age when he instinctually dug his root cellar, and equally confused, I can think of little else. 'I used to sleep in the buried house on hot nights through the following summer,' Lilburn writes. 'I was looking for dreams: it was a place to wait… I later saw it, after I'd done all the work, as some sort of listening post a distance out in the unknown terrain, the land that baffled me and the other world beside that world.' I sometimes think of my entire writing career, and especially these last two years, as early, earnest shovelling toward my root cellar, dark and quiet under the earth.

Why does it matter to me that there be a silent place at the end of my writing life, when the great silence will inevitably arrive as it does for all things, Shakespeare and Shelley and my father's sermons alike?

I think I am trying to rescue that 11-year-old boy who was so feverishly determined to last. To reach my hand back and place it on his shoulder amidst the sobbing. To let him finally breathe deep the damp air.

In my interviews, each time I quoted a poet back to themself, their answer was the same: No, I'm still writing despite what I said back then, and no, I don't see an end to my doing so any time soon ('In truth, I can't imagine reaching a point where I'm not still trying to figure things out verbally and/or talk myself through the harder nights'—Heighton). I suppose I should have expected this, as I was interviewing them about new books they'd just released. But also, time transforms us over and over into our opposites. You dismiss a form until you write nothing but it, an image until you can't escape it. You fall silent until you're ready, again, to speak. In some regards, my move to haiku is a persistence toward, not a resistance away from, my 11-year-old self's desire to last. It's me finding a way to keep blackening pages despite my temporary limitations. 'Are your flies grass, like mine?' will likely not be my last lyric poem, nor the last time I brush the flies from my father's face. But perhaps, here in early midlife, it's enough to press up against the vast silence and rest there a while, cradled like a child.

ARE YOUR FLIES GRASS, LIKE MINE?

Last time, I think,
I'll brush the flies
from my father's face.

—Kobayashi Issa

You show me a photo of your wedding party
and name nearly all but the since-divorced spouses,
yet still I wake at four a.m. and scrawl
Are your flies grass, like mine?,
though flies these days are photographs
papering the dying and the dead.

Dad is almost all photo now
and cassette recording, tapes stretched
and slurred and sputtering near-transparent:
sermons and, once, his voice guiding me
through an Early Reader—me insisting
the 'g' in 'laughed' is hard, him lagging
and lagging until I lagged, too.
Or was that voice you? Twenty-five years
I've had you carry him inside.

Mom, I'm sick with flies and grass
and photographs. When I gasp at four a.m.
I need you out there gasping, too—
the name of yet another great aunt
rescued, written down,
to be recited (finger dusting face)
to your lagging son this afternoon.

Published in Strangers *(Biblioasis, 2021).*

Brandon**Wint**

DIVINE ANIMAL: WRITING THROUGH THE BODY & TOWARD HEALING

Every day is a new prayer I touch
and lift gently as an injured bird
into the physics
of my desires

One evening in the earliest days of autumn 2021 I found myself alone in my modest apartment, trying to stave off the threat of loneliness as the night grew dark and quiet around me. Rather than throw myself into writing, as I sometimes do when I feel the brooding quietude of loneliness or self-alienation growing over me, that night I decided to listen to a poetry podcast. It was a convenient half measure—something that would allow me to assume the thoughtful posture of a writer without fully committing to the attentiveness that poetry writing requires. The podcast I stumbled upon was *Between the Covers*, a conversation between host David Naimon and celebrated Iranian-American poet Kaveh Akbar, about, among other things, Akbar's recently released book *Pilgrim Bell*. To my humble, still-evolving reading of the collection, *Pilgrim Bell* is a book wherein its author is experimenting with the limits and modalities of the poetic voice in its ability to reckon with the enormity of God, both as a concept and as a spiritual force. It is fitting, then, that during the conversation, Kaveh Akbar spoke of poetry as a 'spiritual technology,' wherein one might test the elasticity and efficacy of language in adopting the postures of awe, supplication, reverence, questioning, gratitude or incoherence that are sometimes associated with the task of writing into a proximity with the divine. The phrase struck me as perfect, insofar as the word 'technology' implies, for me, a continuum, a building upon the modes of previous generations to create something of refined and specific usefulness. Poetry, as much as anything I can think of, is a lifeforce and a tool that implicates itself into a generations-long conversation, as humans attempt to reconcile the exquisite tension between that which we have the capacity to apprehend by feeling, and that which we have the ability to express, especially through language. With this tension in mind, it is easy for me to understand why poetry might be a technology particularly attuned to the expansiveness and mystique of the spiritual, or divine, or intangible realms. There will always be, from a human perspective, something inexpressible about such realms—something unknowable, even while we are naturally impelled to want to

know, to wonder, to question. Poetry is, in my understanding, one of the most robust allies ever granted to humankind in our quest to find satisfactory language for the intangible. For many years now, and while claiming no specific religious affinity, I have thought of poetry in these terms: a resilient spiritual technology that helps me create links between embodied knowing and disembodied knowing—that which I can sense as surely as the contours of an apple, warm in my hand, and that which I can sense through the filters of emotional, spiritual, subconscious intelligence—still known, but less tangible than a fruit in my palm.

Poetry has been the way that I create integrity between the disparate ways it is possible to know or discover something. Poetry, like prayer, helps me transform feeling into insight.

What, then, am I praying for? What feelings am I trying to transform, and how?

I think often, both inside and outside of my writing, of my complicated relationship to my body. Since first being handed the term in 2010 as an undergraduate student at Carleton University, I have been trying to 'write through the body.' Writing through the body, as I have grown to understand and apply it, holds that one of the surest ways to create the conditions for genuine poetic insight is to explore the potential of the senses. If, as a poet, I am willing to filter both memory and imagination through the mediators of touch, taste, sound, smell and sight, I have a chance to create poetry that is visceral, grounded and rich with personal meaning. As importantly, my willingness to use my spectrum of senses as a tool for meaning-making invites readers and listeners to understand my poetry through their own bodies. Writing in a way that prioritizes physicality creates the possibility for intimate, embodied insights to be rendered through language. This, for me, is what keeps poetry alive, gives it blood, bone, muscle, texture, water and spit.

As my relationship to the notion and practice of writing through the body has deepened over the years, it has become ever more necessary to truly feel the weight of the phrase, to lean the full heft of my body, my psyche, my desires into the implications of 'writing through the body' and assess whether it still holds up. What I really mean is: I am a 33-year-old Black man with cerebral palsy. What does it mean to write through a body so riven with discomforts, aches, uncommon limitations, a body so equally marked by racism and ableism. My body, both in my writing and otherwise, calls out for healing. It begs to be nurtured, tries to wrap itself around the inconsistent calculus of tenderness, care. My body whimpers, bellows, occasionally screams like the tired animal it is, I am. Poetry testifies to all of this. Where it has been otherwise difficult for me to muster tenderness or self-care with respect to my body, I am able to articulate in poems what the pathways to healing look and feel like. If poetry is the primary means by which I attempt to close the gap

between my subconscious desires and my embodied knowledge of how to live, the name of the gap itself might be healing.

In my own life, I can think of no more contentious, bewildering entanglement between the tangible and intangible, the embodied and the spirited, than what I call healing. I might go as far as to list 'healing' or 'The Healer' as among the names of God. The poems I write are, therefore, truly a spiritual technology in my uncertain hands; they call out for God, and in their calling, mark me worthy of the deepest mercy, the most exquisite and divine iterations of love.

I untether you, body,
from museum of race,
unchain you
from treadmill of capital,
release you now
into fields of marigold,
the archways of sunflowers, bending.
Body. Tired animal,
I fill your mouth with water,
blue silk you

in spirals of wind.

I write through my body because it is an effective tool, yes. But to speak of my physical relationship to poetry as merely the outcome of good pedagogy would be to oversimplify, to lie. I write through my body because it is my most reliable way to turn my body into a prayer. It is the best language I can muster for brokering conversation between my human condition and my spiritual condition. Of course, the poems are imperfect. Of course, the years have piled onto my flesh with some harshness. I cannot always align my limbs to the demands of divine exercise, but at their best the poems are medicine. They convince me that healing is possible, and they are the natural technology I offer whenever I am preparing myself to say things I hope God, or the angels, or the ancestors can hear.

Poem excerpts from Divine Animal *(Write Bloody North, 2020).*

Rita**Bouvier**

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

dedicated to all who work so hard to remind us that 'water is life'

nipi surrounds our island home.
in my grandfather's hands
it turns into steam
bending the planking for the hull
of the coveted ribbed canvas-wrapped canoe.

it is dew at dawn
on blades of grass on a spider's web
jewel-like
droplets of condensed water vapour
clinging their way back to the earth.

it is waves crashing against the rocky shoreline
the hand of *the great mystery* (for some God)
reaching in and then out again
power to offer life
or death.

it is dark blueberry clouds
full ripe and ready to burst
sweeping the residue of humus
into the surrounding ponds and lake—
abundance in a never-ending cycle of life.

on an early autumn day
setting out to check on the nets
it is mist rising off the lake
slowly turning into clouds
to bring rain another day.

in pipon it is icicles forming
vertically poised on branches of trees
when ice and snow
conspire
with the sun.

it is the sweet water
of birch in spring
in a cauldron over a hot fire
turning into syrupy magic
before your very eyes.

it is a rupturing a rite of passage
as baptismal ceremony a cry
when we are born
into this place this land
this one life.

ODE TO THE JACK PINE

o gangly lean and frugal one
they say you are our greatest defence
against climate change
our atmosphere overloaded
from our excesses—you swallow
oxygenate make whole again.

they say you are the song
a silent infrasound
the drum
the secret of our existence.
ancient you have more DNA
than a human you are
a powerhouse of nature.

they say you are medicinal aerosol
a rich biochemical molecular picnic
a tree is not just a tree
you are a life-giving green machine.
as a friend might lichen love you
I am in awe of you.

Michael**Janairo**

MIANONG

The boy slips from the house, past restless chickens, and swims
into Manila bay, the morning sun a red glow on the horizon

He counts arm-lifts, flutter-kicks, and breaths, simple additions,
another steady rhythm through rise and fall of the sea's slow swells

He keeps at bay his doubts about algebra, English grammar, American
history, and chores to come: hunting snakes, transferring milkfish,

and the goodness of his soul, his true self, the priest had said,
as his body grows on his native land occupied by Americans

Still whelmed by figures, the fish-like boy skims the sea's surface,
muscles burning; he's buoyed and strengthened by the depths

CAPTURE OF THE KAWAG-KAWAG

Come spring, the season's first kawag-kawag
gather along vast shoals and advance
with the flood tide, slender fingerlings,
black eyes leading see-through skin,

the flesh assuming the foamy green and tan
of churning seas of crystalline sand
of the fine black mesh of sinamay nets
as the creatures are caught swimming against

the current, teeming with strength and agility.
The fishermen at their posts haul the captured masses
and pour streams of slick life into earthen jars
—the wild kawag-kawag translated into milkfish fry.

Andrew**Wei**

SHRINE

Only after the next visitor
has taken my place

will I wonder to whom,
exactly, I am praying:

not these gods, who are
not my gods, nor the stone

fox spirits who flank
my offering, staring

clear-eyed into the next
world. I am

filled with questions
but others are waiting, so I clap

twice into the air,
my thoughts falling

into my hands,
and then I bow,

the lines on my palms
pressed tightly together.

LONGING

Hold it gently. Gently

like you hold a dream
in the long blue
silence before
daybreak,

gently the way you hold
your own pale warmth
while surfacing

between sleep
and sleep.

And when the sky
bursts into light

and everything is ending
or beginning, hold it

the same quiet way
as an old landscape
you loved, and remember

how the still water,
before dawn, brimmed
with the ancient light
of stars.

Yes, like that. Pour
the world softly in,
and let it fill you—

the seas within you
rising, and rising,

the emptiness, too, lifting.

Brian**Henderson**

#SPEECHLESS

no hummingbird at the feeder since equinox
but philosophy begins said Wittgenstein
when language goes on holiday
even at summer's end
as the time curve carves away from you
the words are waving goodbye
zipping past you like a hail of darts
and one of them strikes a human feeling directly
and one of them stops to look you in the face
and then they're gone
and you're speechless

#LOBELIA CARDINALIS

unblessed they nonetheless bloom in the wetlands beyond sectarian strife

they take up the discarded feathers of cardinals and transform them
into inflorescence
which is why you seldom find the feathers

in a language with its teeth on fire and intermittent
birthdays of unequally spelled names
they recite their heart sutras

the intricate shutters of their blood cameras
open and close on us
as we walk through the bog and on
the deer who pass and the deer flies
bees dragonflies garter snakes porcupines elm
aspen ash maple cedar song sparrows
redwings waxwings cattail lady's slipper and

at night they turn the record of these various passages into scores

for the small ringing oblivion of tree frog orchestras

#SO THIS IS WHAT IT WAS LIKE

having a piece of the night draped
across his body
her breast a moon against his left shoulder

when she got up to pee he could hear the clock
a hand-wound type that after a few days
of concentrating on its task
loses focus and begins thinking about other things
perhaps the fugue of souls

when he woke it was half past the early light
washing out any stars and so still in the room
he could hear the slightest movement an eye
opening or the dreamed deciding not to waken the dreamer

P.C.**Vandall**

POSTCARD FROM THE WIND

He did not hear the plane take off or see
the islands rise up like a pod of whales.
He was a prairie man, loved big skies
and rolling grasslands. He never saw much

point in going farther. He dreamed with eyes
wide open, could see what was coming
a million miles away, could smell snow
before it flanked the dusty ground. He spoke

the language of wind, knew when it howled
incantations at his door a dry spell
was a coming. What he did not see
on that clear day was the wind heading west

for winter, drawing distance between them
like fence posts. He wiped the sweat from his brow,
dusted off his leathery hands and filled
the emptiness with barley, corn and rye.

He spoke as if she couldn't stay away,
that after sowing her oats she'd be back
like a horse drawn to water, its tail
swishing the hot dust and flies away.

Patrick**Grace**

THE FIRST

Simple, really, heralding the first
day of summer vacation in the early
hours, cartoons on mute,
the overhead vacuum hum

collecting our lost pieces,
a loud sensation down
the street like construction
or a blur of men punching

holes in the other.
Either way something built
and torn apart again.
My low window is a flood

risk in bad rainfall. Double-
pane glass on order.
The man next door
has a face wet with age—

he dries off and does
to himself the hurt
that then I do
to myself too. Watching him

I know the word
for what I am:
Power Ranger,
naked troll

lost in the heating vent,
but I don't say it
when I kneel
next to the bed

and think of him,
the lights I touch.

TRAFFIC LIGHT

I remember the night my brother came home
dragging a stolen traffic light like a body. Late fall
and my legs dangled out the bedroom window,
heavy rain sailing down, the sound like pennies
on the tin roof below. He'd snuck out again,
I knew not by light but by silence.
Those days he memorized monologues
in his room and spoke them to the wall, the campfire
scene from *The Revenant*, finding God in a squirrel.
I tried the book but gave up, as often as we did
in that house. Our lives yielded to the yellow,
Mom falling asleep before dark under the rhododendrons.
The familiar: the back gate and its broken wheel,
the trample of my brother's boots, cigarette in his lips,
that singular burning eye. Sweet clove smoke.
He pulled the light behind him one-handed,
the overgrown grass flattening under its weight.
I waited for the back door, the inevitable grunt.
This one weighed heavy on him for years
and for years after he never gave up
where he found it, three lights burning
across his walls in blinks of stop, go, wait.

BONES

Who'd the bones
belong to, someone before
raccoon swooned skull
to protect its slippery
kits, me filming all this—

hazy sky, sun high, low
battery Hitachi in hideout
#5, my newest so I knew
it less than #3, say, the
shuttered carport but one loose
plank, potter wasps
humming me to sleep, say,
open your mouth, say,
the water runs a river
wider than my brother
's search party, gallivanting
down by the community creek

dear swift waxwing watching
me swallow broad beans
against the neighbour's fence,
my hairy guilt
is all-you-can-eat
in the shadow of the mountain
ash tree, me filming all this—

raccoon nesting her nursery,
my mother rhyming clumsy
on the front porch,
tradition, say, the chain
for my brother to follow,
swept into the left, the late air

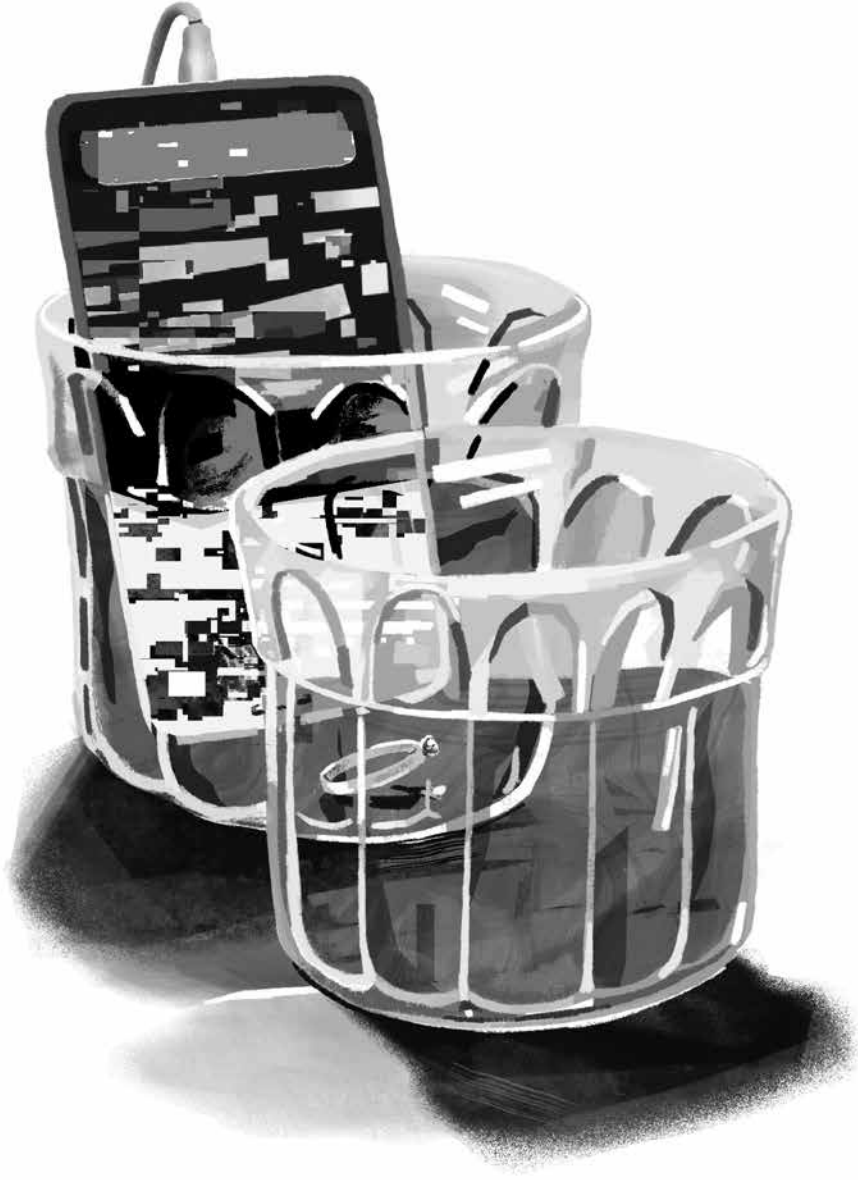
James**Dunnigan**

WORDS IN AUGUST

for Dominique Lampron-Thibault

Under the ash trees of Darling Street
late sitting on his balcony my friend
and I discussed over a Grolsch or
five the breakup we had learned about
by text an hour earlier: a friend
who was leaving for Princeton,
his girlfriend he'd met going out
one night like this, with whom
he'd been three years. It dawned
on me, as dusk quick-falling hushed
the cicadas: I hadn't written back.
I should. I would, I said to my friend
smoking beside me in his broken chair,
if I could find the words. Between us
we debated which was worse:
a silence in a lack of words
or silence in a word not listened to.
An open-windowed van cut through
the alley where beneath us
in the breathing weeds
a bird sat on a lost saw singing,
it seemed to us, two verses
from *Un Canadien Errant*.
'Silence' he said to me in French,
whirling his hand over the ashtray's ring,
'you think that it exists?'
When it got dark we came back in,
emptied our bottles, and those
we'd emptied already, into the sink
and laid them beside each other
beside the fridge. I thought of the sea
I hadn't seen since I was twelve,
and where he'd gone last year
while I remained, here with a girlfriend
who left me, later, for a friend.
I thought of her: two years ago,
standing beside me by a snow machine,
she saying 'Well,' it being cold,

‘do we go back?’ then walking back
under its arc, hearing it fill the night
with ice; the winter turning Earth’s long face
in speechless radiance to the stars.



James**Warner**

OLD SCHOOL

Gabled entryways and red brick walls,
the local idiom of rectitude:
it suited the Sisters, who ruled the creaky halls
and humid classrooms. Often I'll pass and note
the building's latter air of desuetude,
remembering that theatre of rote.

Not just the make of scribbler, width of rule,
grade of pencil, they taught the very care
of pencils, how they must be sharpened. School,
again, September. Penned in nervous rows,
hands folded, we knew ourselves as small. *Beware
an enterprise that requires new clothes.*

Though glad to have an approbative star
affixed to our work, it neither armed us nor
dispelled our doubt. More typical by far
was when we broke off from some basal task
to watch as, over the sport field, snow tore
in funnelling gloom. Day-dreaming, at a desk.

The modular weeks, homogenous as porridge,
into the past. The plaster statue of Jesus,
into the past. (Consigned to basement storage,
long since, with crates of Christmas ornaments,
blackboard erasers, a chalk cliff in pieces,
and trophies for intramural tournaments.)

Thawed, the field each spring was blue dog turds
and new grass shoots and trash, a rude event,
remedial to all those droning words
and repetition of numbers. And to our dim
awareness of things a glimpse of school's intent—
its grave mobilization against whim.

Old school, enjoining standards. Elemental,
compulsory. Its shadow slides at dusk
to the field's embankment walls and hedges, like Grendel
from the mead hall. Years on, as teens, derog-
atively of the darkened place, we cussed
and threw our bottles there, unaimed through the fog....

And the nuns sighed: retired, into prayer.

DAME PHILOSOPHY

Anicius Boethius wrote *De consolatione*
in prison, charged with conspiracy.
It's thought that he was executed not long after,
in Pavia, place of his exile,
circa 524 CE.

As for the book, surely worth reading—
esteemed 'The Golden Volume' for centuries.
But then, who has the time?
Last night again trying to get through it
I fell asleep on the couch.

Deep, in the badly lit but great near-after,
taking shape, her form
emerging from the cursive gloom
as from eternity's cabinet...
it was she, to the life, unchanged.

I woke, partly, in a crowd
of mute people packed into a dirigible
flying past a corner of the moon.
Solemnly deploying instruments
and occupied at monitors and charts,

all there seemed intent
on some far threshold. While astern
the Earth veered slowly away
shrinking to the size of a robin's egg,
a marble. Gazing after it

with the ache one knows running
through an airport as the last flight departs,
I reached out. The dream broke.
And there I was, in the dead of night,
nodding over *De consolatione*.

Ben**Robinson**

JAMES

In the night, I carry boiling pots of water up the stairs
steam rolling off the surface
fog off a dark lake

Slowly I pour them into an inflatable pool
in the bedroom, hoping to coax you
into this world with warm water

All the things in between your mother
and me: a floral shower curtain, the rail of
a hospital bed, you just below the surface
of every embrace

I sit alone in the empty Tim Hortons while they give
the epidural—three employees and me and an in-house feature
where six women cycle across the country
coffee cups nestled in their water bottle holders

Outside the hospital walls, the wind whips the lake
into a frenzy, waves gather and disperse
When you arrive, there will be rivulets

of dried blood in your hair
a bracelet around your wrist
with your sex and mother's name

Before we can take you home, we must sign a form
ensuring you are indeed our child—a holdover from when
(your grandmother tells me) newborns were kept

in the nursery overnight, wheeled out on carts
a dozen at a time in the morning, calm slowly descending over
the ward as they returned to their mothers

All that holds you to the world today
is a government-issued piece of paper
that I print your name on with a blue ballpoint pen

A name that only becomes real as I watch it sit
in the mouths of others—as though by consensus
we might bring you into being


FREE
LIBR

ADVANCE POLLS

a bit of sunshine and
all the men are out fussing
with their trucks

deadheads in the gardens
more Halloween decorations
than election signs

plastic body parts dangle from front porches
pumpkins—faceless at Thanksgiving
smashed in by month's end

two boys practise layups
put the orange ball through the orange hoop
again and again

pieces of plywood along the fence in the park
where the children paint their concerns: *save the bees*
no littering don't play by the trains

a sign lying in the grass says *We Serve Kosher Only*
this week someone defaced the synagogue
with sidewalk chalk

a woman walking a squirrel-sized dog
feeds white bread
to a squirrel

someone wrote *LIES*
on the newspaper vending machine
they don't bother filling it anymore

ON THE OTHER SIDE / IT DIDN'T SAY NOTHING

At the Goderich Beach a sign faces
in toward the road that reads
ANIMALS PROHIBITED

Tonight a dozen geese float at the edge
where the water meets the land
honking songs of protest

My father-in-law points across the channel
to The World's Largest Underground Salt Mine™
at the mouth of the Maitland River,

Tells us about the regional shortage last year
because of a twelve-week strike at the mine,
how the company would only sell to wholesalers

So the local snow-removal crews had to wait
four to six weeks for shipments from Egypt,
make do with sand in the meantime

On the boardwalk, you can still see the spots
the lake rose up in the spring, flipping the sod onto its back,
tossing rocks up into the parking lot where

An elderly couple sits in their van, watching the sunset
eating fish and chips from the food truck
windows lowered just enough to let the breeze in

Robert**Hogg**

DEATH IS

a shift of
the centre

into darkness
a new point

of light
become real

A SINGLE MOMENT

Why shouldn't
I

for a single
moment

enjoy
the sweet

soft
smell

of my
newly

washed

Mike**Madill**

SIX FEET UP

I sold your car hoist today, watched it
trundle out of here strapped to a hay wagon,
silhouette of its four corner posts jutting up
into the late afternoon haze like rib bones.
I still see you working the levers, ever on guard
for glitches. Believe me when I say
it's gone to a good home.

Come winter, the new owner's Model A
will be warm and dry and six feet up
in a Quonset hut—all the passions
you should've lived longer.
You logged a lot of miles
in the early days, installing
TV transmitter towers from Inuvik to
Antigonish, left with little time
to help raise a couple of sons who turned out
less like you than maybe you'd hoped.

I've chosen words, arranging the gears and
gizmos of every de facto tear-down
and rebuild in my head. And yet, words, too,
don't always mesh, like the stripped teeth
of gears. I approach the real you, as though
laying down paving stones, page by page:
from the mother you couldn't tell no,
to the son you were afraid to
unabashedly embrace.

IN PENCIL

Long after midnight, I picked my way
through Saturday's crossword, reciting
every clue like a poem. You could've
helped me spell out the obscurities
but the room with its terrazzo floor
was too empty.

17-Across: Where do elephants
go to die? Four letters. *Away*. Or
maybe *Home*. *Gone* is too much, too
profane. All I could do was watch your life
unmooring. The final insult:
disposable cloaks of gowns and gloves,
last touch denied.

1-Down. Still no clue.
68-Across:
I'd like to change *Destiny* to
Forever, another seven-
letter word.

Lingering has weakness to it,
a submission that wasn't your style.
Instead, you made a swift job of it,
eluding (6-Down) the code blue.
Technique is found in your follow-through,
you used to say. They managed to restart
your heart, but I suspect you were
already thick in the swim of
babble.


41
42
48
36
45
21
58
34
59
60
62
55
52
39
35

DEEP LIGHT

Why couldn't it have rained
the day you died, instead of
the studded strap of sunlight?
The rotting of one more rainbow
grows rank, no one left
to share the secrets of sons with.
You should've sent me rain
enough to be worthy of Noah,
worthy of you.
Who would've thought
the intricacies of drowning
could gather light that deep?
Even more flickering down
through pine boughs, spilling
into the skylight. Front-room
afternoons heating up
without the turn of a page.
No clouds to follow, to find my way
back to a surface I no longer trust.
Is there a way back?
The weight of other people's dawns
above me, your blinding light
the searing, electric stare
of jury and judge.

Jay**Ritchie**

WITHIN THE PARK GROUPS ARE FORMING

You sit with a translator
on a bench across from a fountain.

There is so much you want to say.

Intervals between the water speak
of how your sacrifices have made
a possible future instantly
fade.

Naming what is there without obscuring what is not
is the fundamental challenge of translation,
the translator says.

The fountain honours French murderers
from the 17th century.
Its indifferent stone acquires a politic
vacated only by destruction.

Reappropriation, the translator suggests.

Down in the quarry, the ceremony
has already started.

WATER MAKES ITS HOME IN THE ROCK

One sound at a time.

Industry retreats to the interior.

There.

The scaffolding used for extraction stands, still,
a remainder.

Your work is the image of work, a working image.

The photographer
quotes Barthes to the flower arrangements.
This-will-be & this-has-been.

White wine in the afternoon.

The air textured like fabric, a warp
in the pattern of lack.

AT THE END OF THE DOCK

The late lights of City B
obscured by fog.

An intermittent beeping floats across the water.

A barge of dying smoke alarms
drifts toward the transfer station.

Disoriented, the kingfishers launch themselves
against the glass panes
of the new conservatory.

Underwater, the trout breathe laced air.

Here you stand on someone else's horizon,
one point in a projection
of what is to come.

THE IMAGE OF A SWAN GLIDES OUT OF THE REEDS

You know in French a swan
is *cygne*, homophonous with *signe*, a sign.
The sign's beak points inland.

Sharp, then soft, the grass thins, hisses.

Events once isolated from one another in time
reveal themselves as connected,
your loss in fact a sedulous agent
that has risen in the distance
in the form of an abandoned textile mill.

Inside, a temple to the image.

Kieran**Egan**

POINTS OF THE COMPASS

Measles, I think it was, ensured I missed
Sister Veronica's classes on Points of the Compass.
I later grasped the idea from her proud mnemonic
as she pointed to the electric light switch
and said to the dimmer of the Dutton twins,
'E is for electricity and east;
the east is over there.'
More than seventy years later
I still need a moment to sort east from west,
orienting myself by that now demolished classroom.

As Sister Veronica pointed to the electric east
I noticed mostly the clear pink skin
of her film-star features, gleaming softly with grace
under the white strip of her wimple.
Her brief frown, moment of impatience,
relaxed into her all-sweet-accord smile,
glittering eyes, divinely perfect teeth.
My sense of east and west tangled in the confusions
of my first and purest love,
setting all my compasses awry.

SOUND MIND

I was once of sound mind
trailing a catcher's mitt
like a basket of multicoloured hopes
at ease in the trees and fields at the edge of town;

I was once of sounder mind
sliding electric fingers
tenderly down her naked arm
to rest in the nest of her welcoming hand;

doubts about my soundness of mind
rising in shocked whispers
like hailstones skittering across the prairie,
marrying so young among my unready friends;

I might not have been of sound mind
buying the neglected farm,
an adventurous gamble, fluttering hearts
as my wife for life hugged my anxious arm;

soundness of mind still seemed at risk
fighting tractors, aligning fence posts,
plant, cultivate, harvest with battered hands,
the bedrock of new stock in the sagging old barn;

but who can remain of unsound mind
raising a flock of children,
like birds, wildlings on a reviving farm,
our nest blessed with their musical babel;

I no longer care if I am of sound mind,
leaning on my oak ridging hoe,
hearing a thrush, a grandchild's laughter,
in a son's crisply furrowed field etched to the high woodlands.

Alex**Jennings**

NOTES FROM OLD CARTHAGE

1.

We cracked the pitcher together
and watched the juice run out
to spoil and stink on the sidewalk.

A growling fender swallows the road
as diatoms transform the water.
A galaxy of teeth.

The night was not time, but space,
every fruit unspooling, unpeeled.
A coming apart, a going in and in.

You do this to yourself.

2.

In memory, I'm the drunk.
Lurching, clumsy, all left feet and thumbs
I could barely type, but you loved
that I could remember ahead.

Next time, I'll say: *You deserve more.*
And you'll fret with your fingers,
turn your eyes up, chuckle.
Killer bees.

Put the crayons away.

3.

Locks remember lost keys.
Hidden in drawers somewhere, unused.
I could swim in mine
like Scrooge McDuck.

Alongside me, blind swimmers race
toward an alien sun. Irises open and close.
Each of them, the only one.

4.

Foreign lands and sunny climes, then
cracked and broken earth.

The villa was right here yesterday
sighing over the wine-dark sea.

You should leave here for school
before disease steals my limbs.

Is pain still pain if you were born to it?

5.

Bite my lips or lick my inner ear.
Stretch marks are tiger stripes are fault lines
spilling over.

An alphabet of hatred. The Esperanto of
denied gratification. Of phantom emissions.
Volumes added to the campfire.

You still lie beside me
writing like a salted snail.

You're welcome.

FRICATIVE

Last night I dreamed we were lovers but
Only as a last resort. We drove
Down Black Lake in your mother's
Car and *Pull over*, you said. And you
Climbed out to feed the ducks.

The sky and the lake met in that way where
One is the other and the other is the one. And you
Squared your hips. My reflection disappeared from your
Eyes and you stared over my shoulder at something
Taller—much taller than me.

SIR

Your mouth cheapens
Your speech. Makes it pretty
When you want it bare.

Please please be calm.
You're making a scene.
You've spilled your drink.

[*Here are stories of the sea.*
Lies about the sea.
Stolen stories I have heard.]

Your eyes are clean.
You crouch behind them.
Gaps in you like broken stairs.

Don't leave for work.
Stay here mothered
in my dime-store pillow.

Ryan**Eavis**

ON A NORTHBOUND TRAIN TO DUBLIN

Narrowly escaping
being comfortable
only weeks ago,
already again
I am breathing deeply
with bright eyes recognizing only
how the sunrise ignites

and shimmering
falls morning into the Irish green
along the River Slaney
where an old stronghold is falling
clocklessly into stones again.
Every tree with their arms thrown up in fractals
chained earthbound by ivy
in their routine,
and beneath horses graze lazily
along the same path
that the same water
calls them back.

I feel the call
sometimes;
steps I've taken but left to overgrow;
that wordless cry of roots left starving,
that can't understand the need
to fly.

But that the horse's path is carved
for pattern's sake
or that trees become stuck
where they grow
I am the swan falling star-like
into the blue river
where everything sparkles
for an undefined second.

Levi**Masuli**

LOUD NEIGHBOUR IN AN APARTMENT BUILDING

Head between pillows, seeking refuge
From songs sung like squawking seabirds
        Bass that makes glass shiver

It's the third party this week
And it's likely to go on until they
Adjourn like stirred mud crabs by daylight
My yawns snuffed, mildly irked
I stir in my cot for an angry sleep

But ire, it seems, robs rest more fiercely than bother
So I rose in resignation, opened my windows
Invited you in

Then, a rush, this thick of sound
Its body like cheap wine that fills me
With light as surf-quartz, swaying seas
Of Eighties kitsch. And, just like that
Peace, and its deeper blue shades

One day, all these, too
Shall wilt into dune
Of fossiled songs and silt
Where I, too, beached-heart
Will gasp for fistfuls of the past
Or tufts from shabby tunes
I shall spin them into lullabies
I shall spin them into glyphs
A handspan above the sand

So indulge, loud neighbour
Fevered and present
Let no wall or law
Contain your
Moment-channelling

Amirah**AlWassif**

THE SHUT UP RULES

My mother painted my flesh with clay
a dirty one
her eye was a lake of tears
her hands were shaken
my soul was angry
my wishes were hungry, but
I kept silent.
My mother tied my legs against the wall
her whispers raised suddenly
she started cutting my hair
the horror knocked on our door, but
I kept silent.
My people categorized the citizens
if you are a male, you will live
if you are a female
be ready to be buried
my people came to us
gathered around our house
my mother cried and shouted, but
I kept silent.
My mother saved my life
she didn't bury me
she gave me a boy's name
she dressed me in boy's clothes
and sent me to a camp far away
for selling water
for making a living
and I kept silent.

JosephA.**Dandurand**

THE GREATEST FEAST ON EARTH (EXCERPT)

Once every century a lone Sasquatch stands on the tallest mountain and he yells as loud as he can and every Sasquatch in the world hears him and they begin their journey to that part of the Earth.

When he is finished calling everyone the lone Sasquatch lights a great fire that can be seen for miles and all the Sasquatches come and join him by the fire. They have all brought food for the gathering and soon everyone is feasting on all the foods from all over the world.

Then they all sit around the fire and there are about a thousand Sasquatches who have come to listen to the words of the lone Sasquatch who has come to tell them about a great flood that is coming and that all the Sasquatches should prepare for the great flood. Most believe his words, but there are some who think he is mistaken and they do not believe there will be a great flood.

After the lone Sasquatch has spoken everyone stands and gives him a gift from where they come from. Some give blankets and others give fish and some even give him wood for his fire.

After the winter ends and the snow begins to melt, the river begins to rise and rise and soon comes over the edge and most of the world is now flooded and the lone Sasquatch leaves his mountain as it too goes under water and the Sasquatch gets into a canoe given to him as a gift and he paddles down river and out to the ocean which has also risen beyond the shores and up to the mountains and all of the Earth is now under water.

The ocean is filled with Sasquatches who had built canoes for the flood after they had been warned by the lone Sasquatch. Together they all paddle and make their way back upriver as the river begins to fall and all the land again appears. They land their canoes and they light a great fire and they gather foods and they have a feast.

Their numbers are now half of what they used to be because some of the Sasquatches did not listen to the words left for them at the last gathering.

When the feast is over the lone Sasquatch stands and warns them of a great fire that will one day come and that they must be ready and so everyone begins to make giant cedar baskets and fills them with water for the great fire.

When they are done they all go back to their place on Earth and the lone Sasquatch goes to his mountain and there he sits and watches over the Earth as in the distance a small fire begins in an old dry forest.

Rebecca**Păpucaru**

UNBECOMING

One August night in 1943, Irene Kipper sat Indian-style on her basement floor and watched a moving image of her only child playing with matches. The eight-minute filmstrip was part of a series illustrating the dangers of mothers leaving children to their own devices, a peril Irene believed to be greatly exaggerated. For starters, there were no open gasoline canisters lying around her home.

The film ended with little Muriel swaddled in bandages with only her eyes visible. They darted around so frantically that Irene snorted with laughter.

'I'm sorry it's not realistic enough for you,' Gordon Kipper said, stopping the projector. 'We filmed in a real hospital.'

'It's plenty realistic. But I don't want her missing school. She's starting first grade soon.'

'She won't miss a day,' Gordie said, turning on the lights.

Irene stretched out her legs, tanned from afternoons lying on a towel in her backyard. They gleamed brown against the white rug.

'I'll take her to the park more often,' she said, stubbing out her cigarette in the crystal ashtray on the floor. 'I don't want her thinking life is a movie set. And I don't want her doing this forever. A year or two, that's it. It'll go straight to her head.'

Irene stood up, brushing stray ash from the front of her gabardine shorts. 'She's definitely got the looks for it,' she said. 'If not the chops.'

'It's more believable if she's not Ethel Barrymore,' Gordie said, packing up his reels. 'But who knows? It's her first film.'

'Too bad you couldn't have used her in *Your Feet Are for Life*.'

Two years ago the women's club at Holy Blossom had screened a film demonstrating the correct way to clean one's home for Passover, with Heppelwhite-brand matzo front and centre in every scene. Gordie was still slaving away as a junior executive, so Irene had suggested he make a short film about foot hygiene, one that would showcase his company's new line of orthopaedic shoes. She'd hoped this show of initiative might lead to a raise for Gordie, enough for a bigger house far from her mother-in-law, and tropical vacations. Instead, an old college friend introduced Gordie to a New York publisher of social hygiene textbooks. The company needed filmstrips for their parenting guide, which Irene soon dubbed the 'Guide for the Maternally Perplexed.' Gordon Kipper Productions was born.

Since striking out on his own Gordie had lost weight, so much so that he'd needed a new wardrobe. Irene could have done without the

goyische pipe he began smoking, but she understood that it was part of his new image. No one in their neighbourhood was connected to the film industry, although Effie Drucker claimed she was related to Kirk Douglas through a great-uncle who'd settled in Canada. Irene, who still dreamed of becoming a wise-cracking screwball comedienne, the Carole Lombard of Yiddish vaudeville, was now a producer's wife. Rabbi Mendel had asked her to organize a movie night at temple, trusting her to select edifying and uplifting films for the congregation. Her list of appropriate titles was on the floor beside her ash tray, which needed emptying. Both could wait.

Irene untied the straps of her halter top in the same offhand manner she might untie an apron. As Gordie reached for her breasts she breathed in the scent of his bay rum, the same brand William Powell used, according to *Photoplay*, which Irene now read in her capacity as producer's wife and helpmeet.

Irene's newly dyed hair was the same minxy copper as Myrna Loy's, Powell's frequent co-star. She pulled Gordie down to the rug and closed her eyes.

The next afternoon Irene sat Muriel down in the local sandbox and told her to build a castle. 'The kind a princess would live in,' she said. She sat on a nearby bench and lit a cigarette.

Muriel stared at her pink bucket and shovel. Louis the soundman, who'd crinkled a special paper to create the roar of Muriel's onscreen fire, would know how to make a castle. But he was at work with her father. So was Eddie the cameraman, who made her laugh with his impressions of Groucho Marx. She was on her own.

Over the next few days, the other little girls at the park took pity on Muriel and showed her how to turn her lumps into turrets. They also warned her about Bobby Greenberg, but Muriel had already seen him in action. Bobby snuck up on little girls playing in the sand and pulled their hair with all his terrible fat-boy strength until Mrs. Greenberg looked up from her magazine. 'Now, Bobby, you mustn't do that.' Then, while his victim wailed, she gave her gloating and panting son a whole bag of Chicken Bones. The other mothers complained that giving him candy was just encouraging him, but Mrs. Greenberg said boys would be boys and nothing would change that.

Muriel's mother said Mrs. Greenberg was a cow and her son was a deviant. That wouldn't stop Muriel and her mother from going to the park, however. They would not give in to fear.

'Just let him try it,' Irene would say as she braided Muriel's hair. 'I'll spank him so hard his grandchildren will feel it.'

When her day came, Muriel was ready. At the first tug of her pigtails, Muriel spun around and placed both hands around the older boy's

throat. Bobby stumbled and fell, knocking his head against the wooden border of the sandbox, which did not deter Muriel from climbing on top of him and squeezing his larynx as hard as she could.

Mrs. Greenberg dropped her magazine and rushed over to Bobby. As she did so, Irene looked up from the pages of *Variety*. 'Now, Muriel, you mustn't do that.'

Bobby Greenberg never pulled anyone's hair after that. He stayed by his mother's side, flinching whenever a ponytail or pigtail bounced by him. Muriel became a sandbox legend, the golden-haired girl who'd brought down Goliath. Irene was delighted, until a rumour spread that Muriel was a budding juvenile delinquent.

So much for a normal childhood. Irene still had not told Gordie about the incident, but now she asked him if the act of choking was innate in children. Gordie Kipper allowed this might be the case for those seriously disturbed. That was why his filmstrips were so important. They showed parents how to raise healthy, well-adjusted children, even when the world was losing its mind.

After several fitful nights, Irene told her husband that Muriel could continue to act in his films, even into adolescence (a guide to puberty was in the works). His sets were often visited by experts in childhood development, including a German refugee who was now teaching psychiatry at the University of Toronto. Should Muriel reveal any more troubling tendencies, Herr Doktor Kessler would surely intervene.

Muriel turned out to be such a model child it was unsettling. So much so that Irene was relieved when Daddy's little girl began lashing out at her. Each time Muriel slammed her bedroom door shut, Irene felt a surge of triumph.

At 13 Muriel was learning about sex from the actors her father cast as her doctors. His films were celebrated for their frankness, and so Muriel was shown illustrations of uteri and diseased genitalia as though she were a colleague, not a confused teenager.

'It looks like it's been shot,' Eddie the cameraman said when he saw the blown-up photograph of a penis covered in herpetic sores.

Muriel laughed along with the crew until her father chastised the men for their unprofessionalism.

At 13 Muriel had a raging crush on Eddie, who had been filming her since she was a toddler. When he looked at her through his camera lens, Muriel was certain he was making love to her soul. She would sulk whenever her mother visited the set, but not for long because Eddie said she photographed better when she was cheerful. Muriel would smile and will her eyes to gleam while her mother teased Eddie about his motorcycle. 'So unbecoming for a young father,' she would say, as she offered him a cigarette.

If anyone was unbecoming, it was Irene Kipper. At home Muriel would shout at her to stop painting her lips and nails such a lurid violet and to lay off the costume jewellery, for Christ's sake. Her mother's clip-on earrings were so large that she had to remove one before she answered the phone. It was tacky, Muriel said. Then there was Irene's disregard for what her father's experts called the 'domestic arts.' Muriel went to school with party sandwiches from the local deli, spirals of crustless brown bread piped with cream cheese instead of peanut butter slathered on white, and there were no home-baked cookies in her lunchbox either, the lid of which bore her name painted on by her mother with her gruesome nail polish.

Irene just laughed at Muriel, who was certain that if her mother was more like the other mothers, then she might have a shot at making friends. Arnie Gluck, the schoolyard wit, had once called Muriel Debbie Reynoldsohn and the name had unfortunately stuck. Irene said they were just jealous, that any of those kids would give their eye teeth, whatever those were, to spend their summers in New York. 'Horse hooey,' Muriel would counter. At the Plaza Hotel, sure, but who wants to be cooped up in a studio apartment, even one overlooking Central Park?

The Kippers had been 'summering,' as Irene called it, in New York since Muriel was nine years old. Their pied-à-terre belonged to the same college friend who'd given Gordie Kipper his start in social hygiene flicks. Mr. Von Hammerstein (the von was added after college, Irene said) owned a number of such barely furnished apartments, which he rented to visiting businessmen. Gordon Kipper, eager to impress the textbook publishers he met for golf and cocktails with an address on the Upper West Side, paid two months rent in advance plus key deposit, sums that ordinary New Yorkers would have considered criminal.

Her parents shared the Murphy bed while Muriel slept in a sleeping bag under the clothesline her mother had hung from the ceiling, gazing up at her mother's menstrual belt and brassieres, screaming whenever a drop of laundry water fell on her face. Some nights were so hot she slept curled up on the tiled bathroom floor.

During those summers her mother lived on cottage cheese and the city's glamour, which included regular visits to a nightclub in the Village called the Barn. The waiters wore overalls and straw hats, and a piglet made the rounds of clients' tables while a band played square dances. There were no aunts to babysit, so Muriel joined her parents, dressed in her best taffeta and pining for Eddie, who spent his summers in Muskoka with his small family. She even missed her cousins, also in cottage country at sleep-away camp. Muriel would have given her eye teeth to be making bonfires and pitching teepees instead of bottle-feeding a piglet for her laughing parents.

Because of the heat and the late nights they all slept in. In the afternoons while her father worked, Muriel and her mother sought the fresh air

and shaded spots of Central Park. One scorching day Muriel broke from her mother and took off in pursuit of an old woman pushing a pram. After much begging the old woman finally parted the muslin curtain so that Muriel, a baby-crazy 13-year-old eager for a sibling, could take a peek. When Muriel screamed at the sight of the ginger cat swaddled inside, the old woman slapped her, two quick stinging blows. In tears and close to hyperventilating, Muriel ran back to her mother, who was ready to call the police—the city was lousy with flashers—but Muriel calmed down enough to insist she was just tired and hungry. She didn't want anyone to know about her encounter, especially her father, who would expect her to have known better. The woman was clearly too old to have babies.

Cream cheese on date bread at the nearest Chock full o' Nuts was now a must. They'd both earned it, her mother said, gesturing to the waiter for more coffee. In New York, Irene's violet nails floated on the air like scattered petals.

When Muriel's father died, Irene promised that his films, their films, would be safely stored until Muriel finished her university studies in Guelph. Once she had her degree, Muriel could decide what to do with the films. A month later Irene informed Muriel, by birthday card, that the films were lost. She gave no details. Muriel did not speak to her mother until a year later, briefly and over the phone, after Irene had been hospitalized for kidney stones.

Irene never remarried. From October to March she wintered with her 'beau,' as she called Eugene, in his Florida condo. The rest of the year she summered at Eugene's condo at Bathurst and Steeles. The only rent she paid was on her storage unit. After Gordie's death, Uncle Louie had invested the proceeds from the sale of the house, which he still managed for her. That way, Irene told Muriel, she'd never be a burden.

Muriel was considering early retirement when Eugene died and Irene announced she would now be summering and wintering in Toronto. Muriel found her a one-bedroom apartment in the old neighbourhood and cleared out her storage unit. On Saturdays she drove her to the salon, but it wasn't enough. Her mother needed to be entertained.

'She doesn't get that I'm tired after working all week,' Muriel told Stanley, who was her beau. 'I don't feel like schlepping around a mall.'

Stanley sometimes played piano accompaniment for the silent films at the Nostalgic Cinema. Muriel should take Irene there, he said. It was the only theatre in town that showed old movies.

'She won't like it,' Muriel said. 'It's just a screening room, not a real cinema. She'll complain about the stairs and the smells from the pizzeria downstairs.'

But when the Nostalgic announced a week-long homage to Myrna Loy, Muriel brought Irene to the Saturday afternoon screening of *After*

the Thin Man. The room was, as always, almost empty. Besides Muriel and her mother, there were a few young people, probably film students, and an old man who arrived after the credits, muttering to himself and lugging a garbage bag which he dumped in the seat beside him. When Myrna Loy appeared in a plunging, backless gown, the old man whistled and stamped his feet. 'They don't make 'em like that anymore,' he shouted, to which Irene responded, 'They sure as hell don't.'

During the closing credits Irene told Muriel that when she was pregnant with her, she'd gone to see this very movie and had nearly choked to death on a Liquorice All-Sort during the newsreel. Hearing this, the homeless man turned around and offered them both Jujubes. To Muriel's surprise, her mother accepted. 'I just love these,' she told him, in her old flirtatious tone. When he began rummaging through his garbage bag she slipped them into her purse.

On the drive home Muriel brought up her father's films. Someone had to have prints. He was a pioneer of their national cinema, his work should be known.

Irene said she had a headache that, if Muriel didn't stop badgering her, would kill her.

'You don't know from headaches,' Muriel said.

Irene burst into tears, as surely and as rapidly as a child who'd just dropped her ice-cream cone. Muriel pulled into a stranger's driveway and begged her mother to stop. Her mother gained enough self-control to tell Muriel that no matter what, she wouldn't be a burden.

'No one's saying that.'

'You don't have to. I know when my child's miserable.'

'I'm not miserable,' Muriel said.

They didn't speak for the rest of the drive, not until Muriel pulled up to her mother's low-rise building. There was a small, artificial waterfall in the lobby that Irene called 'Oy Vey Falls.' Which reminded Muriel: next week the Nostalgic was showing *Niagara*.

'Did you know they filmed it on the Canadian side?' she asked Irene.

'Of course. What do you take me for?'

The next day Irene tripped on her Persian rug. In hospital for a hip transplant, she contracted a newly-discovered stomach virus, which extended her hospital stay indefinitely. This gave doctors time to uncover new horrors, culminating in a benign brain tumour they claimed could be controlled with medication. Irene refused physical therapy, claiming that the doctors were killing her. After three weeks in hospital she was deemed too feeble to live independently. A social worker recommended a nursing home subsidized by the Jewish community.

Muriel negotiated the termination of her mother's lease and began clearing out her apartment. One afternoon, while sifting through Irene's basement storage unit, she found a box of reels under her old baby

blanket. At the sight of the labels in her father's handwriting, Muriel fell to her knees, just as her onscreen mother had done when she'd learned that Little Muriel had contracted polio from swimming in an infected pool.

Irene's thinning hair had been returned to its customary goldfish-red by a volunteer hairdresser, and her violet nails had been filed down. Long, sharpened nails were a danger to women her age, said the social worker. Muriel had brought Irene's favourite shade to the manicurist to console her mother over the loss of her talons.

'The girl didn't get the colour right,' Irene said, patting her head. 'So what's new?'

'I had Dad's films restored. It's a miracle so many of them survived your storage locker.'

Irene turned to face Muriel, the remote control in both hands and pointed at Muriel, much the way Eugene used to point his metal detector at Muriel, in jest or perhaps in search of loose dental fillings.

'His films?'

'His films, yes. His films that I found in your storage locker.'

Muriel took the remote from Irene's shaking hands and silenced the television. Still wearing her coat and feeling the start of a headache, Muriel sat on the chair beside Irene. She was used to her mother's tremors, the sections of pink scalp visible beneath her teased hair, but the long periods of silence as her mother stared off into the distance, that she could not bear. 'Mother, are you listening to me? Why did you hide the films?'

'For Christ's sake, he wasn't Orson Welles.'

'Orson Welles ended up hawking frozen foods.'

'At least he paid his leading ladies. Anyway, I didn't hide them. After Gordie died I gave them to Uncle Louie to sell, but no one wanted them. His kids found them and gave them to me before they put him in the old people's home.'

'You should have given them to me. You shouldn't have let them rot.'

Irene reached for the can of Ensure on her hospital tray, swirling it before sniffing its contents, much like Stanley did with his single-malt whiskey. Some of it spilled onto the front of her hospital gown, but Irene seemed not to notice. She took a small sip, then put the can back. It was a struggle to feed her, the nurses said. Her meal trays came with cards listing the foods she'd been given, which Irene used as comment cards, noting in her scrawling hand the unique awfulness of each meal. She kept the cards in an empty Kleenex box on her bed, along with her Elizabeth Arden cream, magnifying glasses and book of crossword puzzles. That way, she told Muriel, no one could throw anything of hers away without her knowledge.

Irene now began sifting through the cards in her Kleenex box as if looking for a number in her Rolodex. 'Why do you have to go digging? Doesn't that dean keep you busy?'

'Ma, I've told you before, I'm the assistant dean, not his assistant.'

'Stanley's still teaching piano there?'

'Yes, we're both still at the Conservatory.'

Irene pushed the Kleenex box away. She rested the back of her freshly coiffed head against the pillow so as not to crush her hair.

'Why did you try to sell the films?' Muriel asked.

'I needed the money.'

'You had the house.'

Irene raised her grey eyes to the ceiling. 'The bank had the house. Gordie pissed everything away at cards, the putz. By the end he wasn't even paying the crew. He had that heart attack because they fired him, the big textbook men. That, and I wanted a divorce.' Irene's eyes were now trained on the fur-trimmed collar of Muriel's wool coat. 'Take off your coat and stay awhile,' she said.

'Forget my coat. You never told me you wanted to divorce Dad.'

Irene had retrieved the remote control and was now clutching it like a pack of cigarettes she intended to rip open as soon as she was alone. 'You don't remember the three of us in that tiny apartment? Crammed like refugees so your father could rent his Broadway office. Never even bothered to get a desk, just that big leather couch. Thought he was some Hollywood producer.'

Even as a child Muriel had known her parents were an odd match. Each time her parents deposited her and her overnight bag on Bubbe's doorstep, her grandmother would comfort her with a plate of fried chicken skin, telling Muriel as she ate that her eldest son should never have married such a flashy woman, and no trip to California or Cuba would ever change that. But divorce? Affairs? That was for the gentiles, not them.

'I had to ask Louie to pay your tuition. All the relatives would come by the house with groceries, even before Gordie died. It was awful.'

Muriel found a crumpled tissue on the bed, but Irene refused it. Her own eyes and nose were prickling. Everything hurt, even her bones ached, as if she were in the midst of a growth spurt. 'Oh, Ma,' she said. Muriel's hand grazed her mother's breast as she blotted Ensure from the front of her gown with the tissue. She expected her mother to crack wise about Muriel copping a feel—she would have welcomed it—but Irene just sighed.

'My little penguin,' Irene said. 'Still wearing those headbands and sweater sets. Looking like his idea of a proper lady. It won't bring him back.'

Muriel's hands flew to her head to adjust her velvet headband, something she did during awkward moments, but this time she took it off,

letting it drop onto her lap. Irene was right, she was frozen in time. Her father's time, the last year of his life when Muriel was 18 and no young man, certainly not a greenhorn like Gershon Pinkus, was good enough for Gordon Kipper's little girl. Poor Gershon; after meeting her father, he'd accepted a job on an oil rig. Muriel knew she'd never hear from him again, not after Mrs. Pinkus had come by the apartment one night to reclaim her engagement ring. Before leaving she'd issued a warning in her glutinous accent, the result of emigration in middle age: 'A man's daughter is his jewel, not his ornament.'

Muriel scratched her scalp, now tingling in liberation, behind both ears. As a child she could wiggle her ears, delighting the crew, but not her father, who'd ordered her to stop making an exhibition of herself. That was his job, Muriel supposed. She'd been his ornament, polished smooth and bright to disguise his failure to live up to the doctrine of his films.

Something like anger coiled in her chest.

Irene stroked Muriel's hair, brittle from decades of peroxide. The odours of their respective hair sprays and chemical solutions mingled with the smell of hospital-grade disinfectant.

Heavy is the head that wears the velvet headband. Muriel rested her head against her mother's breast, and sighed.

In the taxi downtown Muriel pressed the bridge of her nose with both index fingers, a tip for preventing migraines she'd read about in *Chatelaine*. Then, for the first time in her taxi-going life, she closed her eyes. Splotches of sunlight bloomed across the darkness behind her eyelids, like those frames of her father's films that were damaged beyond repair. Maybe her father had cast her to save money to bet at cards, but Muriel had loved being on set, loved it so much that she'd cried on the last day of each shoot, the way other kids cried on the last day of summer camp.

Her father's death hadn't just ended her career, it had frozen Muriel on the threshold of maturity, onscreen and off. *Early to Wed*, their last film, began with Muriel as 18-year old Debbie accepting boyfriend Chip's proposal. Flash forward to a barefoot Debbie in curlers surrounded by screaming children, dolefully watching Chip leave their shabby apartment for his shift at the factory. Slow fade to the second half of the film, which began with Debbie's refusal of Chip's engagement ring. Flash forward again, this time to a chipper Debbie preparing dinner in her modern kitchen, curls smooth and feet in heels. Seated at the table were two children and a husband—not the leather-jacketed Chip, but a man in a suit and glasses who could have been Chip's older, featureless brother.

Neither scenario had appealed to Muriel. Small wonder, then, that she'd pursued a man who would live with her for three decades but not marry her. Small wonder, too, that she'd waited until her late 30s to try

to have a child, then looked into adoption in the same half-hearted way she'd once considered having her mother committed.

After her father's death, Muriel had come home from university to help her mother. One morning she'd looked out her bedroom window and seen Irene at the end of their driveway. The sun lit up her mother's uncombed hair, mirroring the red and orange leaves scattered on their neglected lawn. In her quilted forest-green housecoat, Irene was painting their mailbox with her nail polish. The numbers were fading; Gordie had been promising to fix it. Irene had insisted she was fine, she knew what she was doing. She'd even made Muriel breakfast.

In the taxi, Muriel opened her eyes. Her hands were a pink blur in her lap. Next time she'd tell Irene about the nursing home. She couldn't put it off much longer.

It took a few weeks of screening her father's films for Muriel to get used to the audience's laughter, particularly at her death scenes in *Lambs to the Slaughter: Preventing Childhood Fatalities*. Soon Muriel was laughing, too, as her child-self guzzled rat poison like chocolate milk (it was Grapette, her favourite soda, inside the big bottle with the skull and crossbones). She laughed when she fell on the giant scissors (plastic) she'd been warned not to run with, and she kept laughing during the long close-up of Little Muriel on her belly in a pool of fake blood, a pint-sized general fallen on his sword.

Questions from the audience were usually variations on the same theme: that of suspected child abuse. Had enacting such gruesome deaths impacted her psychologically? What had her relationship with her father really been like? Why hadn't her father just cast an actress and spared her the humiliation?

Each time Muriel gave the same answers: 'Hopefully not, but who knows,' 'Somewhat distant except on set' and 'Not a lot of professional moppets in 1940s Toronto.' She spoke slowly and genially, as she did whenever she had to soothe parents disappointed to discover that no matter how many lessons they booked or how acclaimed the instructor, their child was not a budding Glenn Gould.

Irene died of sepsis before she could be moved to the facility she'd so dreaded. The day after she died, Muriel had to present her father's films at York University. Muriel arrived at the screening with her mother's nail polish and lipstick in her purse. Irene's body was at the funeral home, awaiting cremation. There was paperwork to complete, relatives to inform, a notary to call, but it all had to be put aside for 'The Social Hygiene Films of Gordon Kipper: Canada, Conformity, and the American Dream.'

As always, the audience groaned as the male doctor explained the onset of her menses to a silent Muriel. She was not to feel ashamed of

something so perfectly normal, Muriel was told. So normal, in fact, that there was no need for her to ever discuss the matter with another living soul. It would be unbecoming.

Muriel sat in numb silence, just like her teenaged self on the screen. She was recalling the start of her real menses, in New York on the evening of the day she'd encountered the woman with the cat in her stroller. Perhaps the shock of what befell ageing spinsters had set Muriel's ovaries in motion. She had not yet filmed what her mother would call 'For Whom the Ovary Tolls,' and the streaks of blood alarmed her.

Muriel had waddled out of the narrow bathroom with her underpants around her ankles, blood streaking her thighs. She stopped crying when she saw her mother's smile.

'My little penguin,' Irene had said. 'My little girl's a grown-up penguin.' Laughing, Irene wiped the blood off Muriel's legs while her smouldering cigarette waited for her on the edge of the sink, its cork filter stained an unbecoming violet.

Onscreen, teenaged Muriel confronted a set of plastic ovaries, while in the audience grown-up Muriel looked down at her now violet nails and laughed. She might die laughing, if she wasn't careful.

Connor**Thompson**

CAMERA OBSCURA

When Burton travels for business he brings along two objects: a small puppet and a metronome. The small puppet is meant to be a likeness of himself, and was made by his only son, who is also named Burton. Young Burton is 10 and made the sculpture in art class out of wire and a rag-tag conglomerate of plastic and metal—electrical components, nuts, washers and various other items whose practical applications Old Burton can only guess at. He is certain that none of them were intended to represent the human form—but then again, he has never understood art.

The puppet rests on a small wooden pedestal and is too cumbersome to stand for long under its own power; slowly, like a melting snowman, Puppet Burton droops and sags until he is a grotesque mass of wire and thingamajig. To keep Puppet Burton upright, Old Burton is obliged to prop him against something. The advantage is that Puppet Burton travels conveniently; in his flimsiness he can easily be folded in upon himself, and when Old Burton arrives at his destination, he need only unfurl his puppet-self and find somewhere to lean him.

The metronome is to help him sleep. He has always used one, ever since he was a child. Sixty beats-per-minute, tick-tick-tick. Hunt and Cavett tease him; they learned about the metronome during a team-building exercise in which the participants had to make three statements about themselves, one of which had to be a lie. Burton said: 'I have a son named Burton. I grew up on a farm. To help me sleep I use a metronome.' Hunt and Cavett guessed metronome. But Burton grew up in a small town.

His co-workers tease him because 60 beats-per-minute is just one beat per second—in which case, why doesn't Burton just use the ticking of a clock to lull himself to sleep?

Burton shrugs. 'I've just always used a metronome,' he says. 'It was my mother's. She used to play piano. Chopin and Satie. Other, lesser-known *études*.'

At this Hunt and Cavett exchange a look, and Burton understands he has said too much again.

Sometimes, out of nowhere, they will ask him a theoretical question about the metronome: If he set it to a faster tempo, would his dream be in fast-forward? And so forth. Burton knows they are jokes, and rhetorical, but he answers them anyway. He does not hear the metronome when he dreams.

They don't tease Burton about the puppet version of himself (he brought it to the office to keep on his desk), but from time to time Burton will come back from lunch to find the puppet in a sexual position with his stapler.

And what choice does Burton have but to bear these minor indignities with good humour? He has never been a confrontational person. He is not as clever as them, so a rejoinder is out of the question. And Hunt and Cavett, who sit on either side of his cubicle, have never harmed him or stolen from him or humiliated him in front of his other colleagues; indeed, much of their interactions are entirely straightforward and work-related. But Hunt and Cavett are young men, thinks Burton, and young men cannot be expected to go very long without a diversion. And Burton, perfectly situated between them in their cubicles, knows he must inevitably be their outlet, because Burton knows that he is a little bit odd.

The puppet is on the desk, supported by a lamp, and the metronome is on the bedside table, still and silent. If there is a word to describe the hotel room, it is *orange*. The walls are orange, the carpet is orange, the bed sheets, stretched taut over the mattress, are their own shade of orange—somewhat darker than the walls, which, Burton notes, are the colour of pumpkin.

Amid all this orange Burton sits, using the minimum amount of buttock required to perch on the edge of the bed. His legs are spread and bent at the knees, his weight mostly on his feet, which are flat on the floor. His elbows are locked and his hands grip the meagre meat of his thighs. Unconsciously he kneads them. His shoulders are hunched, his neck forward, and in this awkward position his skin-and-bone torso protrudes from his dress shirt in unusual places, the fabric bunched and rearranged to hang in a way in which it was never intended. It is the position he takes when he is deep in thought, or overcome with stress, or both. Hunt and Cavett have invented a verb to describe it: *gargoyling*.

No one can see Burton gargoyle now (other than Puppet Burton). He is alone, and far from home.

The phone rings, and Burton's head jerks toward the sound. Six, seven times it bleats and Burton knows he should answer it, but his hands remain clamped around his thighs. The phone falls silent. He swirls his tongue around his mouth and finds it dry.

Through the window a thousand city lights criss-cross in grids like a galaxy of well-ordered stars. He pries himself to his feet and leans his forehead on the glass, and his skull shivers with the vibrations of the world.

How did he get himself into this mess?

He knows how. He rewinds the tape and hits play.

Earlier that afternoon. After an enthralling seminar on something-something, he sits alone in the convention hall. Hunt and Cavett have

abandoned him. The coffee in his mug is cold. His mind wanders, as it does. There are over seven billion people on the planet, and in a century most of them will be gone and replaced by seven billion different people—probably more! The darkest place one can imagine must be—it simply *must* be—the inside of a human body (specifically the abdomen). But he doesn't know enough about anatomy. Is there enough room in there? That is to say, can a place be *dark* if there's no room for light in the first place? Could under a mound of earth be *dark*? The inside of a rock?

The hall is almost empty; most of his fellow conference-goers have absconded with their coffees and pastries to smaller 'action groups' to discuss, he assumes, variations on the theme of the conference: *New Strategies to Streamline Fluidity and Market Influence in a Global World.* Burton's brain twitches at the redundancy of the last two words. How can the world *not* be global? He is also unsure how one streamlines a fluid, since a fluid takes the shape of its container—so in that case wouldn't you simply need to find the most streamlined container? He has prepared these and a small roster of other questions to address in his own action group, which, he realizes, must be starting at this moment without him.

He turns and she is there. Crystallized in the chair next to him as if from nothing. She sits languidly, her legs crossed and extended toward him. When Burton notices her she is looking at him in a direct way, and he gets the impression she has been sitting there, observing him, for some time.

As his eyes flick to hers, she tilts her head to one side and says: 'Hello.'

'Hello.'

'Are you enjoying the conference?' Her voice is warm and resonant.

He looks around the hall, which is as beige as his hotel room is orange. Beige walls, beige curtains, beige tablecloths. Burton shakes his head and says: 'It is not the best conference I have been to.'

'No?'

'No, the conference last year in Toledo was far better organized.'

'Toledo,' she says, as if the very concept of Toledo is the most intriguing thing in the world. She leans toward him, rests her elbow on her knee, her chin in her palm. On the stage young men in black T-shirts break down the projection screen and pluck microphones from their stands. 'I wasn't at that one.'

'The hotel rooms weren't so...'

'Small?'

'Orange.'

She throws her head back and laughs for some reason, and for some reason he blushes.

'Well, my room is blue, so we must be on different floors.'

'Yes, they must have colour-coded floors here.' He finds he is sweating, and his next sentence comes out in a rush: 'Mine is orange, yours is blue—there could be a red floor, a green floor. Any colour, really.'

'Tell me something...'—she reaches out and flips his lanyard over, reads it—'Burton. What floor are you on?'

'The ninth.'

Her fingertips linger on his lanyard. 'And what room are you in?'

What a peculiar thing to ask. His ears are buzzing. He places a knuckle in his ear. Why does she want to know that? 'Why do you want to know that?'

'I'm just curious. I'm on the fourth floor. Room 428.'

'Do you have a view of the city or the lake?'

'The lake.'

'Mine overlooks the city.'

He pauses the tape in his mind and the orange room fades in around him.

This next part he is ashamed to replay.

It has always been, he knows, the impetus of Hunt and Cavett and men like them to treat these conferences as opportunities to meet people and socialize and commit—as Hunt calls them—'indiscretions.' Cavett refers to it as 'making mistakes.' 'Let's hit the bar and see if we can't make some mistakes,' he'll say, clapping Burton on the back so that he almost stumbles. It has always been Burton's impetus to decline these invitations. He knows it cannot come as a surprise to anyone that he is no Ladies Man; nevertheless, that is the very thing H and C insist on calling him in mixed company, loudly and repeatedly! They will break from their group and find him on a stool drinking soda water and say: 'There he is! The Ladies Man!' And the strangers with them will raise their glasses and toast him and he will try to shrug off their invitations to join them at this-or-that club or in so-and-so's room, but Hunt or Cavett or a stranger will insist and he'll find himself amid swirling, coloured lights and blaring music, sitting on a new stool sipping a new soda water while a myriad of Hunts and Cavetts make mistakes with one another. He will watch all this for a while and then slip back to his room, straighten his puppet, and set his metronome.

This, he tells himself, is all fine. Because despite his oddness Burton has a wife, whose name is Lydia, who has come to enjoy falling asleep to the tick-tick-tick of a metronome at 60 beats-per-minute so much that they have two metronomes, so that when Burton is away she can still have a tick-tick-tick to herself. In the evenings he calls her and she puts Young Burton on, even though it is past his bedtime. He tells Lydia about the stools at the clubs where he sits with soda water, about the swirling lights, about whichever mistake-maker said the funny thing that made

everyone laugh. Lydia imagines he must have such fun leading this exotic life, and thrills for Burton's adventures. He doesn't tell her about being called Ladies Man, though he thinks she would find it silly, like he does.

It was Lydia just now on the telephone, he knows, and Young Burton, fresh from the bath, ready to hear about Old Burton's day. But how could he explain what came over him in the hall?

He closes his eyes. The tape resumes. Orange fades to beige.

'Mine overlooks the city,' he says.

And then at last he takes her in. Her hair is straight and long and somehow both brown and blond at the same time; her nose is small—too small? No, the right small; her lips are thin and artificially red, so maybe even thinner than they appear; her skin is unblemished; her eyes blue like forget-me-nots in the spring, and there's something dancing in them that makes them hard to look at. She wears a pale grey skirt and matching jacket and her lanyard, which reads 'Angela,' rests on a simple white top with all the buttons buttoned but one. She or her skin or her perfume or her shampoo smells faintly of strawberry candy.

He processes all of this, swallows and adds: '913.'

A sudden plummeting, a rushing in the ears, a most unsettling sense of absence beneath him where the ground should be, but isn't; his vision ripples like the surface of a pond—the beigeness of the room extra beige, a heightened beige, the maximum beige can be. He blinks.

'913,' she says. Then she smiles and leans closer and says quietly, her voice bypassing his ears altogether to echo in his brain like a pealing bell: 'Well, Burton, I'm going to come to your room tonight, and I'm going to give you something that I think you're going to like. A lot. How does that sound?'

Before Burton can untie himself to answer, she is gone.

End tape.

It is fair to say that his interaction with Angela ruined his day. He was useless in his action group, his litany of questions long forgotten, and he quickly lost the thread of the discussion. He found his thoughts drifting toward her laugh. At dinner Cavett cajoled him about his plans for the night and invited him to join them at the bar, and he barely had the wherewithal to decline. Was everything all right? Hunt asked. 'Not feeling well, pal?'

'No. Yes. Fine.' Burton stood abruptly and walked away with his napkin still tucked into his collar.

Burton detaches his skull from the window. The city lights twinkle below. In the window his reflection shimmers like a spirit and Burton thinks of the last time he made his son cry.

After Young Burton had made Puppet Burton, Old Burton wondered if his son might have unearthed a newfound interest in mechanical things, and one day he came home from work with a surprise. A simple wooden box, open at one end, into which slid a second wooden box that was also

open at the same end. At the front of the first box was a small, circular hole. In the second box was a translucent sheet.

'What is it?' Young Burton had asked.

'It's a *camera obscura*,' Old Burton said.

They went outside and pointed the contraption at the garden. 'Look here,' said Old Burton to his son. On the sheet in the second box the image of the garden was small and inverted.

Young Burton frowned. 'What's happening?' he asked.

'It is a basic principle of optics,' said Old Burton. 'See?'

Old Burton walked to the edge of the garden. 'Look again,' he said. His son did as he was told, and when he saw his father on the sheet, hanging upside down from the garden, he screamed and dropped the box.

Later, after he had calmed down, Young Burton explained: 'You were *different*, Papa. You weren't *you*.'

Old Burton and Lydia tried to explain: It *was* Old Burton, it was just the way Young Burton was *seeing* his father that was different.

But Young Burton remained obstinate. 'No, Papa,' he sniffled. 'You were a different you. A scary, upside-down you.'

Old Burton went to bed baffled. Lydia consoled him and said Young Burton, once he understood how the box worked, would come to like it. But as Old Burton tick-tick-ticked toward sleep, he considered, rather, a troubling thought: That what had startled Young Burton wasn't the image itself, but the truth it told: that the world you knew could be flipped, altered, made unfamiliar—and worse than that, the people in the world could be too. And perhaps the person you *are* is not the one standing right-side-up beside the garden; perhaps there are other versions of you, upside-down versions, inside-out versions, and who's to say which version of you is the real one? Old Burton's mind churned over these unpleasant thoughts until the metronome at last asserted itself.

A gentle thud, and Burton turns. On the desk, Puppet Burton has collapsed, limbs akimbo, as if it is all just too much to bear.

His thoughts are a maelstrom. A voice inside insists: That was not *me* in the hall this afternoon. But now he's not so sure. A lead weight in his stomach anchors him to the unruly truth: Of course he's not a Ladies Man, but there could be a version of him that is. And maybe that version of Burton lives here and only here in this strange orange place. And maybe…maybe inside him is not just the darkest darkness, but all the possible Burtons he can be.

There is a knock on his door.

Burton stands in his orange room. Around him stand all the Burtons that the principles of optics can reveal. The knock sounds again. Which of us, he wonders, will open the door?

It's Angela. Her hair is up. She wears a red evening gown. 'Invite me in,' she says.

Ladies Man Burton steps back and Angela steps forward. The door swings shut.

'You weren't kidding about the orange,' she says. At the desk she turns. 'Here.' She holds out her hand. In it is a roll of bills. 'Take it.'

He is too confused to take it.

She sighs. 'I told you I would come to your room and give you something. This is the something. It's half of what your friends gave me to sleep with you. $250. I'm keeping the other half. I think that's fair, don't you?' She tosses the money onto the desk. 'Your friends are assholes. You know that, right? They're outside in the hallway, giggling like morons. They're not your friends. They're children.'

Burton floats to the bed. His buttocks perch on the edge of the mattress. His shoulders tense and his hands grip his thighs.

Angela slips out of her heels, glides to the window, peeks out at the city. 'I'll have to stay for a bit.'

'Of course,' he says.

'For the optics.'

'Of course I know they're assholes, I mean.'

'Good. At least we'll make a little money out of it.'

His mind spins like a centrifuge, diffusing all the different Burtons into their component molecules. A question drips down in fragments from his brain to his mouth: 'Why?'

The way he says it, the way it rasps on the edge of his breath like it's all he can do to shape the sound into a word, brings her up short. For a moment she takes in the gargoyle sitting on the bed, then she approaches and sits next to it. 'Last night I saw you at the bar. How you sat apart from the others. How you endured all the bullshit those morons subjected you to. After you went up, I overheard them talking about how they wanted to get you laid. How it would be just the *funniest* thing. I've got a brother a bit like you. I wouldn't want pricks like Hart and Whatever picking on him.'

With effort, he unclamps his fingers from his thighs.

'So I went up to them and said I'd do it. For a price. Fuckers offered me 50 at first.'

He imagines them amid the din of music and disorienting lights, plotting, laughing, clapping each other on the back, toasting the Ladies Man.

'These conferences are just so goddamn boring, and full of pricks like that. I thought I'd pass the time by fucking with them. But I'm sorry,' she says, 'if I've upset you. And for the hall, earlier, if I laid it on a little thick. They were watching.'

On the desk poor Puppet Burton lies entangled in himself. Burton stands and straightens his puppet-self.

'What's that?'

He tells her.

'Your son made it?'

He nods.

She approaches him. She still smells faintly of strawberry candy. Her hand finds his forearm. 'Listen. Whatever you thought was happening here, it's not your fault. You aren't them. You aren't any of this. This is just a stupid game played by cruel people, me included.'

'Not you.'

'Kinda me. But most importantly, not you. You are not *this*.' She swirls her hands above her head to indicate the hotel and all its coloured rooms, all its Hunts and Cavetts, and all the city lights outside, twinkling in their rows.

He looks at her and her face is open and guileless, so he feels like he can say this to her, that the right version of him is speaking: 'I was worried, for a second, that I was.'

'Well, you're *not*.'

She sits on the bed and he sits in the desk chair. From a small handbag Burton hadn't even noticed, she produces a flask. He declines. He tells her of Young Burton, of Lydia; she tells him of her dumb-shit ex-boyfriend who broke his leg falling off a motorcycle. She asks about the metronome and he tells her; she says she used to play piano. 'No, no Chopin or Satie. Chopsticks maybe.' She laughs. She says she gets it, that she sleeps with a fan on, for the white noise. She swigs from the flask; he declines. They talk about the conference and how silly it is. 'Good point,' she says: 'how *do* you streamline a fluid?' She laughs again. She swigs from the flask. He tells her about the *camera obscura*. She says it would have probably freaked her out too. She asks what will he spend his $250 on? She's gonna buy a telescope for her nephews. He recites her the moons of Jupiter and Saturn. 'Now *that* is an impressive skill,' she says. He does not know what he'll spend his money on. He'll probably just give it to Lydia. A silence falls between them. Or maybe he'll buy something for Young Burton, he says. 'Just no weird camera thingies,' she says. 'No'—he smiles—'nothing like that.'

Through it all, Puppet Burton stands as straight as all his little parts allow.

Around 2 she leaves. Before heading out she goes to the bathroom and messes up her hair. Just in case those dickheads are waiting for her to emerge. 'Gotta look like we had some fun.'

'Like we made some mistakes.'

'Yeah.'

'I did have fun,' says Burton.

She smiles. 'Me too. Easiest $250 I ever made.' At the door she turns. 'See you next year, Burton old boy,' she says.

The bed still smells of strawberry candy when he crawls in, but it doesn't matter. It's still tick-tick-tick and off to sleep.

Sarah**Totton**

UNIVERSAL STICK MAN REPAIR KIT

Once upon a time there were two young men. One could turn nothing into something. The other could turn something into nothing. Together they comprised a fellowship of two.

Shea flitted about campus sporting an off-white cape and a prematurely receding hairline. He studied psychology, inside and outside of lecture.

Blue, slow-mouthed and quick-handed, majored in math for his parents and minored in studio art for himself.

Although they met in body at freshman orientation, a meeting of the minds did not happen until the day when Blue, passing by the message board in the residence lounge, noticed a piece of paper pinned there, on which someone had been testing pens. Above the round scribbles and short lines, Blue wrote 'Universal Stick Man Repair Kit.'

Shea, who was sitting in the lounge people-watching, laughed.

Few people understood Blue's sense of humour. Fewer still could make Shea laugh.

Not long after, at a rooftop restaurant in the alchemical atmosphere of a warm September evening, they shared a platter of breaded mushroom caps and mozzarella sticks with their fellow dormitory residents, the carnival smell of cold cola and hot fat in the air.

Shea invited Blue to go elsewhere with him for dessert. 'Elsewhere' being his out-of-town sister's house. In an air-conditioned kitchen all pink marble and stainless steel, Shea and Blue made Pop Tart ice cream in the sister's machine, dropping broken pieces of the blueberry pastry into the spout, watching the machine transmute silken cream into chunky lilac.

It was the first of many collaborations.

A few days later Blue sat in his Calculus lecture reading a story Shea had written. A man in Hell, waiting to speak to a demon agent at the Denizen Complaints Department, was told to take a number. Blue, reading it, barked with laughter that he stifled into a cough as the professor and nearby students looked over.

Blue sketched a picture of a demon agent knitting a tail-warmer from yarn wound around his spiralling antelope horns. Later, he showed the sketch to Shea. Shea was amused. Blue had found someone whose words he could hang onto. Shea had found someone who hung onto his every word.

Shea claimed to have been hit by lightning in Donegal when he was 5. Blue wanted to believe it; the world in which it was true was a world he

wanted to inhabit. Being with Shea was like walking in another country, one Blue had only glimpsed in dreams, between the trees, through the mist, around the corners of houses and down long lanes of garage doors and chain-linked yards of barking dogs.

They invented a secret language of catchphrases and in-jokes. Their fellow dormitory residents nicknamed them Butter & Bell. They talked of self-publishing a graphic novel. They talked of world domination. They broke icicles of frozen ichor from the stone walls of ancient castles, fired cannons across the roofscapes of empty cities. They strode along the narrow, bracing halls of their comradeship and did not look back.

Shea passed more stories to Blue, and Blue illustrated them. Blue drew pictures and Shea wrote stories around them. Together they leap-frogged, pulling each other along, gaining momentum, until every single thing in their world became an inspiration for new work. Dinner in the back corner of the cafeteria, a ladle-full of gravy pooling around a chicken pot pie, Shea's eyes gleaming.

'This is a nut cluster,' said Blue.

'A nut cluster of gristly proportions,' said Shea.

Before dinner ended, their table was littered with rough sketches on napkins pulled from the dispenser, and the underside of Shea's forearm was black with notes made with a Sharpie, a shorthand of plot sigils.

They withdrew to Shea's dorm room and continued their story against the backdrop of Shea's vacant fish tank bubbling like a cauldron. It used to contain Shea's pet eel, absconded once under Shea's bed where he'd found it covered in dust. Absconded a second time down the heating vent where Blue had nabbed it by the tip of its tail just in time, hauling it out hand over fist. Absconded a third time to parts unknown. The eel featured in many of their illustrated tales.

Shea posed for Blue's trickier drawings. They worked through the night, laughing till they couldn't breathe, and Shea's neighbour banged on the wall to shut them up.

Dawn broke through the tangle of their thoughts, summoning them to class. When they parted at the brick-flagged crossroads, Shea to a seminar, Blue to a lecture, the world had changed. Leaves lay like flakes of gold on the jewel-green lawns. Steam rose off the roof of the University Centre as gargoyle's breath, and the spinney of trees on the hill at the edge of campus stood like the ruins of a goblin city.

The world Blue shared with Shea was a secret domain of comics and Smarties and pens in a multicoloured spray across Shea's desk. They didn't abuse drugs; their muses thrived on sugary tributes of freezer cake eaten straight from the pan with pilfered cafeteria forks, gummy bears, and shot glasses of flat Coke.

When they sold an illustrated story to a small-press anthology under the Butter & Bell moniker, they bought a bottle of absinthe to celebrate,

taking turns sipping it from a blown-glass skull Shea had acquired in the Czech Republic.

'I feel…no different,' said Shea.

'Looks like mouthwash,' said Blue, 'tastes like backwash.'

Shea decanted the rest of the bottle into the fish tank, both of them cackling.

But it was not an untroubled Elysium they inhabited. While Blue was content to approach his intended images via imperfect increments like an asymptotic curve, Shea was a perfectionist with a quick temper. On two occasions he became so frustrated with Blue's failure to match the vision in his mind's eye, that he tore Blue's work to pieces and flung them into the air.

'Do it properly or not at all!'

Blue forgave him, because Shea was just as vicious with his own work when it didn't meet his standards. Sometimes he threw away stories that could have been salvaged or which contained the grain of brilliance, but Shea forbade any resurrections. Once scrapped, an idea should be forgotten.

The Christmas holidays were a stretch of dark days for Blue. So reliant had he become on Shea's vision, that his initiative grew vestigial with disuse. He felt empty and unmoored and counted the days till the winter semester began.

Shea returned from the holidays with a sword from Germany, polished purple tap shoes he referred to as 'K360s,' and having dyed his cape with crystal violet. He'd bought the shoes in New York. Not to dance in, but to announce his presence as he clopped along the residence hallways.

Shea and Blue resumed their old routine, returned to their old haunts: their table in the back corner of the cafeteria; the carpeted stairs of the University Centre where they perched like truant birds, watching how people walked, dressed and behaved; the on-campus bar where they sat, a tiny bubble of sobriety in a sea of inebriation, free-associating lyrics to made-up songs; the dead space in the echoing top of the residence stairwell, a concrete-bound aerie where they scribbled and scrawled until the stories took hold and Shea tapped echoing rhythms like applause.

Wherever Blue went, he left his mark with a piece of blue chalk or a blue waxed pencil. A blue dot on the frame of Shea's door to let him know Shea had missed him.

'Marking your territory?' said Shea, but soon enough he adopted a white piece of chalk or wax and was crossing Blue's mark with his own. They even left their stamp—the Butter & Bell logo—on the quad, dyeing the snow with tap water and six bottles of blue food colouring mixed in the garbage can from Shea's room, Blue tamping lines in the snow and Shea pouring behind him.

Shea's mood darkened as winter deepened. He had seen a couple of plays on Broadway, and he now believed that the tenor of their work

wasn't serious enough. Shea's writing, and subsequently Blue's art, grew sinister.

Shea adopted a technique he termed 'method writing.'

Could a ball hurtling toward you at speed be sliced in half with a machete or a sword? Blue thought so, and correspondingly made his drawings.

'Never rely on your imagination for what you can fact-check,' said Shea.

After a trip to the sports store, they spent two hours at the squash court in the residence basement, Shea hurling balls at Blue and Blue trying to cut them in half with Shea's sword. They irreparably damaged one basketball, six tennis balls, four lacrosse balls, four knuckles and two wrists. Shea even got a black eye. The answer was no, it couldn't be done, though Blue came close with one of the tennis balls. But he judged Shea's sword too heavy to swing easily and too blunt to cut properly.

Their second foray into method writing happened on the lot at the edge of campus where Shea's car was parked. Blue's argument was that it was not possible for a person to hang onto the hood of a car while it was being driven erratically. Shea insisted they test this hypothesis. He brought his camcorder along to record the evidence.

It was snowing, and though it was past midnight, the white overcast and ground locked the city's radiance in a capsule of day-bright snow-light. Snow swallowed their footsteps, and the air was tinged with butter-soft smoke. Snow engulfed Shea's car, which he made a rudimentary job of clearing. Snowflakes studded his cape like opals.

Shea held out his keys.

'I can't drive standard,' said Blue.

'Would you rather ride the hood?'

Blue perched Shea's camcorder on the dash centimetres from Shea's nose, pressed against the windshield. The car bucked and slid as Blue changed gears, not helped by the fact that the road conditions demanded a two-handed grip on the wheel. Blue stuck to on-campus roads and parking lots, none of which had been ploughed. The car fishtailed and once made a complete revolution. Shea screamed at Blue to drive faster, swerve harder. It ended when the car slammed into a curb, dumping Shea into a snowbank.

On the way back to residence, Shea reviewed the footage. 'We should be filming stories, not writing them.'

'I can't illustrate films,' said Blue.

'You can incorporate art into them.'

So Shea stopped writing stories and started writing scripts for 'performance pieces,' as he called them.

Blue created a set piece, twisting gold-filled wire, draping coloured silks, affixing crystals. When he finished, it looked so right that he shook.

He had never made anything so beautiful. He posed it at the edge of the arboretum where Shea stood and recited a poem at it. Then Shea set its silks on fire and trampled its soft wire body into the glassy, crystalline snow.

Blue protested, stricken. Shea insisted that destruction was necessary so the art would exist only in their invented world, preserved on camera. Anyway, Shea had paid for the raw materials Blue couldn't otherwise afford.

'Never again,' said Blue.

A week later, Shea clacked into Blue's Statistics lecture, held up a white feather and let it drop onto Blue's laptop.

Challenge accepted, Shea.

Blue no longer made props for Shea's performance pieces. Blue became the props, strung from a tree inside a duffle bag or folded into a suitcase that was then wedged between a concrete barrier and the side of Shea's car, its hard shell compressing his ribs. That one still triggered nightmares.

The winter semester ended. Blue got work in Toronto. Shea stayed behind. His parents bought him a house near the river.

Texts and emails to Shea went unanswered. One phone call got a response, with Shea sounding vague: 'Come visit if you want...whenever... Chris and I are writing a radio play.'

Who and what was Chris?

Shea's house: mortar, toothpaste-white between the bricks, bronze vultures either side of the front door.

Inside: Shea. Wouldn't look directly at Blue. Chris, however, had Shea's full attention. He bore an uncanny resemblance to Blue. A sheep, a follower. Chris didn't acknowledge Blue. Chris the interloper.

No. Blue the interloper.

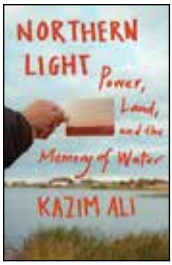
Blue had nothing to say to Shea, and Shea had no further use for Blue, so Blue left. He looked back once at the house. If it wasn't haunted already, it certainly would be.

Blue kicked one of the bronze vultures. The vulture was unscathed. The pain rang in his foot for hours after.

The days of great conflagrations and blue-sky sailing were over. Blue had no one to buoy him up. He had no one to tear him down. Sometimes he felt great sadness, and sometimes he felt the hard-shell sides of the suitcase crushing his ribs. He'd dodged a bullet. Sometimes he wished it had hit him.

REVIEWS

NON-FICTION



Kazim Ali, *Northern Light: Power, Land, and the Memory of Water*, Goose Lane Editions, 2021
Anvi Hoàng, *Why Do You Look at Me and See a Girl?*, Guernica Editions, 2021

Published in 2021, Kazim Ali's *Northern Light: Power, Land, and the Memory of Water* and Anvi Hoàng's *Why Do You Look at Me and See a Girl?* are two powerful memoirs that revisit childhood and reflect on connections to family and place. Despite their different settings, both Ali and Hoàng confront colonial and gendered power structures and seek to reconcile their upbringing with the present.

Northern Light articulates settlers' responsibilities toward both the land and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. As a child of immigrants, Ali asks, what does it mean to call a place home when the feeling of home comes at the expense of the land's first and current inhabitants? Born in the UK to South Asian parents, Ali moved to Jenpeg, a community in northern Manitoba, at a young age. During that time his father worked on a hydroelectric dam that Ali later discovers was built on unceded land. While the town no longer exists, in the same area is the Indigenous town of Cross Lake, where residents pay Manitoba Hydro millions of dollars every year despite having been promised subsidized electricity. In many narratives of diaspora, people search for home in hope of finding an answer to their identity and ancestry. Ali returns to Jenpeg with similar intentions; however, he realizes that he cannot find a nostalgic home in a place built on unceded land. He writes:

> Jenpeg—the Jenpeg that I knew—was built as a temporary town in the forest. It was built to support the building of a dam. It was never going to be there when I went back. It was never meant to be more than it was. It never belonged to us and there was nothing there to be found.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this place characterized from the start by non-permanence and provisionality looks nothing like he remembers: 'The land has been chewed into by the river, and there is just the thinnest swampy margin of reeds and muck now between the lapping waves and the forest.'

He also fails to find 'any of the spark of energy I expected to feel, no sense of a homecoming.' Thankfully the Pimicikamak Cree Nation is there to extend a warm welcome. From the moment Ali emails Chief Merrick about visiting Cross Lake, she is enthusiastic about receiving him into the community. After spending time with her and other community members, Ali reflects:

> Rather than answer my questions, she wanted me to come north, not just to visit but to *see*. When the politicians and executives of the south look north, they see resources—the minerals, the oil, the timber, the flow of the rivers—and with what they consider irrefutably reasonable logic, they devise ways of harnessing those resources for 'Canada,' that place that by population mostly...huddles along the southern border.

Ali comes to realize that his return is just the beginning of a larger reckoning with Canada's program of resource extraction in the North and that to change his relationship to the land, he must do as Chief Merrick suggests and recalibrate his perspective.

Northern Light is not a traditional memoir, though it does begin on familiar terrain with the personal and ancestral. In the book's first sentence, Ali writes, 'I've always had a hard time answering the question "Where are you from?"' In attempting to locate an answer, he starts with the 1947 Partition of India, a historical event at the heart of many South Asian diasporic narratives. Very quickly, however, he veers away from his family's history of immigration and settlement in Canada. Rather than predominantly focus on his personal life, as might be expected from the genre, Ali shifts attention to the Pimicikamak. In doing so, he writes a book that addresses, without deflecting, his and his family's complicity in ongoing colonialism while simultaneously forging a path forward as an ally.

Indeed, as the child of immigrants, Ali finds points of connection with the Pimicikamak. For example, when he speaks with a school principal about opportunities for children to learn Cree, he recalls how his understanding of his family's language, Urdu, is limited as he had to prioritize learning English. Though Ali's family has been touched by colonialism as well, his visit to Cross Lake reveals to him his responsibilities as a settler. Significantly, colonization is presented as an ongoing process, one not relegated to the past but requiring active repudiation by long-established and more recent settlers alike.

Northern Light is informative without feeling ponderous due to its journalistic style, which immerses the reader in Ali's encounters with

the people of Cross Lake. Covering topics such as British and French colonization, residential schools and language eradication, the book offers a helpful resource for settlers, particularly new immigrants, who might lack an understanding of Canada's history of colonial violence toward Indigenous people. That being said, even readers aware of this history will be rewarded with new insights through Ali's engagement with the Pimicikamak and their specific stories. If to 'see,' in Chief Merrick's formulation, is to move beyond extractive logic and instead observe the people, animals and land, then Ali successfully sees, vividly evoking a sense of place—and we see with him.

Near the end of the book, Ali reaches a conclusion: 'Places do not belong to us. We belong to them.' In the search for home, Ali finds a home within himself, one made up of the stories and the people he has encountered throughout his life. Just as Chief Merrick intends, he returns to his childhood home on account of the dam, but comes to discover that it is so much more than a place rich in resources.

While *Northern Light* focuses on the impacts of industrialization and settler-colonialism, *Why Do You Look at Me and See a Girl?* focuses on Hoàng's journey to understand her identity. After growing up in Vietnam, Hoàng moved to the United States in 2001 at the age of 29 to pursue a master's degree. She lived there for a decade before returning to Vietnam, a visit that highlighted her complicated relationship to her former and current homes. She writes, 'I went to Vietnam looking for closure, reconciliation, reconnection, to be de-Americanized, re-Vietnamized, de-Vietnamized, re-Americanized.' Spending time in both countries, the memoir is Hoàng's attempt to reconcile the positive and negative parts of Vietnamese and American culture, to challenge Vietnamese stereotypes and to find strength in her family's stories.

The book opens with a narrative account of her beloved grandmother's life during the Vietnam War, when she spent her time travelling great distances to visit her children in prison. Hoàng returns to her grandmother's story repeatedly. She does this because she admires her older relative's fortitude and resilience, but also because she's interested in tracing how attitudes and behaviours shift over generations. In addition to being a story of family, Hoàng's memoir is also a sociological study and work of history, trying to account for the ways the forces of colonialism, communism and capitalism have marked the Vietnamese. Finally, it's a chronicle of the ups and downs of Hoàng's life in the US, where she lives in Provo, Utah, and later Bloomington, Indiana. She writes about her experiences at university during her graduate degrees, meeting her husband, beginning her career as a writer and even conceiving of the memoir itself.

If this project sounds ambitious, it is. In *Northern Light*, Ali narrowly focuses on the impact of colonialism and resource extraction on the com-

munity of Cross Lake; in *Why Do You Look at Me and See a Girl?* Hoàng's scope is much broader, arguably too broad. Eschewing chronological order, the memoir goes back and forth in time and between Vietnam and America; it moves from sensuous, moving descriptions of family rituals to history lessons, from her aunt's experience as a steadfast socialist to a denunciation of materialism, from traumatic events to mundane details. Memoirs often prioritize the personal over the communal and cultural; Hoàng refreshingly gives equal weight to her own individualism and the external forces that have shaped her. Still, she shifts so rapidly between the two that it can be hard to follow at times. Hoàng's style compounds the challenges of the reading experience: academic at times, lyrical at others. Reading the memoir as a series of vignettes rather than a continuous story allowed me to appreciate its poetry.

Much of the memoir grapples with Hoàng's experience in America, where she must navigate the world of white Americans. She is dismayed to realize how little most Americans know of her country, but she takes pleasure in shocking them with the revelation that in Vietnam, the war is called 'the American War.' In the US she also faces the expectations of Vietnamese Americans, who perceive her according to their own histories and prejudices. For those who left Vietnam during the war, 'their memory of the country stopped at the moment of their leaving. Their amnesia is the result of a decade of isolation and non-communication between Vietnam and most of the rest of the world after the war ended in 1975.' In contrast, Hoàng has a different relationship to Vietnam. Recognizing how her identity differs from those who emigrated during the war as well as from those Vietnamese Americans who grew up in the US, she teases out the differences that exist despite a shared point of origin.

I could personally relate to many of these moments as, like Hoàng, I grew up in another country before coming to the West to study. As a collection of insights about cultural differences, the memoir is especially strong. Hoàng writes, 'So I pit the American and Vietnamese systems against each other to spin out my own value fabric, its crude quality being fit only for myself as I tried to edge my way in the new place.' In this anecdote, Hoàng contrasts Vietnamese and American perceptions of age, which felt incredibly familiar. In Vietnam, Hoàng describes, being young is associated with oppression because of constant scrutiny from adults. In contrast, being young in America is associated with freedom and countless opportunities. In Hoàng's observations, American youth have the freedom to make mistakes, which do not define their futures. Although this observation may overlook nuances of race and gender, it reflects Hoàng's optimism about America, particularly at the start of her residency there.

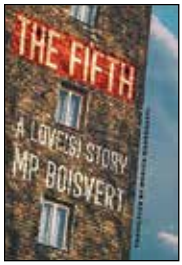
Throughout, Hoàng's voice is strong and confident. As a youth she chafes against her country's norms. For example, she sees how,

'Throughout history, the unrelenting pressure to survive and the numbing tension to recover from ruins took over Vietnamese bodies, minds and souls. People rarely talked about anything else but survival.' While this mindset is understandable, she derides the way it has become the default position. Hoàng states, 'I knew early on that challenging dominant forces around me was the only way to free myself from the grip of traditions and thus find some measure of happiness.' It is to Hoàng's credit that this path to happiness, so straightforward in her youth, reveals itself to be less so as she matures. Similarly, America, the promised land of her dreams, becomes a more complex country.

Ultimately, *Why Do You Look at Me and See a Girl?* is a non-linear narrative of self-discovery, one that never reaches a clear answer to 'Who am I?' What Hoàng does offer is a determined attempt to resist cultural expectations and forge her own path.

— Manahil Bandukwala

FICTION



MP Boisvert, Trans. Monica Meneghetti, *The Fifth: A Love(s) Story*, Caitlin Press, 2021
Christopher DiRaddo, *The Family Way*, Esplanade Books, 2021

Our contemporary media landscape remains, for the most part, saturated with mono-normative narratives—plotlines that ultimately conclude with the 'happily-ever-after' promised by romantic, monogamous love. While queer folks have always had to imagine ways of living outside traditional ideas of a 'happy' life, even queer LGBTQ+ tales tend toward this predictable climax. When they do appear, poly narratives often function as a foil to the monogamous couple. Working against these prescriptive norms, MP Boisvert's *The Fifth: A Love(s) Story* and Christopher DiRaddo's *The Family Way* expand the structures of love by offering

visions of family that disrupt notions of romantic exclusivity, kinship based on blood and the lesser value of platonic intimacy.

Translated into English from its original French in 2021, *The Fifth* explores the dynamics of a polyamorous community living in Quebec. Simon, Alice, Camille and Gayle live mostly harmoniously together as a 'Family of roommates' whose relationship structure is described as 'a triangle with a line extending from one of the corners that's kind of unrelated to the rest—a nameless polygon.' Alice is the 'hinge,' dating Simon and participating in a sexual-romantic relationship with the couple, Gayle and Camille. The story begins when Eloy, Alice's ex-boyfriend, moves into the shared home, introducing an unpredictable element into their carefully constructed community.

The form of Boisvert's short text likewise disrupts conventions. The narrative is told alternately from each character's perspective and switches occasionally into a script format. The constant transition between viewpoints leaves the reader slightly disoriented. The characters appear, disappear, blend into one. As one character begins to take shape, they recede, lost in the oscillation into another mind. Late in the text, Simon daydreams about a future with Eloy in which '[their] love would be like a novel, the kind Alice loves so much, the ones featuring monogamous bliss and many children.' Here, love in a conventional novel is associated with monogamy. In choosing to centre polyamory, *The Fifth* is thus unconventional in terms of both form and content. Boisvert's story refuses to act as a normalizing force; it doesn't offer a handbook for polyamory, nor does it present polyamory as just another way to live. As the characters slip away, the reader never gains access to the Family's intimate world. The text functions instead as a disruptive piece that leaves the reader with more questions than answers.

Thus, the reader is positioned with Eloy, a newcomer, an outsider, a figure of the mainstream. The Family expects to be judged by Eloy, yet he slowly comes to accept and love each of his roommates. Eloy's relationships in the poly unit are mostly platonic, except with Simon. The Family is held together as much by non-sexual friendships as by romantic intimacies; Eloy says of his friendship with Camille: she is 'my favourite roommate, the one I'm not attracted to but still consider my girlfriend somewhat.' Even as Eloy is accepted by and accepts his new community, he ultimately surrenders to society's expectations of the individual. Before he leaves, he explains to himself that his relationship with the Family is the only thing keeping him in the city and that this isn't enough; he notes that polyamory 'doesn't put bread on the table.' In this way, Boisvert's text offers an important commentary on the structural impediments to living a poly life. Eloy's decision to leave reflects the very real challenges of polyamory within an individualistic, neo-lib-

eral, mono-normative society; when Eloy chooses to pursue a job—'I'm useless without a job'—rather than continue to rely on the collective financial, emotional and social stability of the Family, he accedes to the demands placed on the individual under capitalism.

In her 2020 monograph, *Polyamory, Monogamy, and American Dreams: The Stories We Tell about Poly Lives and the Cultural Production of Inequality*, sociologist Mimi Schippers posits two essential questions to consider when analyzing media that represents polyamory:

> What is the text saying about poly relationships and happiness, morality, and living the 'good life'? In its representation of poly relationships, does the narrative do cultural and ideological work to maintain and legitimize social inequalities along the lines of race, ethnicity, nation, religion, class, gender, and sexuality or does it challenge them?

With regards to the first question, Boisvert's text pushes the bounds on what kinds of lives can be 'good' and 'happy.' In fact, Eloy's decision to *leave* the Family in pursuit of a career is the foil to happiness. The answer to Schippers's second question is more varied. Camille's experiences as a trans woman are explored in the text (although her initial portrayal as hyper-sexual raises questions about which kinds of trans representation are helpful and which are harmful), but other identifiers such as class, race and politics are mostly absent from the text. While it isn't fair to ask one short text to address every social issue, it is worth thinking about which ideological norms *The Fifth* challenges and which it does not.

Schippers's framework for approaching poly texts similarly opens a discussion into how Christopher DiRaddo's *The Family Way* engages critically with normative ideas of family and relationships. Set in Montreal and revolving around a community of middle-aged gay men, the novel follows 40-year-old Paul as he agrees to be a sperm donor for his lesbian friends, Wendy and Eve. Spanning more than 400 pages, DiRaddo's text veers opposite Boisvert's relatively slender one. Employing dialogue and action-driven, first-person narration, *The Family Way* has a diary-like quality, which allows the reader to feel intimately connected to Paul. However, there are moments when this intimacy feels excessive as Paul relates important and mundane details alike. Even so, by so fully inhabiting Paul's everyday life, the novel functions as a chronicle of a life less often represented.

Despite its conventional form, the text portrays Paul's story in a way that resists monogamous ways of living. The normative forces that affect queer relationships are represented and critiqued in Danny, Paul's close friend who is obsessed with the traditional nuclear family—with finding an exclusive partner with whom he can reproduce 'what [his] mom and dad had when they were alive.' Danny is characterized as possessive,

vulnerable and willing to commit to whomever will have him. In contrast, Paul and Michael's relationship is more open, healthier and more stable. Paul's decision to be a sperm donor and eventual uncle figure for his friends is never a point of tension with his partner Michael, which productively expands the novel's vision of family. Throughout the text, Paul and Michael move toward a version of polyamory with Leo, a man they meet while on their annual vacation to Provincetown. In the narrative's imaginary of what both a family and a relationship can look like, *The Family Way* redefines a 'happy life,' demonstrating its attainment through relationships that fall outside hetero- and homo-normative ideals.

Left unexplored in the novel is Paul's privilege in having the choice (due to his class status, race and gender) to leave his political activism in the past. In his middle-age domesticity, Paul is nostalgic for his former radicalism, musing, 'I thought back to that time in the nineties. How much chaos there was in those days. Alan, my work with Pride. I was so active then, so angry. I felt like a domesticated animal now. All that rage was in the past, and the world was a different place.' In this moment, Paul reveals his yearning for the political fervour he has left behind and the way he used to find community by embracing his otherness and challenging the status quo. But the factors that determine who can become a 'domesticated animal' and who cannot remain mostly invisible to Paul. He understands the changes in his life as an inevitable product of age rather than as a sign of privilege.

At the same time, Paul mourns the fact that his alternative family structure doesn't fit into the nuclear family. He says, 'I was doing the most traditional thing one could expect, I was having a child. But once again I felt different.' Now his 'difference' is presented as something regrettable, rather than as a source of community. Despite the fact that he is fulfilling society's normative expectations—he is in a serious relationship, having a child and succeeding professionally—Paul still feels his otherness. This novel, like *The Fifth*, suggests that fulfilling expectations does not inevitably lead to a 'happy life.' The ending to *The Family Way* leaves the reader with a hopeful sense of Paul coming to terms with a new, poly community.

The poly, queer experiences that *The Fifth* and *The Family Way* explore—determining family ties for oneself, creating relationship structures outside society's ideals and navigating queer identity in 21st-century Quebec—are significant and invaluable representation. Ultimately, both texts are odes to non-conventional families, to the queer folks creating community, to chosen family, to disruptive love.

— MJ Holec

Virginia Pésémapéo Bordeleau, Trans. Susan Ouriou, *The Lover, the Lake,* Freehand Books, 2021
Nathan Niigan Noodin Adler, *Ghost Lake*, Kegedonce Press, 2020

A slim 163-page paperback, artist and author Virginia Pésémapéo Bordeleau's *The Lover, the Lake* moves quickly and with confidence. Bordeleau charts the star-crossed romance of Wabougouni, an Anishinaabe healer and expectant mother, and Gabriel, a Métis trapper, against the backdrop of early Canadian colonization.

Initially published in French in 2013, the novel in Susan Ouriou's English translation is direct and, at times, satisfyingly visceral. After overtaking a moose, Gabriel 'slit the animal's jugular vein, which pissed red onto the snow.' Camping at night, he is overcome with awe for his surroundings, 'a land whose volcanic-rock belly surfaced in outcroppings bearing fossilized crustaceans in their veins.' Bordeleau's sentences are particularly engaging when they draw upon the body, taking stock of its fleshy undersides, its scents, its proclivity to piss and spit and suck. This viscerality fuels her most interesting metaphors and a serviceable, direct approach to the explicitly erotic scenes for the novel. One's mileage with regards to the latter will vary. *The Lover, the Lake* may not titillate, but nor does it embarrass; Bordeleau's straightforward prose shrugs off stigma or shame.

It's a dispensation essential to the novel's self-proclaimed project. Upon its initial publication, *The Lover, the Lake* was heralded as 'the first erotic novel written by an Indigenous woman in French.' Bordeleau's novel does not enter into the genre lightly; the English translation's preface explicates that *The Lover, the Lake* aims to render 'a history of pleasure in the body in a world as yet untouched by Indian residential schools and the multiple instances of abuse carried out on children by church representatives,' a specific moment in time 'before the rift that occurred in the consciousness of Indigenous peoples' as a result of such overwhelming systemic violence.

As a contribution to the genre, *The Lover, the Lake* does what is expected of an erotic romance, at times to its diminishment. Certain tropes feel exhausted: the good male protagonist who introduces incredible oral sex to its heroine; the benevolent older prostitute who teaches the hero

how to truly please a woman, and thus truly be a man; one too many kindly uncles and fellow soldiers who dole out surfeits of stilted colloquialism. Other aspects that otherwise skirt the line of cliché are buoyed by Bordeleau's deliberate frame. The trope of the lovers who understand each other without speaking, who slowly teach each other one another's language, for example, is rendered fractionally more interesting in a work that is, itself, struggling against the confines of colonial grammar.

The Lover, the Lake is compelling in its specific depiction of the tensions that surround Gabriel and Wabougouni, moving between Lake Abitibi, Gabriel's Quebecois village, and the frontlines of the Second World War. Attempting to capture dynamics untouched by the Canadian residential school system does not mean presenting a precolonial paradise or a world without conflict or trauma. Wabougouni's grandmother, Zagkigan Ikwe, was raped by a Christian missionary; she and Wabougouni live in an uneasy truce with the rest of their clan, who are largely Indigenous Christian converts. Gabriel, meanwhile, is ushered to the fringes of Quebec society because of his race and, simultaneously, fetishized and preyed upon as an exotic rarity in Paris.

The fantasy of pleasure and freedom—what we might term a sense of escapism—in Wabougouni and Gabriel's connection comes not from an avoidance or erasure of the difficulties and traumas of colonization, but through its insistence that confrontation is necessary for healing. When *The Lover, the Lake* engages with these ideas, it breaks from its formula and offers an intriguing glimpse into richer depths.

Nathan Niigan Noodin Adler's *Ghost Lake* is, in many ways, the opposite of Bordeleau's *The Lover, the Lake*. A companion short-story collection to Adler's horror novel *Wrist*, *Ghost Lake* contains 13 loosely interconnected stories of the eerie, magical world that surrounds the titular community.

Though *Wrist*'s companion, *Ghost Lake* is not strictly horror. There are great, gory flashes of it—a haunted woman fights off an inhumanly strong attacker, two cousins venture into an isolated cave hunting murderous memengwesiag (small and shadowy winged tricksters)—but other stories remain in the realm of the mysterious and more-than-human. Thunderbirds reanimate an injured driver; an isolated Misaabe, a giantess, saves an injured hiker; a love letter is left in a spider's web. Adler has no shortage of ideas, and *Ghost Lake*'s sprawling density is its most absorbing quality.

And yet *Ghost Lake*'s lush sense of place comes at the expense of its characters. Its vast landscapes and scope frequently weigh down its prose, obscuring any distinctive character voice and countervailing any emotional impact. In fact, just about every story could be halved—and benefit immensely from it.

Often, *Ghost Lake*'s excess results from its indecision in the face of the supernatural. The characters run up against events that seem too

extraordinary to believe. In 'Incendiaries,' three bored white teenagers, Clay, Dare and Tyler, ransack an Indigenous burial ground for fun and are subsequently haunted by a cast of vengeful spirits who frighten them into returning their stolen offerings. When confronted by his spectral visitor, Clay wonders: 'Did he only imagine it? Was it only a hallucination? Was it all in his head?' Later, surprised by an old woman visiting a burial ground, Clay's friend Dare repeats this same pattern: 'Goddamned, lady almost gave him a heart attack! Was she there the whole time? Or was she sitting so still, and quiet, that he didn't notice her until he was right in front of her?' Rather than effectively highlight the uncanniness of these situations, these routine carousels of rational explanations grind many of the stories to a halt.

While returning a stolen child's rattle to the spirit of their mother Naphtha, Tyler also lapses into a curious litany, wondering:

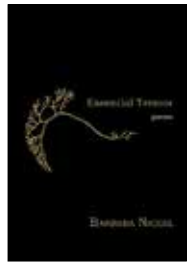
> Did Naphtha sing? What songs would those have been? Goodbye songs, songs of memory and loss? Or songs to conjure the dead? He's glad he never got around to using the instrument to record an audio track. Once captured in digital software, how would he be able to return sound?

Tyler's questions are especially frustrating; one wishes Adler had attempted to answer these prompts and dramatized them on the page instead. A story of returning stolen sound, of new technological hauntings and appropriations, immediately seems far more potent than following three functionally identical teens repeating the same character beats, learning the same lessons. A stronger editorial hand might have guided Adler toward a sharper structure.

Where *The Lover, the Lake* promises the fantasy of pleasure, *Ghost Lake* seeks to shock, surprise and scare. But to enjoy the escapist qualities of this genre requires room for the reader's imagination to run alongside the author's. While Adler is skilled at imagining gripping, cinematic scenarios, *Ghost Lake*'s tendency to over-explicate its anxieties drains its stories of their supernatural power. A more rigorous edit would open up more space for the reader to engage with the collection's world, rather than be puppeted by its constrictive script. One is left eager to see how Adler's writing will mature and develop with more support.

— Rebecca Peng

POETRY



Susan McCaslin, *Heart Work*, Ekstasis Editions, 2020
Barbara Nickel, *Essential Tremor*, Caitlin Press, 2021
Louise B. Halfe (Sky Dancer), *awâsis—kinky and dishevelled*, Brick Books, 2021

The religious tradition I was born into tended to sharply divide spirit and body. In its most crass expression, the body was bad, but the spirit was good. Poetry wouldn't have it. Starting with William Blake and threading all the way through Lisa Robertson's *Debbie: An Epic* and beyond, poetry has patched up this division, extending tendrils of spirit out from the body into the world. The three poets here explore their spirituality through the body in uniquely different ways: McCaslin begins with the heart, Nickel with the nervous system and Halfe with her awâsis, the inner adult child within.

In *Heart Work*, McCaslin looks through four windows of the heart: the writing of Saint Hildegard and related artwork; the letters of John Keats; the 2017 fires in Cariboo, British Columbia (accompanied by photographs taken by her husband); and the COVID-19 pandemic. Each window reveals a different facet of McCaslin's spiritual reflections, which are 'heart arts;/pure acts of the educated heart.' The mystics see beyond the visible; the heart can know more than the brain. Through meditations of the heart, McCaslin sees trees become mandalas, and mandalas flower into trees, both with the power to break open barriers and reveal the connections between all things:

> New science says trees
> patient sustainers have hearts...
>
> 'If planting a single tree could help
> could cutting fewer planting more
>
> open us again to planetary breathing?'

McCaslin's mystic vision extends into the next three sections. In 'Negative Capability Suite,' each poem springboards off an excerpt from one of Keats's letters. Echoing Blake's doors of perception, McCaslin writes:

> you could imagine no heaven
> other than one of heightened perception
> not less than what we touch, taste, smell, see, hear
> but more...

Given that McCaslin created the Han Shan Poetry Project, a successful initiative to protect a rainforest near the Fraser River, she must have been devastated by the Cariboo fires of 2017, which destroyed large sections of forest and barely spared her family cabin. Despite this, McCaslin's large, mystic vision finds beauty even in the fires' aftermath, while still acknowledging the pain she feels:

> tender crestfallen trees
> play airs in A minor
>
> burnt orange patches
> scribbled on pine bark
>
> imitate autumn leaves—
> such wild colour in an ashen world

McCaslin is at her best when she allows her language to be playful, when her words skip and arc across the page. Even amid the pandemic, spring, in the form of Persephone,

> would love be loved
> as crone revitalized
> kick up her heels in a field

and where

> sub-terranean streams
>
> trickle tickle up her spine
> It's not Mother's Day
> though she mothers sound

Like McCaslin, Nickel writes about the pandemic in a way that doesn't feel forced or campy, but authentic and contemporary. Like McCaslin, she too draws spirituality from the body using artwork, mystical texts and Biblical references. Nickel's work in *Essential Tremor* is so strong I forgot to take notes on my first read-through, carried along by poems that pop with sonic tumbling—internal rhymes, assonance and consonance—and with texture and depth that invite rereading. The 'essential tremor' from the title is a nervous system disorder that causes rhythmic and uncontrollable shaking in the body, usually the hands. The speaker in Nickel's titular poem inhabits the role of caregiver:

Ends always with me spoon-feeding
and push-chairing, the secret life
of drool…
…would gather the minuscule
beauties, for instance wind flickering the aspen,
every quaver I'm given from your hand.

Nickel explores the effects of the tremor at this very personal level, and then branches out in a variety of fascinating directions throughout the rest of the book.

In a series of poems entitled 'Body in the Mirror,' Nickel beautifully mimics the anatomical sketches of Leonardo da Vinci, taking translations of his notes and creating symmetrical images that work both as lyric and visual poems, revealing the wonder of the human body:

Lean	Lean
and thin	and thin
muscles.	muscles.
Space	Space
arises	arises
between	between
one	one
and	and
the other makes	the other makes
a	a
window.	window.

In 'Corona,' Nickel creates an engaging sequence of 13 linked sonnets, reminiscent of Dionne Brand's powerful work in *Land to Light On*. From a poem entitled '3 (Spring)' Nickel writes:

…we will receive their surplus
masks, we are arriving at the ends
of paragraphs and meals; that wending
of the river the evening he surprised us—
dark swath, a log until it gleamed—
a beaver dived into the running stream.

Each poem begins with the last line of the preceding one, and the entire sequence wraps around to the beginning of the first poem. References to current news are both playful and affecting: 'Try not to seize/the toilet paper please' and 'while that buffoon condemns the WHO; on Zoom.'

Riffing off the *Anchoresses' Guide* as well as Biblical references to parts of the body—eyes, hair, uterus—Nickel intersperses sonnets with poems in the next section that dance about the page and play with language, both in meaning and sound, in the manner of Dennis Cooley. There's yet another startling overlap with McCaslin's mysticism in the sonnet entitled 'Anchoress (2)': 'Our Rule instructs: *Therefore, dear sisters, love/your windows as little as you possibly can.*' The poem ends

with the anchoress pulling the curtain back and despite seeing just a 'dingy courtyard, rag of sky,' sees enough to 'magnify the Lord.'

While dramatically different in tone and spirituality, Halfe's book, *awâsis—kinky and dishevelled*, just as powerfully connects spirit and body. Rollicking, hilarious and at times bawdy, Halfe's poems tell stories of awâsis, the adult child within, or directly translated from Cree, 'being lent a spiritual being.' Since the pronouns *she* or *he* don't exist in Cree, awâsis is sometimes presented as female, male, she-he or he-she. However, awâsis is always fully present in the body: she-he farts and poops and no matter the situation, even if humiliating, is constantly having a good time.

The stories in *awâsis* range from creation stories to critiques of corporate (white) culture, playfully disrupting and undermining the power structures and language ('inglish') that have attempted to dominate Halfe's culture. The mythic stories, like Nickel's work, invite multiple readings, layered as they are:

> *awâsis* belonged to the Universe
> but he didn't know that.
> For years and years he looked for Belly Button.
> He walked the forest, tripped
> on the tree's umbilical cord.
> Still he did not see.

The meanings of these poems are not obvious or simplistic, and like all good stories, the listener is pulled back to them over and over, discovering something new each time.

The poems that comment on our consumptive society are especially poignant. In 'Birding Around,' two crows fight over 'a bit of bannock on the city sidewalk' and then move on to fast-food litter:

> In the evening dusk
> they gathered,
> quarrelling through the night,
> bubble gum
> stuck between their beaks.

In 'Bored Meeting,' both 'inglish' and corporate culture are wryly parodied with deliberate misspellings and exaggerated syllables:

> *awâsis* was con-duck-thing a fist-full year-end
> bored meeting.
> She asked her ass-sis-tent
> to place her diaphragm
> on the scream so people could see
> the numb-burrs.
> The room was getting stuffy.
> She opened the window
> so they wouldn't get sophisticated.

The last three lines here hint at a possible way forward to reconciliation, a path that avoids tokenism and allows the good of Indigenous cultures to break into the stagnant and oppressive structures of our society. Canada could use the medicine of hilarious disruptions.

Throughout the book, Halfe uses Cree when—and this is a guess on my part—English just won't do, when the depth and nuance of her language is too powerful to give up to translation. Translations are provided in the right-hand margins, a superior choice to footnotes at the bottom of the page or back of the book because the reader can readily catch the gist of the word's meaning with little interruption to the flow of the poem. Awâsis is a trickster, a shapeshifter, and there are many ways she-he can be read in Halfe's poems: as a spirit interior to the narrator, as a figure in the mythic realm, and as a disrupter of contemporary political structures; no wonder Halfe has this to say about him-her:

> *awâsis*, I just never know what mischief
> you are up to. I never know whether to laugh
> or to cringe.
> You are a maverick.
>
> Secretly,
> I'm in love with you.

While the embodied spirituality of each of these three poets manifests differently, each offers great poetry. The writing here is transparent: that is, it doesn't get in the way; the reader is drawn into the world of the poet and carried along with her. Whether you read these books for their poetry or their spiritual insights, you'll find a reason to read them a second time.

—Al Rempel

BOOKS RECEIVED

Books from these fine presses have recently arrived at EVENT for review (September–December 2021):

Anvil Press • Biblioasis • Book*hug Press • Brick Books
Brighthorse Books • Burton House Books • Caitlin Press
Crossfield Publishing • Douglas & McIntyre • ECW Press
Ekstasis Editions • Esplanade Books • Exile Editions
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Note: Review copies that do not get reviewed in the magazine are donated to the Carnegie Centre Library in Vancouver, the Royal Columbian Hospital Auxiliary, and to various literacy programs in BC.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

AMIRAH AL WASSIF's poems have appeared in several print and online publications including South Florida Poetry Journal, Birmingham Arts Journal, *Hawaii Review*, Meniscus, *Chiron Review*, and others. Amirah has a poetry collection, *For Those Who Don't Know Chocolate* (Poetic Justice Books & Arts, 2019), and a children's book, *The Cocoa Boy and Other Stories* (2020).

MANAHIL BANDUKWALA is a visual artist and writer. Her most recent work is a collaborative piece with Liam Burke titled *Orbital Cultivation* (Collusion Books, 2021). She is Coordinating Editor for *Arc* and Digital Content Editor for *Canthius*. She is a member of VII, an Ottawa-based creative-writing collective. See her work at manahilbandukwala.com.

RITA BOUVIER is Métis; her home community is Sakitawak, or Île-à-la-Crosse, situated on the historic trading and meeting grounds of the Cree and Dene peoples. Her third book of poetry, *nakamowin'sa for the seasons* (Thistledown), won the 2016 Saskatchewan Book Awards' Aboriginal Peoples' Writing Award. Her poetry has been translated into Spanish, German and Cree-Michif.

JOSEPH A. DANDURAND is a member of Kwantlen First Nation located on the Fraser River in BC, and is Director of the Kwantlen Cultural Centre. He has published 13 books of poetry, including *SH:LAM (The Doctor)* (Mawenzi, 2019) and *The Corrupted* (Guernica, 2020). His book of short stories and plays for children is *The Sasquatch, the Fire, and the Cedar Basket* (Nightwood, 2020).

TIFFANY S. DANG is an award-winning illustrator currently residing on the outskirts of Toronto. She constantly tries to merge the line between traditional and digital media to create dynamic and emotional work for editorial, packaging and narrative projects. When she's not drawing, she can be found designing or reading.

JAMES DUNNIGAN is the author of two chapbooks, *Wine and Fire* (Cactus, 2020) and *The Stained Glass Sequence* (Frog Hollow, 2019). Winning second prize in CBC's Quebec Writing Competition with 'Open Bay' (2014), he has also been featured in *Maisonneuve*, *CV2*, Lantern Magazine and Graphite Publications, among others.

RYAN EAVIS is a 35-year-old from Cape Breton, NS. As well as an emerging poet, he is a stonemason, jazz musician and a recent graduate from Dalhousie University with a BSc in Psychology.

KIERAN EGAN lives in Vancouver. His chapbook *Among the Branches* was published by The Alfred Gustav Press in 2019. He was short-listed for the *Times Literary Supplement* Mick Imlah Poetry Prize in 2017, and his poems have appeared in Canadian, US and UK magazines.

PATRICK GRACE is a queer writer from Vancouver, where he works as an elementary school teacher and moonlights as Managing Editor for Plenitude Magazine. Recent poems have appeared in *The Fiddlehead* and *The Malahat Review*. His debut chapbook is *Dastardly* (Anstruther Press, 2021).

BRIAN HENDERSON is a Governor General's Award finalist for *Nerve Language* (Pedlar Press, 2007) and a finalist for the Chalmers Award for *Sharawadji* (Brick Books, 2011). He is the author of 13 books of poetry, including *Unidentified Poetic Object* (Brick, 2019), long-listed for the Raymond Souster Award, and *unfinished* (MQUP, forthcoming). He is a co-editor of the Laurier Poetry Series.

ROBERT HOGG is a retired English professor and organic farmer who now

devotes his life to writing in Eastern Ontario. He has published five books of poetry, three chapbooks, and his work has appeared in over 70 periodicals. Two chapbooks, *Ranch Days—for Ed Dorn* and *Ranch Days—the McIntosh*, appeared in 2019. Forthcoming titles include *Oh Yeah—More Poems*.

MJ HOLEC graduated from UBC with an MA in English Language and Literatures in 2019, and since then she has been working as a writing coach teaching English to high school students. She hopes to pursue a PhD in Creative Writing, but for now enjoys writing, painting and reading.

MICHAEL JANAIRO is a writer living in upstate New York. He earned an MFA in Writing from the University of Pittsburgh and a BSJ from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. His Filipino family name is pronounced 'ha NIGH row.' He blogs at michaeljanairo.com.

ALEX JENNINGS is a retired Foreign Service brat who was born in Wiesbaden, Germany, and raised in Gaborone (Botswana), Paramaribo (Surinam), Tunis (Tunisia) and the US. He lives and works in New Orleans.

ANNA LING KAYE is a writer, editor and columnist on CBC Radio. Her fiction has been short-listed for the PEN Canada New Voices Prize and the Journey Prize, and received the 2021 RBC Bronwen Wallace Award.

AMANDA LEDUC is the author of *The Centaur's Wife* (Random House Canada, 2021) and *Disfigured: On Fairy Tales, Disability, and Making Space* (Coach House Books), which was short-listed for the 2020 Governor General's Award for Nonfiction. She has cerebral palsy and lives in Hamilton, ON, where she serves as Communications Coordinator for the Festival of Literary Diversity (FOLD).

MIKE MADILL has worn many different hats, including as a social worker, computer analyst and home contractor. His poetry has been published in literary magazines across Canada, including *The Antigonish Review*, *The Fiddlehead* and *The New Quarterly*, and he was short-listed for *FreeFall*'s 2019–20 Poetry Contest. This is his first time in EVENT.

LEVI MASULI, based in the Philippines, works on sound and text. His works can be peeped at levimasuli.com.

REBECCA PĂPUCARU's 'Yentas' won *The Malahat Review*'s 2020 Novella Prize, and her short fiction has recently appeared in *Grain*. She was awarded the 2018 Canadian Jewish Literary Award for Poetry for *The Panic Room* (Nightwood Editions, 2017), also a finalist for the A.M. Klein Prize and long-listed for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award. This is her second appearance in EVENT.

REBECCA PENG is a writer, furby enthusiast and multimillionaire on Neopets. She lives with a cat named Bug.

AL REMPEL's books of poetry are *Undiscovered Country* (Mother Tongue, 2018), *This Isn't the Apocalypse We Hoped For* (Caitlin, 2013) and *Understories* (Caitlin, 2010). He has a chapbook, *Behind the Bladed Green*, forthcoming in 2022 with The Alfred Gustav Press. His videopoem collaborations have been screened internationally. He can be found at www.alrempel.com.

JAY RITCHIE is the author of *Cheer Up, Jay Ritchie* (Coach House Books, 2017) and has an MFA from UMass Amherst. His work has been performed on CBC Radio, at the Newmarket National 10-Minute Play Festival, and at the Phi Centre in Montreal.

BEN ROBINSON is a poet, musician and librarian. His most recent chapbooks are *Keeps on Running* (The Alfred Gustav Press) and *Dept. of Continuous Improvement* (above/ground). He has only ever lived in Hamilton, ON, on the traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron-

Wendat, Haudenosaunee and Mississaugas. He is @bengymen on Twitter.

ROB TAYLOR is the author of *Strangers* (Biblioasis, 2021) and three other poetry collections. He is also the editor of *What the Poets Are Doing: Canadian Poets in Conversation* (Nightwood Editions, 2018) and *Best Canadian Poetry 2019* (Biblioasis). He teaches creative writing at Simon Fraser University.

CONNOR THOMPSON is an actor and writer from Toronto. His fiction has appeared in TL;DR Press, X-R-A-Y, Interstellar and Flyover Country. One time he was in a Kia commercial with Paul Anka. Find him at @cpethompson.

SARAH TOTTON's fiction has appeared in *The New Quarterly*, *Nature* and McSweeney's Internet Tendency. She was named a Regional Winner (Canada & the Caribbean) in the 2007 Commonwealth Short Story Competition, and her debut collection, *Animythical Tales*, was published in 2010 by Fantastic Books.

P.C. VANDALL is the author of four collections of poetry: *Something from Nothing* (Writing Knights, 2013), *Woodwinds* (Lipstick, 2013), *Matrimonial Cake* (Red Dashboard, 2014) and *The Blue Moth of Morning* (The Porcupine's Quill, 2021). She lives on Gabriola Island, BC, with her husband and two children.

BEN VON JAGOW is a writer, poet and photographer from Ottawa living in Basel, Switzerland. His work has appeared in literary journals such as Amsterdam Quarterly, *The Antigonish Review*, *Newfoundland Quarterly* and *The Literary Review of Canada*, among others. He was long-listed for the 2020 CBC Poetry Prize. For more of Ben's work, visit benvj.com.

JAMES WARNER's poems have appeared for many years in magazines in Canada and abroad. He lives in Nova Scotia.

ANDREW WEI was born in Syracuse, NY, and holds a degree in Electrical Engineering from the University of Texas at Dallas. His poetry has previously appeared in *Reunion: The Dallas Review* and *fields*.

BRANDON WINT is a poet, spoken word artist and multi-disciplinary collaborator based in western Canada. As a performer and educator, he has toured Canada extensively, and has shared his work in Jamaica, Australia, Latvia, Lithuania and the US. *Divine Animal* (Write Bloody North, 2020) is his debut collection of poetry.

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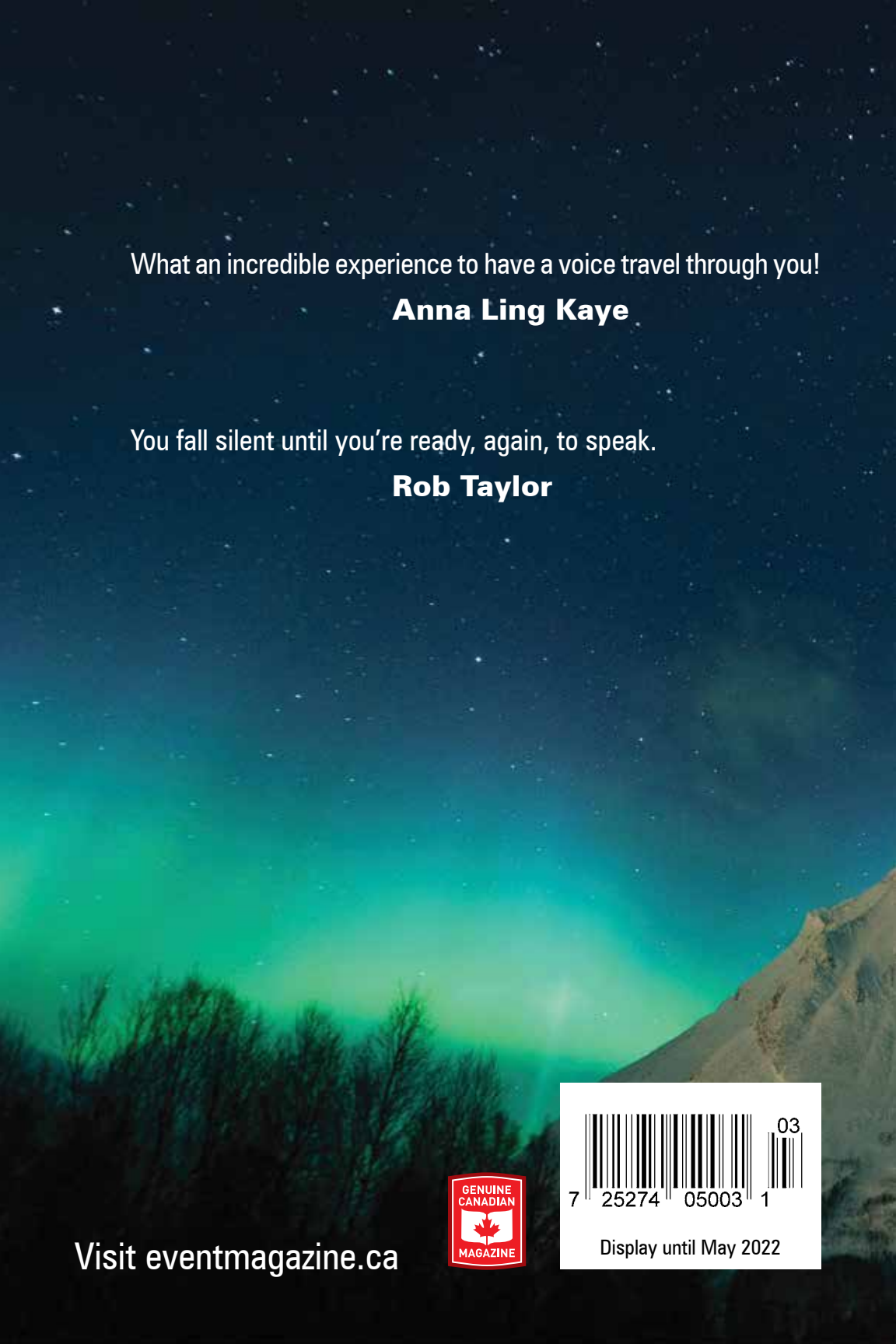

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