

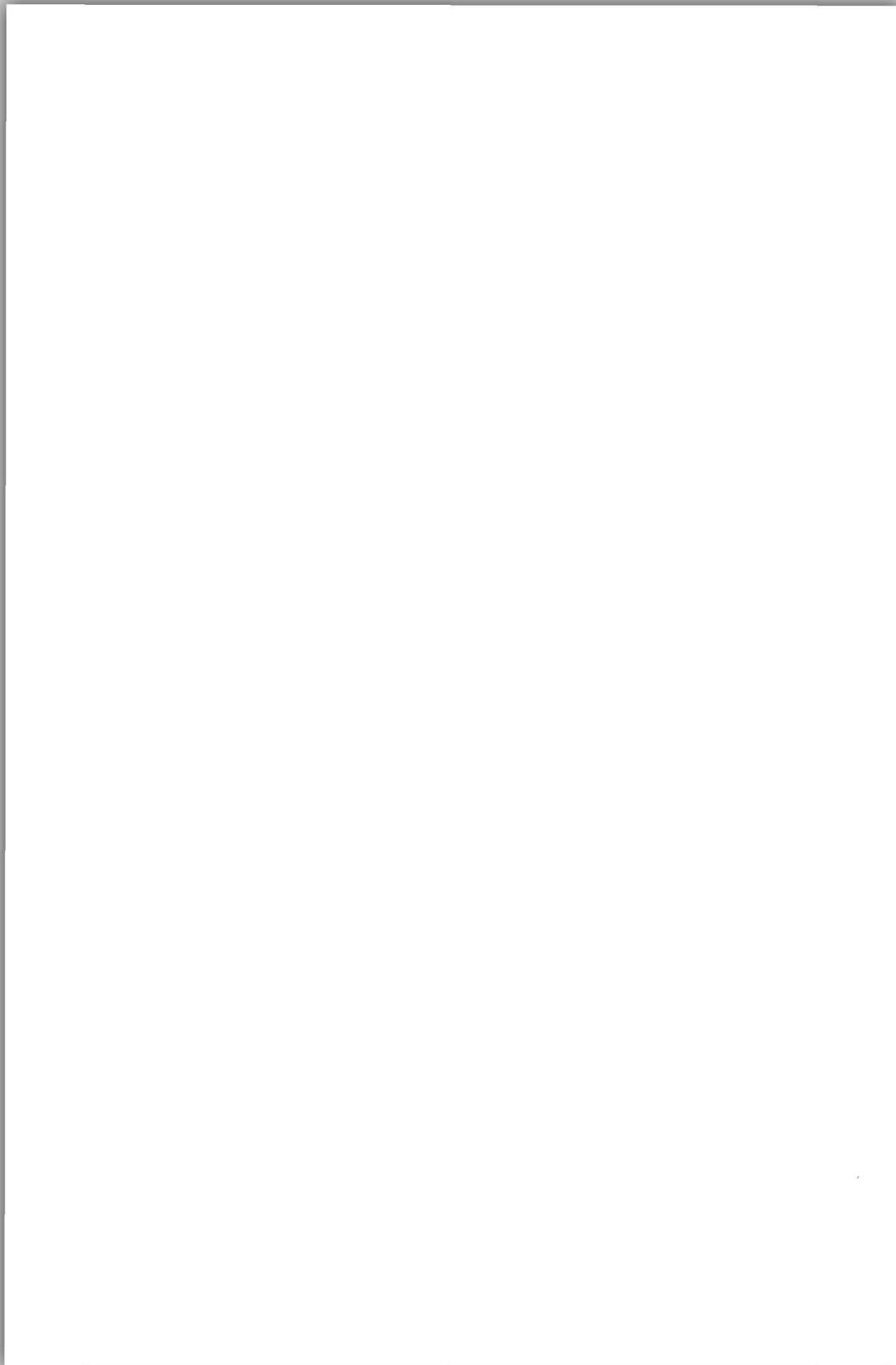
PRISM *international*

Contemporary writing from Canada and around the world

WINTER 1993

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A N N U A L

SHORT
FICTION
contest

PRISM international

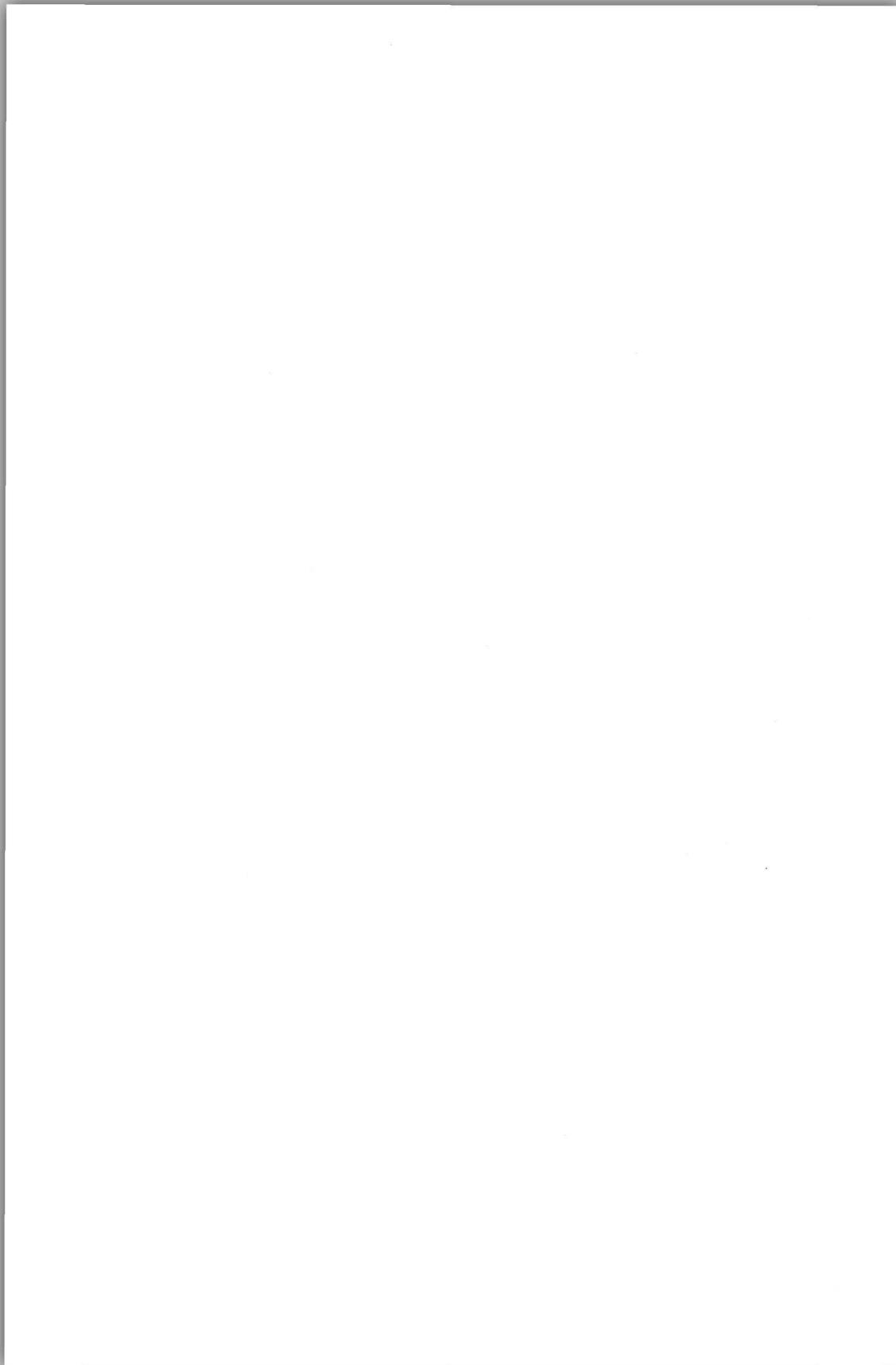
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PRISM *international*, a magazine of contemporary writing, is published four times per year by the Department of Creative Writing at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z1. Microfilm editions are available from University Microfilms Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan, and reprints from the Kraus Reprint Corporation, New York, N.Y.

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Cover art by Marianna Gartner

One-year individual subscriptions \$16.00, two-year subscriptions \$24.00, library and institution subscriptions \$22.00, two-year subscriptions \$36.00, sample copy \$5.00. Canadians add 7% G.S.T.

All manuscripts should be sent to the Editors at the above address. Manuscripts must be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope with Canadian stamps or International Reply Coupons. Manuscripts with insufficient postage will be held for six months and then discarded. The Advisory Editor is responsible for the magazine's overall mandate including continuity, quality, and budgetary obligations.

Payment to contributors is \$20.00 per page plus a one-year subscription. PRISM *international* purchases First North American Serial Rights only.

Our gratitude to the Canada Council, Dean Patricia Marchak, and the Dean of Arts' Office at the University of British Columbia.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Government of British Columbia, through the Ministry of Tourism and Ministry Responsible for Culture.

Publications Mail Registration No. 5496. January 1993

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Selima Hill

Nine Sonnets

This sequence is an exploration of the relationship between a young girl and her much older soldier brother, written by her, at the time of her brother's death.

1

Beside the river in the dead of night,
a cry, and then another, like a spell,
turns the darkened willows into light,
the silence of the woods into a bell;
and in the white house on the moonlit hill
a woman shivers in her narrow bed
to hear the hare; and then the hare is still;
she feels his ginger paws against her head,
his fur, that tickles like small butterflies
settling on her cheek and on her hand;
she feels him move; she hears his wild cries
glittering inside her ear like sand:
he's lost inside the forest of her hair,
and finds, and steals, her brother's kisses there.

As soon as I heard you were ill, my love, I wept.
Not true. I put the phone down, went upstairs,
made the lunch and, while the children slept,
ate my food, then gave the children theirs;
I called the dog, and walked across the sand,
past the villa, past the bungalow,
and out onto a hilly bit of land
we specially like, where hares and rabbits go;
came back, washed up, made tea; and only then,
when people thought I wasn't, was I sad:
I saw you walk away between two men,
and when you waved, I saw the wound you had;
I saw our mother, in her gardening shoes,
waving back; and dark and darker yews.

I remember night; the golden chairs;
your uniform's rough kiss, like woollen dew;
I remember running down the stairs
towards your arms: I don't remember you.
I remember kneeling by your door
for hours on end, imagining inside
a soldier, not a brother anymore;
and as I waited something in me died.
My heart was empty, it was like a hall,
a kind of church, where funerals take place;
and as I leant against your bedroom wall—
a different brother's, with a different face—
I heard a choir of tiny voices chant
She knows she ought to love him, but she can't.

This afternoon a single goose appeared
below the shack, as though she had lost her way;
I too am feeling lonely, like the bird.
My mother said my brother died today.
I didn't know I'd feel so upset.
I don't know what to do, or where I'm going.
The air is cold, the evening sun has set,
a curious, chilling off-shore wind is blowing;
it ruffles up the surface of the sea,
and sprays more sand against my little shack—
one summer evening, late, like this, you carried me
across the dunes for miles on your back;
and, once in town, we spread ourselves with honey
and, clothed in bees, held out your cap for money.

. . . More like a cat than anybody's child,
I slipped towards my mother's chair, unseen,
and watched her watch you dance. And then you smiled.
I stepped onto your feet. I was your queen.
We walked, and then we danced, across the floor,
I held your knees, your skin smelled warm and sweet,
my frilly dress was crushed, I wanted more,
you waltzed me backwards, balanced on your feet,
out beyond the terrace. *Don't you know
it's long past bedtime. I should be inside. . .*
But I was young then, it was long ago;
my heart has got much older since you died.
(It's like the eyeball of the hare we caught,
and dried, until it hardened; like a wart.)

Three sisters, like three hens, eye one another;
six hands, like sparrows, flutter up and down,
making wreaths for you, the sisters' brother,
from winter flowers whose petals have turned brown,
from rosemary and basil's grey and blue,
from lavender, and ivy from the apple;
from snowdrops tied in ribbon, berried yew—
six hands like hymns; the kitchen like a chapel
where hens and rabbits wander in and out,
and flowers and fruit-trees grow between the stones:
three lemons for the mousse; a lily; trout,
ten tickling fingers checking it for bones.
Chop, chop. That's it. There's nothing we can do.
A fly. A knife. The sickly smell of rue.

As usual, I have been ignoring them,
and when I come in with a loaf of bread,
I creep upstairs instead of calling them,
and eat my honey sandwich on my bed;
my ginger hare, relaxing by my side,
flashes me his pink, familiar grin—
the sort of grin you give a nervous bride—
and winks his eyes that scintillate like gin;
that look me over lovingly and say
Just you and me; while from their room downstairs
we hear the noise we seem to hear all day—
a heavy bumping, like bad-tempered bears
who wish they had the love they haven't got.
Don't try to say I'm nice—when I am not.

How could I love you, how could I be kind,
or kinder than I was? I was too shy.
I only thought of me, and I was blind
to you, your shyness, and the reasons why
you never talked; we never talked. Too bad.
It's no good my regretting all this now.
It's no good looking back and feeling sad—
remembering our Christmases, and how
you used to dress up in a long red coat,
and long white beard, that camouflaged your face;
and, rowlocks creaking, row the little boat
across the river to the landing-place.
You called my name, you rattled at my door:
I hated it. I should have loved you more.

From the river, mist on mist is rising—
brushing sleepy boats among the rushes,
ghostly herds of heifers; and surprising
early rabbits, speckled-throated thrushes;
drifting on the lawns where pink-nosed calves
are licking lilies, sniffing the white rose
that floats in mottled clouds along the paths
and into kitchens where the wild plum grows;
the emerald fly sucks sweetness from ripe pears;
fish swim above the flags that once were floors;
a horse lives in the drawing-room downstairs,
where roe-deer haunt the honeyed corridors;
fat hens make nests on feather-beds and chairs,
and up and down, like big gold fleas, hop hares.

The Lactose-Intolerant Daughter

John Lavery

I am the lactose-intolerant daughter. I had a raging temper when I was young.

My mother's sweet head with its creamy curls and cartoon-blue eyes turned and bobbed alertly atop her squat, inflexible body. She was four-foot-ten. And a quarter. My father, on the other hand, was well over six feet tall. He was, I suppose, a handsome man, in his way, in his harmless way, bearded, sloppy, burly in winter, fat in July.

My temper. I might lose it because the peas were hard, or because the button which my mother sewed on at the collar of my white blouse was pink.

I had a doll whose eyelids rubbed against the edge of the eye-holes with a dry, grating noise, a slow-witted noise. I would raise and lower this doll time after time so that the eyelids would open and close and I would hear again and again this sound which was like a hen's claw gradually tearing its way along my spine. Until I was in such an exalted state that anything, my mother's little floating laugh, or the smell of eggs on my father's breath, would cause all the little fires burning along my back to blow into the red hole of a brain that I have, and there would no longer be any doubt, any bravura, any lumps in my existence. There would only be screaming. Screaming, squirming, kicking, and breaking.

My mother would be desperate after these tantrums. Exhausted. My father would have found some reason to leave the house. And I, I would be very soft-eyed, very chalky, and untouchable.

I had a cousin who was five years younger than I was. I did not know her well, she died in a car accident at nineteen. Her husband died with her. I say husband. He was, at any rate, the father of the seventeen-month-old boy who survived them.

I was selling perfumed candles and rattan furniture at the time. My father thought it would be the right thing if I looked after little Nick. For a while.

Sure, I said to myself. Love to. Please, little Nick, eat. Please, little

Nick, sleep. Please, little Nick, stop shrieking, your parents will be home in another lifetime.

"We'll help you out with the money side of it," said my father, confidentially, as though we were cooking up a surprise for the late parents, and they musn't find out.

"Oh, the money's okay," I said. Like an idiot.

"You realize, do you, that Nick might be with you...for some months."

I can still hear the pearly vagueness of "some months." How many months did it end up being? Roughly. 250? About that.

He was exasperatingly sweet, was Little Nick. It irritated me that nothing he did irritated me. Long before he learned to talk, he could sing, belting out the national anthem, from listening to sports on television.

One day, he came home from grade one, stomped past me through the kitchen, and without even looking up said, "Hey, good-lookin'."

I was frightened. He was not mine. He could not learn in any orderly way. He could only pick up scraps when and where he wanted, and grind them all into a paste of niceness. He was too simple, too mysterious.

"Nichol P. Henry's the name," he used to say. "Double-draggin's the game."

Because right from the start he was very poor at school. Teacher after teacher, whether bun-haired and auntish, or lanky and concerned, would, at some point in the school year, look me in the face and say, as if they were the first to make the diagnosis, "I'm afraid Nichol has a learning disability." Generally, it was in a gymnasium, there were scattered triangular sandwiches left on paper plates on long wooden tables, there were mothers milling about everywhere, some of them waiting to talk to this same teacher about their wunderkind, not knowing whether to listen in with frank solicitude, or pretend not to hear.

Double-draggin'. I had an old, navy Raleigh 3-speed. I used to strap little Nick onto the seat, his feet in a pair of stirrups made from belts, and then pedal standing up. Nick called it double-draggin', and we did it for years. Eventually Nick did the pedaling, and I got the seat. We went double-draggin' everywhere, especially on the cemetery hills.

And to a hundred different grocery stores.

It is not difficult, generally speaking, to shoplift from grocery stores. You pay, of course, for bread and milk, a can of condensed soup and so on, and you walk out of the store with your pockets and intimate apparel stuffed to bursting. The truth is, as in any business venture, the more you pay for, the more you can steal.

I've been caught. Many times. So. I break into a sweat, and as always,

soon after I start to perspire, I start to cry. I put it all back on the shelves while some needle-toothed woman with skin that cracks like pink icing breathes behind me. So. They distribute your photograph to all the grocery stores in the neighbourhood. You move to a new neighbourhood.

Once, at Christmas, I was just pushing the door open to leave when the hand, barely heavier than its own shadow, placed itself on my shoulder, the voice exploded, pleasantly, "Excuse-me-madam-I-believe-you-dropped-a-glove-back-at-the-cash-if-you'll-just-come-with-me . . ."

There were four of them in the room. "We've been watching you," said one, "for over half an hour." So I started unloading onto the table all the Christmas surprises I had gotten for Nick, the champagne crackers, the olives, the snails, the snail shells, their eyes got rounder and rounder, I kept unloading, capers and smoked salmon and so on, and at the end I pulled out the ice-pack and the frozen duck. One of them got on the phone then, and soon afterward the police officer arrived.

I waited for hours in the police station. I was hot the whole time. I couldn't keep the perspiration from sprouting at the roots of my hair, or the tears from collecting in my lids, my jaw was aching close to my ears, and I wished I were at the sea, the real sea, gray, noisy, and insolent, where the wind pulls your hair across your mouth, and the sand is cold.

Until a brown-faced man with a horsehair moustache came across me, swore at me, and said, "Do you realize it's two AM in the morning?"

And then he asked me if I was planning to sit there all night long "hiding my light under the bushes" and if I was going to wait all my life for something to happen "like a lump in a bog," and after some more in the same vein he told me to go with a uniformed woman whose calves were made of shortening.

We went up some stairs and down some stairs and along several corridors, and then she stopped at a cupboard and took down a gray blanket, a gray towel, and some gray powder in a paper cup, which she gave me saying, "The shower's at the far end. Wash. Everything."

With one hand she opened a swinging door, and with the other, she guided me through without touching me. I was in a dormitory with tall bare windows through which entered a frosty light, glaucous and wet, so that I had the impression of being in an airy aquarium filled with sleeping lumpfish.

I was very tired. I drifted with my blanket, my towel and cleanser down to the far end, my head as though navigating through a school of stars. An older woman with pleated eyes was sitting on the floor, resting her shoulder against a fire extinguisher, holding a bottle of beer.

"Sit down," she said, and I did.

"Do you know," I said, "how much it costs to keep an archer in arrows?"

She snorted.

And that was all. She leaned against her fire extinguisher, and I leaned against her, and we drank and drank her smuggled beer. Eventually, she blew out so hard her lips vibrated, and then she got to her feet, pulling me up with her. We shuffled together into the john, settled into adjacent stalls, and crack! the sound of our micturitions rang out into the night like gunfire, on and on I peed, I was dreaming, this couldn't be me, this equine jet, my kidneys would surely fail, they would turn into dry knots, my skin into paper, I was terrified, I was laughing and laughing, we were both laughing and we could not stop.

When suddenly the stall door banged open, an enraged, shadowy she-walrus stood in the doorway, a thick, fingered flipper made for me, burst open my cheek. Small mercies, I thought, for my astonished bladder choked shut its flow at last.

There were other walruses outside arguing with my older woman in a gurgly English language unknown to me.

And then they had slid off back to their broken sleep, my older woman was helping me off the toilet, coocoorooing sharply, because clots of laughter continued still to heave drily in my throat, we paddled, lamely, me, my older woman, my strange face, and I, together into bed, at last, my cheek, she said, would be every, come and get me, Nick, I thought, come and get me, just look at me, Nick, I'm every, your cheek, she said, will be every, every colour, of the rainbow.

I might have been ten or eleven when my father took me to see the doctor.

"I would tend to suspect a physiological cause for her behaviour, allergies perhaps, or asthma. It might be dietary. I'd like to have her tested for lactose intolerance. It's a shame you didn't have her see someone before this."

"We should have, I know. Certainly, we should have," said my father. "So you don't think she's just plain cracked?"

"Children are never just plain cracked," said the doctor. "Adults maybe. Not children."

Do you know how much it costs to keep an archer in arrows?

The year Nick finished first in the province and second in Canada, he went through \$3,432 worth of arrows.

I know because the C.W.A.A. made me keep track that year. The year before I had applied for two \$6,000 grants. One in the name of Nichol P. Henry. The other in the name of Henry P. Nichol. Simple.

I got them both.

The C.W.A.A. discovered my little piece of deception, not without

embarrassment. They agreed that I would only have to pay back ten per cent of the grant acquired fraudulently provided I kept a documented accounting the following year to demonstrate why I needed so much money. Sweet of them. The resulting expense account for Nick's archery—equipment, travel, range time, club dues, tournament fees, chocolate bars—came to well over \$17,000. Even so, I was never granted more than \$8,000 by the C.W.A.A. in that or subsequent seasons. And, of course, once Nick achieved senior status I was no longer eligible for C.W.A.A. funding at all.

This is a young man who had—who had—definite Olympic potential.

The things I've sold to keep him shooting. Fruit trees, Chelsea flatware, drafting tables, bath pouffes, leaves of cheese, glow-in-the-dark jigsaw puzzles—I'm serious, depicting the night sky and constellations, very attractive really, and highly educational, I still have some if you're interested.

No house, no savings, no RRSPs.

Of course there's the darling little dye-guns. Remind me to tell you about the dye-guns.

Nick and Tibor Farkas were brothers-in-arms. Tibor had biblical cheeks, and a moulded lip over which sprouted, already at fourteen, a dry, Palestinian-blue moustache. His leaky eyes gave the impression of being well adapted to reading by moonlight. He was terrified of me.

Nick announced one day that he and Tibor were going to shoot in the Provincials. They started practising together like mad. And then, one day, Nick was sitting in the kitchen as sad as nails saying how the draw had been made up and how he and Tibor would have to shoot against each other in the second round and wouldn't both be able to qualify for the Provincials after all, and how they'd gone to see Mr. Jakanax, but he said he couldn't change the draw. And so on.

They went on practising like mad together, but now it was to expiate their grief. I observed Nick closely. I knew perfectly well he was capable of letting Tibor beat him, out of friendship.

So on the day before their match, I said I'd take the two of them out for barbecued chicken, and then I had my hair straightened. I decided I looked too much like a Peruvian Indian who ate black potatoes, so I went back and had it cut short. This was much better. In my charcoal jumpsuit and red pelerine cape, and with a little predacious eyework, I looked the perfect hooded, blood-stained crow.

This left me, however, with barely enough time to crush all the Aspirins, stir in the sugar, and slide the mixture into the little yellow draw-string sack that I had acquired with my Nina Ricci body powder, before the boys arrived and we set off together.

They were as morose and silent during the meal as the barbecued chicken they were eating. I sat, as I had intended, very close to Tibor, not, as I had intended, to intimidate him with my corvine sheen, but, in fact, because I badly needed the strength of his presence to carry it off. I was trembling so rapidly I was dizzy with nervousness, and his bare arm beside me was so still, his abstracted manner of eating so reassuring, and his dreamy affection for Nick so solid. I ordered him coffee after the meal without asking if he wanted it, and, for Nick, yet another giant Pepsi.

"I can't for the life of me," I said, "remember what the capital of Nebraska is. Go get the map book in the car, why don't you, Nick."

"Tibor'll go," said Nick.

"Nick . . .," I said.

"I'll go," said Tibor.

"Nick'll go," I said. And off Nick went, frowning, balancing a spoon on the tip of his index finger.

I took out my little yellow sack then.

"Artificial sweetener," I said. "Would you like some, Tibor?"

I poured the contents of the sack into his cup, all but a half teaspoonful or so which I poured into my own. My pulse fluttered in my lip as I stirred his coffee for him. I felt like one of those violent flowers which bursts open instantly in nature films, I was struck, suddenly, by the fetid swampland air, I heard the whish of red insects with complex wings investigating me.

Aspirin is what? \$2.59 a bottle? I was just playing, wasn't I.

At any rate, Tibor was in the hospital by four AM. The early hour might be thought of as indicating a somewhat excitable reaction on the part of his parents. There was, apparently, a little blood in his vomit.

And Nick qualified for the Provincials. He didn't win that year, although he did win, if I'm not mistaken, the next six years in a row.

I watched him as he stood aiming, so still, so solid on the legs he was forever strengthening. I slid into the arrow's cockpit, belted myself in, strained at the controls to keep the arrow on course during the fraction of a second of flight time as the target hurtled toward me. The jolt of impact made my throat bang against the back of my neck.

I have never been sick, with a disease. I have never suffered any real pain. I have no doubt that I will live till I'm ancient and die in a brief burst of energy, like a cheap light bulb. I have no doubt. I love to lie in the dark, in my ten-pound pyjamas, to feel and to listen as my gleaming intestines hum and mill, to uncover my pulse beating raptly just inside my Achilles tendon, in the root of my nose, under my coccyx, or to glide through the eddies of sensation oh, well beneath my little blind nipples, deeper even than the end of my uterus. I imagine my own creamy kidneys, my succu-

lent liver. I love my insides. I am chic, an elegant machine. Stunning.

Narcissus, flimsy soul that he was, should not have been either young, or gorgeous, or a man. He should have been chewy, middlingly aged, and a woman. Secure in the knowledge that no outsider would love her, ever.

But back to Tibor.

I visited him the following day in the hospital. The corridors were stifling. I found him sitting on the edge of his frame bed, dressed and with his boots on, waiting to leave, his lips plump and chapped from the dry hospital air.

“How are you feeling?”

He shrugged.

“Too bad you couldn’t shoot.”

He shrugged again. “Nick would have beat me.”

“Not necessarily.”

“Yes necessarily. I was going to let him if I had to. But I wouldn’t have had to.”

It was barely 5:30, already pitch dark outside, and cold. The street cats would be waking, stretching their arthritic limbs, licking the sand out of their oily paws, the black city fumes curdling their empty stomachs.

“I ralphed too, you know. Not as much as you.”

All part of the plan.

“Nick told me,” said Tibor. “He phoned me to say he won.”

I know, I thought. I dialed.

I was so hot in my coat. I could feel the perspiration running out of my new short hair, and down my neck.

“No more barbecued chicken for us for a while, I guess.”

“They don’t cook it enough,” said Tibor. “You can get salmonella from chicken. Not just pork.”

“Can you.”

Well, Tibor, I thought, we all have to make sacrifices for Nichol P., I’m afraid. I am afraid.

“Listen, Tibor,” I said, “I’m sweating like a salmon in here myself, and I guess you’re all set to go—your Mother’s coming is she?—so I’m going to head out.”

I had to keep telling myself as I hurried away that no one would suspect anything. It was common enough for people to be seen rushing through hospitals, crying. There was no need for alarm.

So the tests were done and, as it turned out, I was not able to properly metabolize the sugar constituent in milk. Lactose.

On the whole, though, I think my father would have preferred me to be just plain cracked. He could not accept that milk, the very first white-

toothed food, was in any way responsible for my, as he put it, indulgent temper. He wanted me to be guilty. Still more, he wanted to be guilty himself.

My mother, though, latched on to lactose intolerance like a baby to a pacifier. She could suck on it for hours, never tiring of telling her friends how difficult it was to keep milk out of my diet, especially with the other children being normal.

In fact, there always was, or almost always, "just a drop of" milk in the mashed potatoes, or cheese sauce half-heartedly scraped off the cauliflower. My mother was forever forgetting to order the lactose-free milk which her grocery store did not stock regularly but was able to get for her. And inevitably, inevitably, if we did have lactose-free milk in the house, we ran out of regular milk, and I would have to watch as the special, dark brown carton poured its contents out over heaping bowls of breakfast cereal.

After which I would have to listen as my father made everybody thank me for letting them use my milk.

And Death too. Death isn't some scrawny, lurking spy just waiting to slash away with his chipped scythe. I've seen Death. Death is a woman too. A young woman.

"Hello, Mrs. Henry," she said.

All the time Nick was going to High School, *quite* a number of years in other words, I was terrified of two things: drugs, and bimbos dreaming of skiwear and white oak cupboards. I needn't have bothered. His lack of interest in drugs resulted in Nick's never touching them. His lack of interest in girls resulted in his touching hundreds. If I met Nick after school for a hamburger, he might have a bimbo with him, or he might have two. He didn't introduce them, didn't even talk to them.

He talked to me.

I asked him once what he did talk about when he talked to girls.

"Oh," he said, pausing, pouting, "life."

"Hello, Mrs. Henry," she said. "My name is Joanna. I think it's wonderful, all you've done for Nick. I admire you."

I was eating barbecue chips and she, she was standing in the kitchen doorway, her arms wrapped around a white leather sports bag, very tall and plain-eyed, with a flat face, and a smile like a mosquito. She looked directly at me for several seconds, and then she was gone. I heard her talking with Nick, heard the front door close.

I think it's wonderful. Nobody had ever told me that.

I hated her. How could she know what I had done, what I was still do-

ing, for Nick. She who was bright and appealing and young. I hated her. It was humiliating to be put in a position where I could not help but feel gratitude.

Because I did feel gratitude. Nobody had ever told me that. And she was so bright and young, her forehead so full of projects. As young and appealing as a peeling birch, I thought, and the words rolled stupidly around in my head for hour upon hour.

I was going to tell you about the dye-guns.

Derek Thibodeau put me on to them. We went for ice-cream together during a Lotus 1-2-3 course. I licked my Apple-achian Mountain (mounds of maple ice-cream topped with chunky applesauce), and he, in his shimmering gray suit and dark V-neck sweater, told me about how much difficulty he was having telemarketing his dye-guns. He obviously believed in the product, which shot an indelible but harmless green dye. The idea was to stain the clothing of thieves and other assailants in order to be able subsequently to identify them. It was intended, of course, for women.

Now I will sell anything. Derek gave me 52 contact names and addresses established from his telequestionnaire. I sold 37 guns.

"It can't be!" he said. "How . . . did you sell . . . thirty-seven?"

But I wouldn't tell him.

Derek's long gone now, and there's zillions of dye-guns in purses everywhere. I don't know if any have ever gone off. A fad. I expect the bottom to fall out any time now.

Aim for the eyes, I tell them. Forget the dib-dab on the shirt cuff or the seat of the pants. Imagine your aggressor trying to hide with his face covered with green slime. It won't harm him, it won't even hurt him, but it won't come off either. Aim for the eyes.

Money. Finally.

Although every time I hand over my credit card, which I do now with considerable frequency, a few small bubbles of mockery, of disgust, pop in my heart.

Joanna. She was pretty much constantly underfoot. She cooked for us, did dishes, laundry. You don't have time, Mrs. Henry. No, but I didn't like her saying so. She was older than Nick, studying physical education at university. And she wanted Nick to go to university after the Commonwealth Games. Nick who was shaving by the time he left grade school.

She would say: Many students who do poorly in high school do well in university. Yes, I would say, but Nick wasn't a poor student, he was a terrible one. He has a learning disability. He's a dummy. If Nick's a dummy, there's lots of dummies in university. He just needs to learn to

work. He needs encouragement. Work! All he thinks about is nocking another \$25 carbon arrow into his \$1,500 bow. You're right, you know. He loves archery.

And he's good at it.

I could not get her to stop admiring me. I dug up all the dirt I could about myself. I told her I was cheap and ill-tempered, that I was banned from half the grocery stores in town, that I had been to jail. She admired me all the more. And I, for my trouble, simply fell into the habit of talking to her, of looking forward to talking to her.

We were staying in a hotel during one of Nick's tournaments. We had crossed several time zones, we were too tired and disoriented to eat, but we had to go down anyway and meet him at the banquet. We bumped each other in the narrow bathroom, sucked in our stomachs, held in our behinds in order to move about between the sink and the shower. Joanna had forgotten her eye make-up so she borrowed mine, asked me what shade would suit her and proceeded to use the same shade as I had. The result was so hideous that she thought the only remedy would be to put on the same orange cheek blush, and then the same heavy lipstick, so that we ended up looking surprisingly like each other, like two common clowns. We were a little giddy, we made faces together in the mirror to check the brightness of our teeth, and Joanna said, "Some girls are A-cups, some girls are B-cups. Us . . . we're eggcups."

It seemed very funny that evening. We hardly dared to look at each other during dinner. It didn't help that there were deviled eggs in the salad. And afterwards, when Nick had gone up to bed, we sat behind a spiky plant in the lobby, and watched bustlines go by.

I remember it was very windy. I was to show a house in the afternoon. Joanna had promised she would be back in time to go with me. She and Nick were out looking for furniture. They were moving into an apartment together.

I went into Nick's room. There was the poster of a hockey player named Williams which must have been fifteen years old and which I had acquired for him because I thought every boy wanted a poster of a hockey player. Every time we moved I put it up in his new bedroom. I guess he liked it. He never took it down.

The ribbons and trophies were in boxes in his closet.

There was a folding cot for Joanna.

There was a book holding the window open. Nick could not sleep unless the door was closed and the window was open. I closed the window. There was a telephone number written on the cover of the book. A phone number, a date, and the initials, "C. L."

Now this intrigued me, because the rendezvous in question had taken place since the time when Nick's every move had to meet with Joanna's approval. He couldn't have been touching bimbos behind her back, could he? I dug out his archery log and learned that on that particular day he had run three miles, done 130 sit-ups, and shot 250 rounds. But he had not seen anyone with the initials "C. L." Not in connection with archery.

So I spent a very long half an hour going through all the L's in the phone book, found nothing, and ate a box of eggrolls.

And then I had the bright idea of looking through the bills that Joanna made me put into big brown envelopes now that she was keeping my books for the accountant. And there it was, the phone number, the very one, on the optometrist's bill. The bill, that is, for contact lenses.

I should have remembered. I gave them to him after I sold my three-thousandth dye-gun or something. Joanna told me he wanted them. I guess he liked them. He wore them.

I had two hours to wait until Joanna got back. It was so hot and stuffy, and I was starting to perspire.

As it turned out though, I only had one hour to wait. They arrived together. Windy with happiness.

"You won't beLIEVE," squealed Joanna, "all the stuff. Listen listen listen listen listen!"

They had gone to a Jewish used furniture store. A junk store in other words. The owner was dressed in a crumpled black suit, a fur hat, and at least twenty years of beard. They had looked around nervously, found a sofa. Two hundred dollars, said the beard. They could get a new sofa, thought Joanna, at a discount store for not much more than that. Two hundred dollars, said the beard. They were just pushing the door open to leave, when the voice, barely heavier than a shadow, said, Wait. I have lamps. He had two carved wooden lamps, one a moose, the other a boy leaning against a lamppost. Nick loved them. Sofa and lamps, two hundred dollars. Well... no thanks all the same. Wait. I have chairs. He came back with four bundles of sticks wrapped in string. You glue, you clamp, he said. You varnish. Brand new chairs, made to look old. Like... like this one there. Brand new. Two hundred dollars. Sofa, lamps, chairs. Well... okay, we'll take them. Wait, said the voice, I have mixmasters.

They were brimming over with happiness. Their two hundred dollars had bought them enough junk to start their own store. And I was so glad they were there that I wished Joanna would forget about the house we were supposed to show. So glad I could have screamed at them. So glad I wished they would abandon me right then and there.

We left Nick phoning to rent a truck, I remember that, and I remember stopping as we always did at the bakery to buy some hot rolls to put in

our purses so the house we were trying to sell would smell enticingly of fresh bread, but I do not, I do not remember getting back in. I do not remember the expressway. I remember I was in an arrow hurtling towards the target, I remember a roaring in my ears which might well have been the people in the stands standing, I remember the jolt of impact which made my voice bang against the back of my neck.

But I do not remember . . . anything . . . real.

I remember it was very windy.

And I remember death. I've seen death. Death, you see, is a woman, a young woman, she has a long body, angular and taut, harmonious. She flows among us, energetic, although not hasty. She admires us.

She wants us so much to like her.

My mother fed on my temper, didn't she. I needed her. Obviously. How could anyone flailing away on the floor like a pinched beetle and shrieking loud enough to melt a stone not need help. A tapeworm, though, does not nibble out so much of the insides of its host that the host out-and-out dies. No, no. Parasites must be subtle, self-disciplined. My mother was my parasite. She needed to help me, therefore she did not want to cure me.

My father was my meek predator, my oilbird, my goatsucker. He flapped around in my temper, getting redder and redder, holding me down as I squealed and spat, trying to outsquawk me, until, with my gooey rage still clinging to his bill and his bent feathers, he plumped off awkwardly, miserable, looking for some dark corner to lick his wings, alone.

Between the two of them, they ate me up.

Nick's gone. He does not believe I cannot remember if I was driving. He says if I can't remember it means I was. He told me so. That and some other things that he shouldn't have said to his mother. His soul is broken.

He thinks I hated Joanna. He said so. I can't remember. The first person who got to me found me walking in a daze down the expressway. I had lost my voice. I don't remember. All I remember is seeing Joanna's long body. They had pulled her out of the back seat. She couldn't have been sitting in the back.

I couldn't have.

I just couldn't.

Nick's gone. I can't stay here.

I'm going home. My father has glaucoma. My mother's immense.

Won't they have fun, digesting their lactose-intolerant daughter.

Lynnette (Dueck) D'anna

What Will Happen

what will happen when you place your face under
hers and she moves and she
moves and when next you look she is gone is
gone and then and when you

place your faith in something moving in some
one moving faster than the sky faster
than the moon the moon she sets she rises she
grows full then she fades

what will happen to your faith then when no moon
rises when no star sets what will? when
love blows she blows when lust when love she spins &
turns & ebbs like ocean what

will happen then & when the sand she lifts she
lifts in waves in rhythm to your rigid heart your
upright heart & she blows around like dust like
dust and when she rests far away from you some

where & she moves she lifts she blows she fades & you
are left alone what will happen then will you
run will you run you run like water down some path her voice
fastened to your soul forever, for ever there is, what will?

Jay Ruzesky

Black and White

The next day
the cop studied the ticket.
Looked at the J
and the line after like a mountain road
on a map.
He remembered workers in the onion fields
who stopped to watch,
their smiles as Dean signed the ticket
with extra flourish.
Remembered the silver Porsche
as it came off 'The Grapevine' doing sixty-five
in a forty-five zone,
and slipped down the road like a spilled glass
of cheap whisky, and how
Dean had pulled down his hat
and handed back the book and pen without seeing him,
had ignored his safety lecture
and accepted his thin copy of the violation
as if it was money, stuffed it
into his pocket and drove off into the sunset
as though the whole thing had been staged.

And the sergeant took off his gun
and set it beside him
as he sat down behind his unmovable
oak desk and signed his own name
over and over on a piece of clean
white paper, Dean's ticket above and left,
so he could see the similarities
and differences between them.

Various Degrees Of Nakedness

Lisa Moore

The top half of Joan's house caught fire and burned while she slept downstairs. The microwave and television melted. They were as smooth and shiny as beach rocks. She woke up to make herself a cup of tea in the morning and when she got upstairs everything was black. The furniture was in cinders. The windows were blackened with soot. She walked into the centre of the living-room and looked around her. The footsteps behind her exposed the green and gold shag carpet beneath the soot. It occurred to her she must still be asleep.

She went back downstairs and sat on the edge of her bed. Then she went upstairs again. She picked up the phone but it was dead. Her greenish gold footsteps were the only colour in the room. It reminded her of Dorothy on her way to the Emerald City.

The fire chief said it was a miracle she was still alive. The temperature had risen to three thousand degrees. There were large double-paned patio windows. The inside panes broke but the fire ran out of oxygen before the outside panes broke. The fire chief said if the second pane had broken or if she had gotten up in the middle of the night and opened the back door, the house would have exploded. Joan said she felt as if she had been stripped.

She and her twelve-year-old son, Wiley, moved in with us. Wiley had been at his grandmother's the night of the fire. Joan says she keeps having the same nightmare. Her hand on the brass doorknob of the back porch. Everything in sharp focus, like before a storm. Wiley is standing outside the door in the forest. In the dream, Wiley is a baby. She knows she can't open the door; he's toddling through the woods to the highway. He waves to her the way he first learned to wave, with both hands, the fingers pointed toward himself. Her palm is sweaty, and she turns the knob. The house blows up. In the dream, she sees two-by-fours twirling into the sky like batons.

One night during the dream she reached for the glass of water by the bed and threw it over herself. She woke because she smacked the bridge

of her nose with the glass, and water was running down her nightdress, between her breasts, down her spine. She had a little half-moon bruise on the bridge of her nose.

I have become interested in nakedness. All the different kinds. Especially since my sister-in-law moved in. It's as if she can't keep herself covered, things always seem to slip away from her. I walked in on her in the bath once. Her skin was tanned in the shape of her bathing suit. The skin of her torso seemed very white, the colour of a tree when you strip off the bark.

Before supper, my husband Mike shoves Joan out the front door and locks it. There's a small square window in the front door. Joan has her face pressed against it. She's giggling, and saying, "Come on now, Mike, let me in."

There are seven neighborhood boys armed with water balloons standing in a semi-circle around her, arms raised.

Mike puts his face to the window so he can meet Joan's eyes and quietly lifts the mail slot, sticks a pistol through and squirts, hitting the crotch of her jeans. It takes her a moment to realize what's happening. Then Wiley, who has gone to the third floor, opens the window over the front door and drops a wobbling balloon on her head. She shrieks. The boys open fire. The balloons splat against her. The breeze changes direction. At the end of the street eight girls are lined up from one sidewalk to the other. They seem to be advancing to the music of the sea cadets' band in the Star of the Sea Hall at the end of the street. Each one has a swollen balloon that she holds like a baby. The boys are still for a second, then one of them yells "Run!" and they tear down the street, their sneakers slapping on the pavement. Mike lets Joan inside.

I've persuaded Joan to go to the only strip joint in town with me tomorrow night. I just want to see what it's like. A woman can't get in without a male escort, and since Joan's hair is very short she's going to dress like a man. The newspaper ad says formal wear required. The woman on the phone said that they mean no construction boots or torn shirts. I dig out the tuxedo Mike wore to our wedding for Joan to wear.

I've gotten into the habit of telling the woman who sells the coffee and muffins in the cafeteria where I work the most intimate things about myself. I'm not usually one for telling strangers things. Early in the morning the ugly cafeteria is huge and empty; my footsteps echo as in a cathedral. Usually it's just the two of us at that hour. She wears a brown polyester suit with two seams down the front and a gold bull horn on a chain around

her neck. Sometimes when I fall asleep I can see that horn and the skin of her neck. The exact location of her mole, the tiny gold horn jiggling while she wipes the counter. When I give her a twenty she looks at me as if I should know better. She says, with her eyebrow arched, "Are you trying to break me?"

Sometimes just as I'm dropping off to sleep I see her arched eyebrow, exaggerated, and a disconnected voice, "Are you trying to break me?"

I have told her, for instance, that my sister-in-law has moved in because her house burned down, that she hates her ex-husband. That we have no idea when she will move out. That my husband had a daughter with another woman, before he met me. Sometimes we have the child over for supper. I have told the cafeteria woman I believe Joan got drunk and set fire to the house on purpose. Often I find myself saying to her "Strange old world, isn't it?" and shaking my head like an old man. She wears a plastic name tag that says 'Cathy.' Once I said "Good morning Cathy" and she said "That's not my real name." She didn't tell me what her real name is.

Joan's last boyfriend broke up with her two or three nights before the fire. She says he was a real sweetie. She slapped a newspaper at his chest outside a restaurant and it bounced off and fell between a mail box and a newspaper vending box. It's still there. We walk past it on the way to the supermarket. It's waterlogged and you can see she twisted it in her fists before she flung it at him.

Later that night, when Wiley is in bed, Mike and I fight. I throw my cup of coffee across the room as hard as I can. The cup hits the wall behind his head and leaves a mark in the gyrock like a frown. There are no curtains on the front window. It's dark outside and the living-room is lit like a fishtank. A woman in a cotton skirt with a black palm leaf print is standing on the opposite sidewalk under a streetlamp, arms crossed over her breasts. She is watching the fight as if it were a movie. Then on our side of the street two heads pass under the window, a man and a woman. They wave, surprised to see us. Mike's face is still stiff with anger, but both of us wave back, uncertainly. They knock on the door. It turns out they were neighbors of ours two years ago. We hardly spoke to them then and haven't seen them since. But they seem delighted to see us. Mike and I stand in the doorway, forced to talk to them. I can feel the snarl on my face thaw. The breeze is warm and it rushes through the trees on the traffic island as if it can't make up its mind which way to go.

The guy is tanned and is carrying a tennis racket. He mimes taking swings as he talks. He says, "Yeah, I was away studying giant clams, they weigh as much as fifty kilos. The shells don't really shut all the way,

you can stick your whole arm in there, it's real fleshy. Isn't it honey?" he says to his girlfriend. "They just suck your whole arm, for hours if you let 'em. The islanders say if you eat that flesh it's an aphrodisiac, makes the adolescent penis grow or something. You know, they're a small people down there, aren't they, honey? They used to joke about how big I was, they said Barb must be a happy woman."

Barb smiles up at him, and her mouth glitters unexpectedly with braces. "Oh, they thought Tony was real big."

When Mike shuts the door, he says, "That cup could have killed me."

I say, "Are you trying to break me?"

Then he gets a cloth from the kitchen and wipes the splattered coffee off the wall. Joan walks in at that moment, sees the broken cup and leaves.

When Mike and I make love a blush comes into his cheeks and the tips of his ears. That's my private colour for him, almost plum. The first time we were together we were behind the row housing under crisscrossing clotheslines, white shirts laughing with their bellies. We were drunk and his tongue in my ear sounded like a pot of mussels boiling, the shells opening, the salty shells clicking off one another. The whole thing was a riot of tiny noises. I got the flu. He made a pot of tea: cinnamon, cloves, apple and orange chunks. The next day we made love in his new house, empty of furniture, except for a couch covered with satiny parakeets, belonging to the former owners. Streetlight poured in, a plastic bag of chicken breasts glowing on the floor where I dropped it. I had been swimming in a hotel pool that day where they sold paper bathing suits. I made him close his eyes, and I put on the damp suit, which smelled of chlorine and was indestructible.

Once Mike did a tour of a glass blowing factory. They chose him out of the tour group to do the blowing. When we first met he gave me an irregular perfume bottle with his breath caught in it, caught in bubbles. I've worn lilac since I was thirteen. When he took the stopper off it surprised me to smell myself. Lilac on the sanded wand he rubbed down my neck, sticky and warm. It was as if he trapped all my years in a bottle, then he trickled them down my neck. Now he wants to leave for a year, to work. I don't want him to go. I need him here. I'm afraid of him leaving. It looks as though Joan and I will share an apartment if he leaves.

Today around five the doorbell buzzes and it's Jill, a little girl who plays with Wiley. The street is full of squad cars, the police are putting on bulletproof vests. They take rifles and guns out of the trunks of the cars and load them with bullets. A cop comes to the door and pushing Jill from be-

hind says, "Can she stay in there, she can't go around the corner."

I ask what's going on, my voice shrill. The cop looks as if he's going to answer me but then he turns and trots down the street with the gun. A CBC van arrives. Some guy coming up the street says there's a man in one of the houses around the corner with a gun. Princess Anne had been on George Street earlier in the day. I'd taken Wiley and a bunch of neighborhood kids to see her. I think it must be a sniper who has run up from George Street. Wiley is on the concrete step of the house across the street, eating a supper of Jigg's dinner the next door neighbor has given him. The cop cars glitter between us and I say, "Get over here."

"What about my supper?"

"Just get over here." He comes over with the plate. I phone Jill's mother, Maureen, to tell her Jill is with us. A cop answers the phone. "Sergeant Peddle," she says.

I say, "Oh can I talk to Maureen?"

She says, "I wish you could, but I can't get her down. What do you want?"

I say I just wanted to tell her her daughter's at my house, I'm a neighbor.

"Okay the daughter's at your house." Sergeant Peddle hangs up. I whisper to Mike, "The man with the gun is in Maureen's house."

We met Maureen through Wiley. Maureen's a lesbian. We've never seen much of her partner, who's a surgeon. They keep pretty much to themselves but since Joan has moved in she and Maureen call each other every now and then to ask if the other would mind babysitting for half an hour.

After twenty minutes the cops pull away but the CBC is still there with the cameras. Jill wants to go home. I phone Maureen. The phone rings for some time before she picks it up. I hear nothing but long sobs. I keep saying, "Maureen?" but she just sobs into the phone, no words. I tell her I'm Joan's sister-in-law and I say, "I have your daughter here." She doesn't say anything. I say, "Do you want me to come down?"

"Yes."

The large glass window in the front door is smashed in. Broken glass covers the concrete steps. Inside, the plush carpet crunches with every step. I call out to her. In the hall, two framed paintings have been torn off the wall, the frames cracked in half. Maureen is in the kitchen with her head in her arms on the table. The window beside her is smashed. The contents of the fridge lie all over the floor, and the glass shelves have been torn out of it. Some kind of orange drink was spilled on the floor so as I walk across to the table my sneakers make a sound like ripping cotton. I put my arms around her and put one hand over hers, I rub the back

of her thumb with mine. I say, "Who was it? Who did this? Was there a man with a gun in here?" She shakes her head. "Was it your ex-husband?" She shakes her head.

I let go of her and turn on the kettle. I realize I don't know her at all. There are three giant yellow tubs of margarine laying on their sides. It seems like an incredible amount of margarine. I can't believe how much damage there is. I think about the kind of rage it would take to sustain this much damage. I think about the damage the fire had caused in Joan's house. I feel very tired. It seems utterly still. I say, "Where's your partner? Can I call her for you? Does your partner know this has happened?" The phone book is open beside her. "Let me call your partner for you."

Maureen raises her head. Her eyes are sunken and bloodshot from crying or alcohol. "This was my partner," she says.

I sit down. "This was your partner," I repeat. "She did this. How did the cops get here?" I am afraid. The kettle whistles. "Where are the teabags?" She points.

"She's caused over 2,500 dollars worth of damage in the last three months. I've had to replace every window more than once. She doesn't let me out. She doesn't let me see anyone. She'll be back, she'll kill me tonight, I can't get away from her. If she was a man I would have done something, I wouldn't have put up with it. But it's taken my mother so long to understand, how could I tell them this now?"

The breeze blows gently through the window. It is the sunniest day we've had in a long time. You can hear some of the music from the Canada Day celebrations. I ask about the cops.

"I was sitting on the front step and the glass just showered down on top of me and I said by Jesus that's the last time she'll break a window in my house and when Tom from next door came through the door I was in the process, I was proceeding to kill her. I said, Tom call the cops please. They came in and arrested her."

Somebody knocks on the door. Maureen crumples. "Please don't let anyone in, please."

I walk out over the glass. A man is standing outside. He says, "I'm with the CBC, can you tell us what happened here, we heard someone was arrested."

I say, "Well, it's pretty insensitive to come around here right now, isn't it?"

He says, "We didn't know what happened, that's all."

I say, "Well nobody here's going to tell you." It strikes me how absurd it is to speak to him through the broken window without opening the door. Down the street a man is pointing a camera at us.

Then Maureen and I drink the tea. We sit in silence until the phone

rings. It's Mike. He asks if everything is okay. He says he is going to order the kids a pizza. I say that sounds good. I tell Maureen Jill can sleep at our house. We get a broom and start to clean up. Maureen gets out a big sheet of plastic she has for sealing broken windows.

When I get home Joan is dressed in Mike's tuxedo. She hasn't heard anything about the incident on the street and is dressed to go to the strip joint. I expect the dancers to be ugly in some way. But they have beautiful bodies. They dance on a raised stage and the bottom of it is covered with mirrors. I have never been in this bar before. They have ultra-violet lighting that seems to erase everything in the room except whiteness. The women wear white G-strings so their crotches glow as if they are free floating. There's a man in a dark suit and tie sitting at the table in front of me. I glance up and see him in the mirrors around the bottom of the stage. The mirrors reflect him from the neck down; his head is above stage level. His white collar is glowing, sharply cut. It looks at first glance like a headless body. I watch his hand in the mirror lift his scotch and aim it at the empty neck of his shirt.

Joan and I are loaded, walking home past the Anglican cathedral. She starts to cry. I never hug people. I'm not a very physical person in that way. But I hug her very suddenly. I draw her body into mine and I grab her hair in my fingers. It shocks me when I realize I have a fistful of her hair in my hand. It is the exact texture of my husband's. She's wearing my husband's jacket over the tuxedo. The jacket is gold silk. It looks like a wedding band on him. It has started to rain on our way home while she is crying. The rain falls in giant splotches on the quilted jacket, making it heavy and tarnished.

William Logan

three poems

1857

The *Fleurs du mal* betray the *Fleurs de l'Inde*
Rimbaud would promise *Une Saison en enfer*.
In these and other matters we have sinned.

Her sailors brought to France the tamarind
that graced the hothouse garden's *jardinière*,
but *Fleurs du mal* betray the *Fleurs de l'Inde*.

L'Orientalisme's fading wind
gabbles at the gaslight like a prayer.
In these and other matters we have sinned

by letting gardens grow undisciplined.
Traduttore traditore, declare
the *Fleurs du mal*, but not the *Fleurs de l'Inde*.

Read Proust, Verlaine, or Mallarmé, chagrined
by all such orchids suffer unaware
of these and other matters. We have sinned

each time a word of ours has helped rescind
the privilege of lies. Poor Baudelaire.
The *Fleurs du mal* betray the *Fleurs de l'Inde*.
In these and other matters we have sinned.

Auden at C_____ C_____

The ink of twilight stains the Gothic mullions.

Before the common-room's split panelling,
you mumbled to a pair of carpet slippers
the words that once had made a difference.

Old master, face graven like the ruined tracks
of Weimar Berlin, the subway lines gauged east
through stations blooming like the cereus,
how illustrate the night of Marxist doctrine,
the vague incitement to the candled mass,
now lawyers at Wall Street's famous victory?
Not one still worships at your bedded grave,

not one the gorging literary worm

whose grinning rage expels in harmless drudgery
the ink and woodpulp of the mastered will.

On the Ordination of Women

Like a dog's walking on his hinder legs

The dark comes on in damning silhouettes.
The falcon and the hunter's rig conspire
along the roads that fear has organized

and those who lie down in speech by cold waters
will find compassion passion's substitute.
To become mere idea behind the nave

where traitorous families blind their sons
in the barber-pole shades of cassock and cotta,
barking behind their wrists, would carve

concession from the grand Concessionaire.
The old pretenders hover in sackcloth and ashes,
begging absolution for the Absolute.

To followers the poisoned leaders pass,
consorts of the shielded eye, harriers of the ear,
of the tongue's displacement, the hand's thwarted housing.

The wafer settles within dry mouths,
and choirboys chorus their satisfactions
down the clumsy corridors of the throat:

*Sir, it is not done well; but you are surprised
to find it done at all.* The orison
delivered by an unnamed priest: *Ordaining you*

would be like ordaining a dog or a potato.

Omens

Rai Berzins

Saying I'm a sensitive person, I don't say that to brag. I taped this list of things that cause depression? things to watch out for, onto the fridge: cholesterol, coffee, excess protein, lack of exercise, high fat intake, alcohol, smoking, emotional stress, excess sugar, excess salt. Smokes I been off for seventeen months (and counting), I eat alright, I swim and bike, and booze I'm almost sensible with. Where I let slip was emotional stress. And it wasn't even my own.

Gwen says you can't save other people's lives. She's a nurse. She means in the general sense. She's seen some things—chronic behaviour, donut fiends with heart conditions, those who come in dying of their spouses, or exhausted from the grief of others. She says she waits for miracles, personally and professionally, not that she expects them. I couldn't. You might as well wait for evolution. Me, I pretty much have to numb out the part of the brain that makes me aware on a day-to-day basis how people operate. Some of the chemicals I work with help. Still you can wind up open to stuff, other people's stuff coming in the back door.

Darlene drops by one day, this is months ago, just for a visit she says at the start. It's mid-afternoon so I offer her a beer, it doesn't seem stupid, ones my boyfriend Lloyd left, European something or other—*Tuborg* maybe or *Heineken*. Anyhow, Darlene says sure and drinks one, puts it back like water, which should've been a sign. She makes some comment how beer is beer and where do the Europeans get off thinking theirs is so superior. Then she has another.

Three have gone down and she's into her fourth before I can get near what she wants. I work restoring furniture and mostly I work at home and my work-space I like cause it gets for one thing so much light. Afternoons are the best time. I can live with disruptions, it's not that, but it's not like Darlene's a close friend, or that I asked her to drop by whenever. We met at a party, what kept us in contact was her needing a sitter on occasion. Simon's eight but might as well be fifty. The father's one of those guys who calls up every couple months to apologize. He can't make support, his money's tied up in a scheme that's always about to take off, after

which of course there'll be piles, trips to Jamaica, bicycles. Simon's got a bike, one he bought himself from money he made selling chocolate bars. He listens to the promises, he knows them well. So does Darlene but she still half-believes them. Simon says his Dad likes to talk, that's how he puts it—likes to talk. That's all he says. It's enough.

Comes out it wasn't so simple as a visit. Darlene's dying of cancer, she tells me, business-like, through this mouthful of smoke. I nearly fall right off my chair. But Darlene wasn't looking for sympathy, what she needed to know was whether or not I'd consider adopting Simon. She said she probably had half a year anyway, but this wasn't something you could put aside. I asked about Carl, her ex, or any other relative or friend of the family.

"I thought *we* were friends," she goes.

I tell her we are. Meaning as opposed to enemies.

She launches into the whole long mess of her childhood, the neglect and gunshots and so on. She says she'd as soon not have any of them know. And it all came back, the first night we talked, at that party, how I couldn't believe someone could chat about that shit so calmly, especially with a stranger. I thought about how protected I'd been, having a family that hugged and talked. I'd had some hairy times myself, but stuff more often than not I'd had a hand in, getting too high in the wrong circumstances, not knowing the language in a scary foreign bar.

Daryl at this point she hadn't known that long, she'd opened her legs but not a lot else. I just figured it was on-again-off-again, that even she wasn't sure there was anything to count on behind the strut and asshole facade. What I need actually's an early warning system, some kind of radar, or filter attachment I could strap to my head, it's ridiculous. Without much thought—I'd had some beers myself—I look around the kitchen and tell her sure, I'd be there for Simon, I wouldn't let her down. She tells me not to worry myself, who knows, a cure might be just around the corner, or maybe she'd find a way to fight the thing off. I thought, holy shit this woman's made of steel. I asked her what kind of cancer it was but she changed the topic, and I figured—fine.

It's none of my business what Darlene sees in Daryl, besides the fact that their names sound close. Maybe his authority, how he's got an answer to every question, he answers things that aren't even questions, and on the rare occasion he *asks* one you know you've only got so many seconds before he goes and answers it himself. So whenever he'd say things like *how you doing* I'd shrug and let him fill in the blank. I have my dark days, ones you could sit and watch the house burn down around you, drink a glass of varsol, but you don't, something stops you. I sure wasn't going to bring this up with Daryl. So, instead, he brings up Lloyd.

Lloyd's a photographer, the kind that travels. We met through the Skills Exchange, we shared a classroom. He's not ambitious but he makes a living. Me too, when it comes to that. The big surprise was he wasn't a control freak. I actually lost it to a photographer, I was seventeen, he was twenty-eight. He liked to call me *water nymph*, took all these pictures of me in the bath. My skin'd pucker, but he said be patient, he'd learned when you dealt with the photo-muse the central thing was patience. I'm average-looking, I got no delusions. But when you're seventeen, and getting called a water nymph, you can end up in bathtubs way more than you need. Lloyd believes in the photo-muse as much as I do in the furniture-muse. When I found out that, I knew we'd get along.

First time they met—Daryl and Lloyd—Lloyd was about to head off north to where all those caribou got wiped out. Another similar wipe-out was expected, courtesy the power dams. Daryl asked Lloyd if he'd lived in the North. When Lloyd said no, Daryl said maybe then he wouldn't fully understand the job creation aspect. Lloyd sort of lied. He was born in the Yukon but his parents moved south when he was two. Daryl was born in Parry Sound, a couple hours north of Toronto, and anyone who does not know this has not listened. Their conversation went downhill from there, the next time they met they hardly spoke, but Daryl continued to ask me how he was. I didn't lie, I let him know. Lloyd had opportunities coming out his ears. Most recently, south, stuff on peasant communities surviving without the CIA.

Daryl had come by to pick up Darlene, which was just as well since the beers were gone, and I dreaded getting sober in that room with her then.

"So he just takes pictures?" Daryl wants to know.

I toss out an estimate for sales for the year.

"Lucky guy," he goes. "Some of us work."

Daryl's work is renovating houses. It'd been pretty tough of course with the recession, but he made a bundle during the boom. Darlene told me once, in strictest confidence, he had this idea of being an architect but couldn't take the thought of going back to school.

"Work's what pay's the bills," I go, and notice my hands which are a sight in themselves. I'd gouged a knuckle a couple days before, and ran out of mineral spirits halfway through a tricky stain job on a whiner's chair.

"Nicky," goes Daryl, "what we do's work." Meaning not wimp-shit, meaning me and him. Whenever we meet he wants to test my grip. I got some pretty big staple-guns. But picture-taking he figures is fun, or else people wouldn't do it on their holidays. He's got a camera himself, a new one, and all you got to do so he says is point the thing in the right direction. Camera does the rest. I don't argue.

This is maybe two months later, and with Darlene I'd walked a fine line. I didn't mean to, it just sort of happened, she didn't broach the issue and neither did I.

I'm bringing Simon back after having him one Saturday. It's late afternoon, a nice spring day, and we'd been to the park and thrown a basketball around. I used to play a lot really, got scouted by some schools in the States, but never got my act in gear to end up actually going.

Daryl had moved in a few weeks before and his presence was everywhere, inside and out. He had this sixty-something Chevy he'd dug up out of a Springsteen song spread out in pieces across the backyard. He'd gone out looking but all he found was one in perfect working order, which he'd had to then dismantle in order to build back up from scratch. Which was fine with Darlene. It kept him busy.

He looks up from a fender as we're coming in, and scowls.

"Whose is that?"

"Mine," I go.

"Yours?" he goes. "What d'you need a basketball?"

"To play," I tell him.

Simon giggles.

"You shoulda told me," Daryl says to Simon. "You wanna play B-ball, I'll take you out."

Simon reminds him they don't own a ball.

"You want a ball, we'll get a ball," says Daryl like a Dad.

Simon looks at me, then shrugs. Then follows me inside.

We're sitting on the couch, Darlene and me, we're having a beer, she's got on music videos, Simon's in the bath, and Daryl's still outside. It hits me—before she gets too wrecked—now might be a good time to talk. I ask how things are going, but vague-like, giving her the option.

"O.K.," she says, like I asked about the weather. The video she's staring at isn't that exciting.

"Really?" I go, since *O.K.* doesn't say much.

She turns to look at me, her face is a mask. Then for some reason she breaks out laughing. Then she stops.

"Yeah," she goes, "why?"

I start to think it's medication.

"You know," I say. "With the cancer . . .?"

It's like I'm speaking in another language. Her face clouds over, she looks real puzzled, then it brightens like everything's fine.

"Oh . . . *that*," she finally goes.

Daryl marches in with a six-pack on a collar and takes a seat across from us. "I guess you might not realize," he says, "I used to play some ball myself."

I nod and turn right back to Darlene but she's in the meantime gone spaniel over Daryl.

He asks if I ever heard what happened in the pen.

"Tell her, tell her!" says Darlene like it's Christmas.

"Easy, honey, the clock ain't runnin'," Daryl says with this cool grin. Not that I cared but this was his story: He'd played in a league in Kingston in the seventies. They played other city teams, the colleges, and prisons. He couldn't remember which pen it was, but halfway through the game he caught an elbow from a convict, and waited till the ball came back his way. When it did the guy was on him, Daryl turned, faked the shot, then swung the ball with all he had in a hard tight hook at the other's gut. Knocked his wind out. The guy dropped. The refs didn't see it, or if they did they must've thought it was a pass, they didn't call it. The main thing to Daryl was the convict *knew* Daryl knew, and his buddies knew and the other team knew, even the spectators: no one screws with Daryl and walks away.

He throws back his head and with it half a can of beer, shifts back forward, and looks at me.

I look at the TV but there's a commercial. I see Darlene's cigarettes right within reach, have to remind myself I don't smoke, I don't need that number for the trained professionals waiting on-call to talk me off the nicotine, it isn't the nicotine, what it is is needing something to shut my mouth.

"Sorry if I bored you," says Daryl.

"No," I say, "but it sounds pretty stupid."

Cut his throat the blood couldn't drain any faster from his face.

"It wasn't his fault," Darlene lets me know. "You gotta pay'm back or they'll make you their door-mat."

"Darlene," says Daryl. And that's all he has to. It's like he pulled her plug. He gets up, takes his beer and walks it around the room. "Some people," Daryl announces, "think they got the line on it all. They got a boyfriend who travels all over, who takes pretty pictures and sends them postcards."

Lloyd, whether or not Daryl knew it, was down in Nicaragua at that moment. There *had* been postcards and they had me worried. Lloyd was overwhelmed by the place and was looking into getting a placement. Which was all fine and good except I don't speak Spanish, and redone Victorian isn't like a *need*. Least of all though did I need Daryl's input.

"Ever wonder," Daryl goes, "what he's always doing on the other side of the world? Staying home nights writing you letters? Yeah, right, and I'm the Man from Glad."

I ask him (not very nicely) what his problem is.

He just smirks, turns and leaves.

Darlene shrugs, rolls her eyes, and smokes like no tomorrow. She won't defend him but she isn't going to criticize. Bloom's still on the rose, as they say.

"Honey, show her the tickets," Daryl yells in from the other room.

Darlene picks up her purse from the floor, and takes out an airline ticket envelope. She looks up from under her lids like they're curtains, says in this voice that's just learned how to talk—"Daryl's taking me on vacation. *Club Med*. The one in the Bahamas." Far as I knew they shared expenses. Meaning, I guess, it was his idea.

"Great," I say, like I'm taking a pill.

They had reservations for a few weeks away, they were waiting on their tax returns. The thing was, could I take Simon for the week? I tell her it's not a good time for me. Lloyd I was expecting back the very same weekend they were planning to leave.

"So you can't help me out," she says in this monotone.

"It's just me and Lloyd need some time," I say.

"Don't beg, Darlene." Daryl in the doorway. "We'll find someone else. I can think of ten people." But the names aren't charging to the tip of his tongue.

"Yeah," goes Darlene, and turns to the TV like I've ceased to exist.

I'm packing my stuff up when Daryl comes over and picks up the basketball.

"Y'mind?" I say. There's grease on his hands.

"Simon says you're pretty good," Daryl says, challenge dripping.

I shrug. I won't deny it. Not then. Not to him.

He goes to me, "How 'bout we have a little game?"

I tell him no, and reach for the ball.

"How come?" he says. "Think you're too good?"

I look at the floor and wait for him to finish.

"*Daryl* . . ." goes Darlene in this coaxy whine.

"Think fast!" Daryl shouts, throwing out his hands.

I catch the movement from the corner of my eye, a pass coming at my head, and I duck. It's that old trick where you let the ball drop but thrust out your hands like you're passing it hard. The ball hits the floor and he grabs it on the bounce. He's laughing with his teeth closed, which makes the air go out his nose in loud little gusts.

"Darlene," I say and turn to her, "can you train this asshole?"

"Think fast!" I hear again, just before the ball hits my face.

I can't say for sure that I'd actually kill Daryl, if circumstances presented themselves, but I sure can't say I'd prevent someone else. The

throw wasn't as hard as it could've been—Daryl kept reminding us—accidents happen and this was one, his hands were greasy and the ball was worn, you couldn't grip it like you should be able to. I'm sitting in a chair and they're feeding me rye, not that I need it but they're trying to be good hosts. Sitting there not even reaching up to touch it, I can feel the tissue swelling with blood above the eye. Darlene sends Daryl to the kitchen for ice and there's actually an edge to her voice. He goes gets the ice and a cloth, brings me it, he's washed his hands, he's on his best behaviour, he's even wiped the ball off on his shirt. Simon comes in and asks what happened. Darlene tells him Nicky and Daryl were playing and Daryl threw the ball too hard. Daryl says nothing. I don't challenge her version. Simon's not stupid, he's known her eight years. Daryl offers me a ride home and when I tell him thanks but no thanks he looks like he could kiss my feet.

Tha night I'm on the phone with Gwen and it comes up me seeing Darlene.

"So . . ." goes Gwen, "she a skeleton yet?"

I don't know what to say for a sec. I ask her what she means.

Gwen's surprised, she thought I knew, she thought she told me weeks back how when she'd dropped in on this friend of ours (Joan) Darlene was there and, when Gwen came in, Darlene didn't get a chance to take Joan aside and tell her the cancer stuff was secret, to not say anything to Gwen etcetera who—public knowledge—likes to talk. So anyhow Joan decides to get Gwen's input, seeing how Gwen works as a nurse, she might have ideas on what to do, where to go for support and so on. Gwen, instead, goes at the symptoms.

Gwen (whether or not Joan knew) had had (a while back) cysts removed from her ovaries. She'd gone the whole route, not knowing how much to tell the kids, to tell anyone, afraid of pity, afraid of not knowing *how* to live whatever time she might have left, she only worked Emergency, she'd steered well clear of the units where people die gradually. Anyhow it seems they got it—the cancer—and Gwen came out the other end scarred, stunned, but in one piece. Still, she wasn't keen on the word.

It comes out Darlene's had not been confirmed, not entirely, not in fact at all. Darlene had read about changes in moles, that changes in moles were omens of cancer. Gwen asked her then and there to show them the moles. Darlene hesitated, she had good reason. Whether or not they'd done any changing, they weren't moles but *cherry angiomas*, little raised red spots that come and go, according to Gwen about as ominous as feet. Darlene claimed she'd never noticed them before, at least not that big.

Not that red. Gwen let her have it. Darlene played the innocent, something Gwen says she's willing to buy in four out of five people under age ten. Darlene left in tears and a huff.

"Good riddance," says Gwen. "Good riddance from our lives." Then she must've remembered that I was still in contact, still having dealings. She changed the subject, it took us both some effort, like an itch you know you shouldn't claw.

The next morning a card comes from Lloyd saying he's going to be back two weeks early, which still left a while for the bruise to fade. Not that it had to, just I thought it better if the whole thing with Daryl didn't have to come up. Also—and maybe it didn't make sense—I didn't want to walk down the street with people looking from my eye to Lloyd. Anyone who knows me or him wouldn't think that, I'd hope not anyway, that he'd do it, that he'd do it and I'd stick around. Still I was thinking of some big sunglasses.

The phone rings and I turn off the bath, and I answer it and it's Darlene. She wants to know how my eye's doing, if there's much of a bruise.

"Yeah," I tell her, "we got some colour happening."

We chat a bit. There's not a lot to say. She does her best to apologize, without actually coming out and blaming Daryl. Half the blame she takes on herself, the rest she makes over like an Act of God, like a tornado hit me in the face. I'm feeling sorry for her, caught like she is, and once more my mouth gets ahead of my brain.

"I got a thing from Lloyd," I say. "He's coming back earlier, so if you still need someone to keep an eye on Simon . . ."

Darlene sighs and I bite my tongue.

"I *wish* . . ." she goes, "I'd *known*."

"I didn't know myself till today," I tell her.

"Well," she says, "we've made other plans. He's going to stay with Daryl's folks."

I ask does he know them?

She says no, but he might as well start. "Least they're willing," she adds. "I asked Joan too but you can guess her answer."

"I'm sure she had her reasons," I say. A bit too sure. The woman's not *stupid*.

"Yeah? Like talking to Gwen?" snaps Darlene.

"Gwen?" I go, like I've never heard the name.

"You haven't talked?"

"Sure."

There's a silence.

"It *could've* been cancer. We're not all experts, O.K.?" says Darlene.

Her voice is a rasp, like she's slowly swallowing a lit cigarette.

"It's serious stuff. . . is all," I tell her, "what I think Gwen meant."

"I can't trust anyone. Why I bother. . ." she ends with a sigh. Nails on a chalkboard.

"I got a bath running, just a sec," I say.

I put down the phone and wait about a minute. Maybe two. There's no clock in sight. When I pick it up she's still there.

"Daryl I can trust. . . but he's *it*," she says.

"Darlene," I go, "have you *talked* to someone?"

I know what I mean but I don't know if she does, till she hangs up, then it's clear. I unplug the phone, get in the bath, and it doesn't take long, soon I'm starting to feel a big weight slipping from my shoulders. Except for Simon, the fact of Simon living with that stuff every day. I plug the phone in and call her back. The machine is on, I might've guessed, Darlene there waiting to screen my apology, let me talk myself into a stupor, which I've done in the past don't ask me why trying to be a friend. But what I say, after the tone, is I've got no more room in my life for her shit, I specify *shit*, hoping she'll distinguish that from all else that makes up a person, there are places to take your shit these days, they cost, but maybe Daryl can throw in. I add I'll take Simon anytime, I'll do what I can, he's a wonderful kid. The tape runs out as I'm concluding, but that's fine, I'd said my bit.

The thing I guess I mean is it's a step. If you want to reduce stress you sometimes have to take semi-drastring measures. I sink in the bath. I think of a plane crash, Daryl and Darlene going down in the ocean. With open mouths. It's a thought. It's not like I've got them there floating in pieces. They're just there, way the hell out, waving maybe, reviewing their lives. Darlene loves Simon and he probably loves her back—that'd be the problem, it's not fair to him. Daryl I could give two shits, but Darlene—I'm not so fed up I'd want her dead. I give them the sense to close their mouths, stick life preservers around their necks. Just in case. Erase the sharks.

Stuff happens. I've seen it before. Like, how would I feel if something did? The water I make sure to make it warm, the tropics, it's actually like a jacuzzi. Jacuzzi with miles on every side.

I could've made it the Arctic.

Howard Wright

Power Cut

Think of a plug pulled from its socket.
Think of how we used to live
Among the lights: the soap opera
Denouement; coitus interruptus.

Don't think electric. Think shock.
Not the hackneyed night-sky in glorious
Technicolour. Think Film Noir,
Walking through walls, invisibility—

Think witch, voyeur, spy. You stagger
About, bring a candle to bear,
And dance, cave-like, without moving,
The unknown and the scary

Joining hands, outside, out there.
This is a cold tea, a skinned ankle.
Blow out the candle, close your eyes.
Look for me there. Think dark.

N.J. Dodic

Summer Vacation

The highway stretches
to where the map promises
and my dad likes that.

Nelly Kazenbroot

When You Wear Clothes

I'll miss seeing you naked
your skin soft and seamless
like Emmenthal sliced straight
pink cigars unrolling at
your neck, the crease between
your buttocks pressed flat
in that blind male gap
below the little jointless finger
of your sex. When you wear clothes
that shadow you in indigo
and silver studs decorate the
replica of your grandfather's nose,
I'll acquire tunnel vision
from my blue eyes through yours
to where your tattooed skin peels back
and your lazy bones shrink
waxy and bird-white bright
to fit the naked baby doll
that jittered slug toes
upon my lap.

Retiring

Elise Levine

When Mickey lies in bed at night, she can feel her skin crawl. After thirty-one years of living in Brampton, she no longer notices new-house sounds, the settlings and creakings once as heart stopping as groans. Instead, she lies awake and stares at the spot where three years ago Harry patched the ceiling with Plaster of Paris but never painted, now frilling and flaking around the edges, and she thinks her skin looks just like that. Mickey imagines she might hear it one night, her skin quietly slithering from her body, unwrapping from her like something alive and breathing and hugging her with decreasing tautness the past fifty-eight years, and now slipping from her while the electric clock thrums downstairs in the kitchen, time slipping from her body in gauzy strips.

So she's a little nervous, and when in his sleep Harry rolls over onto his back Mickey thinks one of these nights that ceiling will fall down and hopes to hell it lands on Harry's head, because that'll teach him not to leave things too long.

The specialists say it's a rare and incurable form of psoriasis—caused by years of exposure to cosmetics and aggravated, now, by stress—and they can't really help her, which is what they told her when she took a morning off from Eatons and Harry closed the shoe store and drove her to Toronto General for her appointment. They were both a little jumpy, and Harry said, You don't have to bite my head off, Mickey, after he drove around the block at College and University *three* times looking for a parking meter and when he finally found one on College and slowed down to park, a streetcar driver clanged at him, and Harry, who just hated driving downtown, had moved on.

But then he had looked so ill at ease in the clinic waiting room that Mickey almost had to laugh. That was her Harry, she thought.

When it was Mickey's turn to see Doctor Lee he took her thick achy hands in his and Mickey looked down and away. He didn't say much, an Oriental and it's true, they're so quiet you never know what they're thinking. Still, he touched her hands lightly, lightly running his fingertips across her nails, then putting his face an inch from her index finger and

examining every nook and cranny in the cracks between each tender digit.

Maybe he was just a little shy, Mickey thought and when Doctor Lee turned her hands palm up she cautiously looked at his face; and when he suddenly looked her in the eye she was caught off guard and gave a little jump.

There's nothing we can do for you, he had said.

And, as Mickey told each lousy doctor in turn, it hurts, too. So Mickey's nervous, very nervous. She tosses and turns in bed until four, knowing that when she gets up for work in the morning the sheets will be covered with thin white flakes, and while Harry showers she'll bundle up the bedclothes and take them downstairs to the basement, and put them in the washing machine. Then she'll go upstairs to the kitchen and put the coffee on.

Annette walks by Men's Cosmetics at 10:15 and winks at Mickey. Mickey tilts her head exactly one quarter of an inch over the rows of green and black bottles of cologne in reply and without missing a beat reaches down to the glass case in front of her and pulls out a three ounce box of talc for Mr. Pauley, whose tender after shaving face Mickey has helped soothe going on twelve years now. She knows she calms him, makes it easy for a man to walk over to Cosmetics and say, Hello, to place his gloves on the glass counter, so natural to discuss his intimate grooming needs with this woman, her voice slightly deep and mannish but, still, a blonde looker who's never brassy: this class act.

Sometimes, though, Mickey's bleached moustache beads with sweat under the hot store lights, especially when Mr. Hoban follows Mr. Elliott (they both love to talk), and a young man Mickey's never seen before wants service right away (even though Mary's not back from her break yet), and they *all* want cologne, nail brushes, whatever's on special promotion this week and free.

Annette will come to the counter again, at twelve, and the two women will ride the escalator up to Acadian Court on Seven.

The girls are over *there*, two tables to the left of the chandelier, a place by the window even though the room's filled to the rafters with elderly ladies, their blue hair topped by royal blue or burgundy velvet turbans garnished with feathers or rhinestones. They're like brightly coloured balloons bobbing around the room, and any moment now Mr. Clown will appear and someone will reach up and honk his nose. Mickey feels giddy, a little silly so she'll have to watch herself, she thinks, these women so elegant with their lavender or white cotton gloves (of course, gloves)

lunching here because it reminds them of something, of The Ballet and Beef Wellington and sherry trifle for dessert—the recondite grandeur of this place where matrons in support hose serve and assist—and the ladies remind Mickey of her grandmother, they seem so old.

Jean says, Hey, old doll, and Mickey clacks her tray next to Sheila's and sits down.

Mickey prods her chicken pot pie and Annette shakes her head and says, Putting another old one out to pasture.

Sheila says, So how's it feel, Mickey?—your last three days!

Mickey takes a deep breath, looks to her left out the window at old city hall, turns her head back and folds her hands as if saying grace for the green jello with passion-fruit lying before her. Then she rolls her eyes upward—thank you, lord, thank you—and the girls laugh.

On the escalator down to Three Below, Annette says, Mickey, you don't look too bad today. You doing a little better?

Mickey appreciates Annette's caution, all light concern even though it's spreading. And Mickey ticks off the list: first her face and arms and hands, then her back and breasts and stomach, now her hair—my god, her hair!—shaking loose from a careful beehive, steadfast through thirty years of revolving page boys, Dorothy Hamill bobs and Farrah Fawcett manes: that's how people knew Mickey was Mickey: a woman of steel, loyal to her beehive. But now Mickey's cracking and peeling like the packaging on some flimsy substandard product she'd order only once then never again, saying politely but firmly over the phone, Please don't send me anymore *Puissance*, Mr. Lederer; in addition, I will be returning my previous order of twelve. And after fifteen years of dealing with her, Mr. Lederer would know enough to simply say, Yes, Mrs. Chernin, no more *Puissance*.

So Mickey sucks in her stomach and looks straight ahead, almost as if Annette's not there. Oh, Mickey says. Not too bad today, Annette. Not *too* bad.

Annette promises to stop by at 5:30 with a chunk of kolbassa for Mickey to take home to Harry, part of a present from Stu to Annette.

Annette and Stu go back at least eleven years, to when Annette used to run the meat counter and she'd receive his great hulking carcasses on the loading platform, and it was no secret—not to Mickey or to anyone else—that together Stu and Annette would inspect the order in the walk-in freezer.

For years, in fact, Mickey used to stand in the staff washroom at six while Annette (that smile!) leaned her rear against the stainless steel sink—and oh, that Stu: how he'd casually place his warm hand on the small of Annette's back and steer her between the whole hogs and the

sides of beef gently swinging from the steel hooks and, as if they were taking a stroll through the park, Stu might say, By the way, Annette, I took your advice and thought some more about starting my own shop, and Annette would just smile and they'd walk and talk like that for a while.

(And holding her hands under the hand dryer in the staff washroom at six, Mickey could imagine how Annette, standing in the shower that night—as Annette dragged a razor up the firm inside of her left leg, and then again after her shower, as she expertly worked cocoa-butter lotion into every inch of skin—how Annette might think of Stu and smile again; only this time her lips would stretch and part to expose her excellent teeth and, behind them, the pinky muscle of tongue, laced with white.)

But when Mr. Owens called Annette into his office one morning and said, Annette, we think a lady like you would be better off in Confections, Annette had been so defiantly angry (*I love Meats*, Mr. Owens) that—even though she'd served the blue-rinse set this and that, rang up their orders, wrapped their packages of pastel-coloured Choco-Pops for great-nieces and grand-nephews—Annette's eyes had remained dark and muddy from her runny mascara all day long.

I don't care anymore, she'd told Mickey in the staff washroom at noon.

So once a month now for seven years, Stu brings homemade kolbassa to the candy counter, carefully passing the fragrant package past the mountains of jelly beans, reaching up and out to Annette as she dishes out peppermint wafers and candied ginger behind the inviolable fortress of Sweet Delights.

At least, Mickey thinks as she leaves Annette and continues left past the rows of men's briefs, at least Annette didn't have to give up her white food-staff coat and spend a mint like Mickey does on clothes.

Mickey's hands start to ache pretty bad as she turns the key in her cash register and Mary leaves for lunch. Mickey hopes she won't be too busy, because Harry will drop by in half an hour to say hello, having closed his shoe store and taken the subway to skate for an hour at Nathan Phillips Square at lunch time. And as Harry's blades bite into the ice and he twirls forward and backward, *everyone*—executive secretaries in fox furs mingling reluctantly with skins and punks—will stop to watch.

So Mickey hopes she won't be too busy, because even though she and Harry don't talk much at the counter, still, they like to stand there a moment, not saying much, just looking at the people around them. After a silence, Mickey will shift her weight to her right foot and resettle her bust on the counter. Then she'll say, Jean bought a new sofa yesterday. Green floral, six weeks delivery. In reply Harry will say, health food store next door's going out of business. Then Mickey will spray him with this week's sample atomizer, and Harry will leave.

In fact, Harry's due in fifteen minutes now, so Mickey's nervously eyeing the young guy lingering at Timothy E's across from her. She knows the type: he'll need a little *Obsession* to match the hundred and fifty dollar casual wear shirt that's probably in the bag from the Polo shop; but first, he'll make Mickey take out and test every cologne she has to offer; she'll have to compare prices, sizes, possible side-effects, clashing *colours* and *notes*; he'll say, But does the high note of *Mood Indigo* clash with the (barely visible) violet streaks on my new tie? and he'll take it from its box, pure silk and ninety-five at least, Mickey thinks, bought from that new queer in Expressions on Three.

Mickey waits. Before she leaves tonight she'll pick up three pairs of men's bikinis, thirty percent off on top of her employee's discount. She thinks she'll get the white with royal blue pinstripes—nautical, a little saucy, Harry's manly balls sitting in them nicely. Mickey likes to think of Harry—her Harry—on the ice, twirling in a cloud of whatever cologne's on special: Harry whirling in a cloud of *Aramis* one week, *Drakkar Noir* the next.

Mickey's hands prickle cold and she looks down at them, checking for new eruptions, and when she looks up the stylish young man who was shopping at Timothy E's stands in front of her.

Mickey says, Can I help you? but he's not looking at her; instead, he's frowning and looking down.

And there, between them on the counter, lie numerous strands of Mickey's hair, like striations inside a tree, circling one another like so many cracks and wrinkles, the fissures of her body endlessly repeating.

(Hygiene, Mr. Owens had said. Retirement, Mickey.)

These nights, when Mickey lies next to Harry, she can't sleep. She just stares hard at the plastered-over spot on the ceiling and feels madder than hell, but she doesn't know why, really, only that the feeling's getting worse, and she's lost her appetite and dropped six pounds, and maybe she'll never sleep a wink again as long as she lives.

Things fall apart, Mickey thinks, and her stare bores into the spot on the ceiling, and her rage just grows. Then slowly her breasts begin to rise higher and fall lower and her eyes start to roll back slightly in her head, then snap back again to the spot but with decreasing focus each time.

When Mickey finally steps through that spot on the ceiling the music is playing loud and bumpy, *ba-boom, ba-boom*, the lights fast-switching on and off, purple and yellow, the room bleary with reds and bilious greens and Mickey feels queasy. It's like when Mickey and the girls went to the Love Boat one night for their Christmas get together, and they had

thrilled and gasped when Mr. Tease singled each of them out and smiled, and when he smiled at Mickey in the packed bar that night—this man pulsing his groin in and out as the strobe light flashed, rolling his pelvis back and forth—light wisps of Mickey's blonde hair floated free from her usually perfect coiffure, and Mickey hadn't known, or else she didn't even care, her hair wild and damp and free, Mr. Tease smiling, Mickey and the girls laughing and hollering for more.

Only now it's Mickey up there, clambering onto the stage, and nobody's more surprised than Mickey.

Stepping into the spotlight, she's nervous, a long white feather boa trailing from her shoulders while she's wiggling and peeling off these long white kidskin gloves and as she tugs at each skinny finger, every real and imagined kiss in Mickey's life collides in the seductive *now* of her dream.

Mickey's nervous, yes, but she's restless, a little reckless, and she feels a million pounds lighter. Any moment now she'll be taking off.

R.J. Powell

Summer, Dusk, Windows

1.

At this hour,
especially the light.
It is the light
in a sea cave, seconds
before the tide comes.

And the open windows inhale the evening
with a sigh like water
and climbing darkness
fills the room
with soft, thick
hair.

Now the edges
mean nothing.
Here

the young woman in Holland
naked on the bed
shaving her legs in winter,

the strange father
who fell to the floor five years ago,

the letter
that will arrive tomorrow,

and outside, the owl, two
thousand miles deep in childhood.

2.

Now death flies
through the house at enormous speed
but takes only a cup.

Next time, perhaps,
it will take the stairs,
and the time after that the doorways,
and no one will be able to leave
or arrive.

But there will still be the windows
and beyond them
the vast thing, dusk
quivering over the earth.

John O'Neill

Trail Dream

The horse is
thinking about home; and home is the smell and the
shape of the river, fingers of spray, and a
familiar turn in the trail, a horse's neck.
Head straight, the horse
moves through willow brush, across
tussocks of steel, cages of antlers,
and wolf-skulls, jaws snapped open like set traps: he
moves through whatever isn't moving, and through what is,
Chilkat blankets of wind, feedbags of flies, he's
twitching his nostrils with the musky idea of home. This
horse thinks about sleep, is sleep, is
sleeping and thinking and the hard shape of home is his dream,
a map in his brain that his legs follow,
and he feels himself, for an instant,
standing by the river in Klukshu, legs locked, head afloat,
like something built there and permanent and never moving but
having woken up in this trail dream, dream of flight, leads
him as sure as a leather rein, taut across tundra.
I'm on his back but not on his mind,
not in his dream but
dreaming my own way, knees locked, leaning ahead,
the broken skin of my hands on the reins.

Lion d'Or

(an excerpt from a novel)

Mark Jarman

We eat brains of lamb. We hop the electric train to the Bay of Biscay, to the stronger Atlantic tides and the taste of salt in my mouth. Here rows of German soldiers drowned on leave, waves pounding them under. Their superiors ordered them to relax at the beach in precise lines: one line of soldiers standing on guard, another line trooping into the surf. Now there are huge white yachts and half-naked south of France women on the beaches; one woman walks up with a little brother and she strips beside me. She looks like a nude princess from Monaco with only a piece of white twine around her dark hair. And I'm travelling with an Irish virgin, still wearing her nubby 2-piece suit, saving herself for some policeman in Galway. I wonder if Surfer Joe would like it here. The waves now are small and milky.

It's hot and humid. And I'm going crazy, always on a train, then in a shower, water travelling over us, a brief cold respite. Rain rinses the park then it's instantly hot again.

The Lion d'Or seems a great little hotel, an exotic woman named Simone running a bar that also serves as cafe, depending on time of day. There is bitter beer made by mad monks and at dawn men stop their bicycles for red wine before work. Freighters ride past on the river, holds full of Bordeaux wine. Neon's a wine nut: he'd love it here just for that. French naval officers in formal white uniforms hang around, close friends of the woman Simone. Breakfast comes with our room so down in the cafe I fill up on bread and croissants and iced butter and thick marmalade, asking the charming Simone for refills: L'eau chaud s.v.p., Simone congratulating me on my awkward grade school French. I try wild pigeon pie in a wine sauce. At first I missed my habitual greasy spoon bacon and eggs but I get to love this foreign time of morning, and the fare, to love the far southwest of France and northern Spain. I forget about hockey, my team, the crooked contracts and pending lawsuits. I think about the Intended. I forget about hockey.

And who is this I travel with? I know nothing about her. The hotel patrons believe us to be lovers, romantic awkward honeymooners, when in

truth we hate each other at times and are travelling together rather than being alone. Men wink largely as we climb the narrow stairs, send free drinks to our room, wink again when we sheepishly stumble down, acting the part, blushing, fuming. You can't just zap it, change channels in mid-country.

Language buzzes and the tide rises and falls with a floating roof of weeds. I shower yet again. In the hotel room she lies on her stomach and I am allowed to rub myself in the crease of her ass, but not penetrate. We come to this compromise without words. She has done this much before. I masturbate ceaselessly in the shower. It doesn't help, for something is in the air; lovely naked French and Spanish women, a hotel of bubbling pilsner and French food, blood oranges and dark Catalan sausage, sullen heat and beaches and steaming sun, grapes hanging in the vineyard, sex and romance crawling the very air, and I end up with the Irish virgin. She starts taking pictures, she puts it in her mouth, inside her cheek, rubbing me off, and it rises again, but never inside. Knowing this will be funny later doesn't help. On the bristling Persian rug (goats and monkeys!) I rub it lovingly on the Irish woman's pale blue ass, but not inside, just between quivering orbs, moving it all along her, around the world, teasing everywhere I dare but never in, never inside her sacred vulva.

Slate roofs of great churches hang over us; gargoyles and pocked lion heads, church walls the colour of old skulls in summer sunlight. She makes the sign of the cross each time we pass a church and I can't find anything on the jukeboxes.

We are shadows falling down a dun continent, looking for the best exchange of U.S. dollars to francs while hissing Moroccans and handsome Basques try to steal the Irish woman from me and beat panhandlers lie everywhere, emaciated tall blacks on sidewalks selling crap.

We seem so close to Africa, to Tangiers and Morocco, yet we're at approximately the same latitude as Green Bay, Wisconsin or Rapid City, South Dakota. This seems impossible.

We eat spicy olla podrida, drink cold Kronenbourg by the gallon, big fun on the continent. The train tunnel is dark, the longest tunnel in Europe or some such thing; the Irish woman opens my pants knowing it will be dark, has it out and the Moor across the compartment flicks on a lighter. They all see us. Hi guys.

We prowl dark halls of foreign syllables, heaps of linen leaning; we gnaw on a hard roll that comes with the Madrid room as continental breakfast; we hold our tongues. Gold loaves, gold teeth, gold rivers, gold skin, gold gold gold. The train crosses plumb-line canals disappearing into the distant haze of WWI woods.

James Norcliffe

sing bing

for Nancy

love is a very many
something or other
thing bing or was it
nat king cole on the
old radiola or tele-
funken hi-fidelity
in the corner while
she danced with the
man with the smallest
daintiest feet on the
whole axminster wall
to wall and

*take that
pipe out of your mouth
you old groaner*

just
sing bing because she
very many something
or othered you bing
and him bing and love

Judita Vaiciunaite

*translated from the Lithuanian by Viktoria Skrupskelis and
Stuart Frieber*

April in Dzukija

April.

Bright-kerchiefed women (in their palms, colourful, plastic reeds)
they're waiting for the empty, dusty bus near the highway . . .

Lambs are there, in their warm wool

Like the night I used to spin with them,
to colour the eggs with bark and shell-dyes.

I'm still searching for that homestead
through my dreams,

where sandy clearings burn dry in the sun,
and all the red and blue berries are ripe and wet on their stalks,
where my great-grandmothers, freckled as if spattered with sun,
used to row their way across the hazy lakes
with their baskets . . .

Diana Kiesners

Hunting Turtles

First draw them
(coloured if you like)
the main thing is get the shape.
Only when it is imprinted
etched in you
can you know what you're looking for.

It may help to eat the drawing
washed down with water from a swamp
not too clear
a little revulsion is a good thing
a little fear

Then look for eggs.
Any damp and smelly place will do—
the less nice, the more chance
of finding.
Not beauty but
rot and scum and mold.
Look down.

The female turtle lays her eggs
in a hole
beneath a log
under a rock.
The young find their own way
out of the ground.
With them digging up and
you digging down
you could easily miss each other.

We cannot emphasize enough
the importance of becoming the turtle.
You must hoist your whole house on
your back you must carry it
you must be ready to leave

at a moment's notice. There
will never be a place to
raise it on cinderblocks
grow geraniums around the edge.

You know that.

What needs learning is the chance encounter:
when to bite, when retreat
when to pull everything
feet head geraniums
in
when to become a planet
how to look up inside and see
the night sky.

Hole in the Wind

Janice Levy

“Can I tell you a secret?” Brandon Bryan asks. In the dark I twirl the hair on his chest. I run my teeth down his ribs and shake my head.

“No, really,” he insists and turns on the light. I notice the bits of crust in the corners of his eyes.

“Where are you going?” he calls. In the bathroom, I run the shower so it sounds like a rainstorm.

I have always had trouble with secrets. Later, when he is finished sulking, I will cover his mouth and shove his secrets back down his throat with my tongue. I will be hot-eyed and driven.

I stretched out in the back seat, my toes scratching pictures in the dusty side windows. My father drove his taxi back to Guatemala City from Lake Atitlan, down the highway through Antigua. I was six, maybe seven.

We stopped to watch a woman who stirred blue enamel pots of food on a charcoal grill. The woman’s skin was so dark she looked like she had swallowed her shadow. My father bought a little of everything she cooked. He pointed to his taxi and told her he had taken many beautiful women for rides. He’d take her too, he said. “*Gratis*,” he said and spread out his empty palms.

The woman looked like one of my stuffed dolls, her eyes unblinking, her face stiff. She fingered the red and purple material of her skirt and tapped her fingers on the patterns like they were game board pieces and she was planning her next move.

My father turned off the Callejon de San Jose and parked his taxi under a shady tree. He pulled his cap over his eyes and tapped at his watch. He gave me a handful of *quetzales* and told me to come back with two cold *cervezas*. He told me to go very, very slowly so I wouldn’t spill them. Like on hot coals, he said. Carry them like you are walking on hot coals.

When I came back, the woman had moved to the front seat. Her blouse clung to her back like wet tissue paper. My father’s lips moved from her ear to her throat.

I sat in her kitchen and watched “El Chapulin Colorado” on a black and

white T.V. Just when the hero swept his cape over his shoulder, shouted, "*Sigame los buenos*," and bumped into a wall, my father bounced into the kitchen with a silly grin on his face. "Ya," he said and banged the top of the T.V. set so hard it shook.

"Making love with your father is like gulping down steamy *cafecito*," dona Lupita said in my ear. She brushed my hair gently, undoing the knots with her fingers. "He is darker and sweeter than any of the others, but shhh—" she whispered and put her finger to her lips. "*Este es un secreto entre señoritas*." Then laughter spilled out of her hands, poured down her body and washed over me. It was hard to breathe.

At the Mercado de San Sebastian, my father bought me wooden earrings, quetzal birds painted pink and green. "Your mother must not know about our visits to dona Lupita," he said. "Dona Lupita lost her husband and is very lonely. Your mother will get sad and she needs to rest and not worry so much." My father kissed my forehead and swung me in the air. He gave my mother flowers and ate with the appetite of several men. Once, I remember he came home wearing only one sock.

My mother never asked. She held my chin in her hand, stared into my eyes and popped the secrets from my skin as if piercing a boil with a steaming cloth. She snatched at them and curled her fingers, one by one, squeezing, squeezing, her eyes dark knots in her face. Then slowly she stretched out her fingers and rubbed her palm down her thigh. Her eyes became calm and empty, like the unblinking stare of a cow. Stripped of my secrets, I became weak and chilled. My mother sat by my bed, covered me with blankets and smoothed the hair off my face.

The *curandera* came to our house with a small black box filled with things that smelled and rattled. She sprinkled sawdust around my mother's feet and make a sucking noise with her teeth. She held my mother's hands, swayed and mumbled. Then the *curandera* placed her thumbnail against my lips. She said if the wrong words slipped out, my tongue would grow until it rolled out of my mouth like a carpet. She counted her money out loud and left.

"How can I trust you?" Brandon Bryan demands. "How can I trust you if you won't let me tell you anything?"

Brandon Bryan argues with his biceps. They tense and strain against his veins. I bend to kiss the part where the top of his leg meets his hip. Soon he is still.

I am often quiet. Quiet women are tempting, like the undisturbed surface of a lake. Few can walk by without tossing in a pebble to see how the ripples spread.

I think that if I were beautiful I could be myself.

I am a bartender. The room lays in cool, brick red shadows. In the chipped glass mirror behind the counter, I almost look pretty.

Dark red makes people forget about time passing. That's why the walls of the bar are painted red. Brandon Bryan tells me this and much more as he leans on the counter. I watch his biceps press against the cuffs of his short-sleeve shirt. I crush ice with my teeth and stare.

Later, he plucks at the straps of my dress as if playing a tune, then questions with his chin. He says my silence makes him want me more.

Brandon Bryan looks like his name. If you coloured him in, you would use burnt orange. He has come to Guatemala to negotiate the building of a McDonalds. I remember that my last lover had flabby arms and his skin hung down like the wings of a bat.

My mother left little plates with burning candles around the house and a figure carved in soap on the dashboard of my father's taxi. My father complained of bad headaches. He drove his cab in circles with a wet bandanna tied around his forehead. He squeezed his temples and moaned that it was like scorching his fingers in hot oil. Then we caught my mother holding a photograph over a candle. There was a hole where my father's head used to be.

My father threw money on the kitchen table, more than he usually did. My mother tucked the *quetzal* notes in the waistband of her skirt. Then she pinched out the candle's flame with her fingers and put her wet lips to my father's forehead to extinguish his terrible pain.

When my father left that last time, I remember running, just running down the street until the lights of his taxi disappeared. I think I made a hole in the wind.

Brandon Bryan rolls up his sleeves and dips his hands in a bowl of hot bubbles. He lifts my arms up and massages my hips, moving me this way and that. I am a candlestick, then a flower vase. He makes the water hotter and spreads apart my thighs. I am a teapot; tipping, dripping, but I know the rules. He fingers himself like a caterpillar. Behind me I feel the cool bite of a zipper. In five minutes he has showered and gone.

This is his favourite game.

"I am a winner. I have the power." Ten times Brandon Bryan says this as he combs his hair and bears his teeth in the mirror. He is careful not to eat carrots or beets. They will stain his fake front tooth.

"Some people walk in the rain. Other people just get wet," he says, snapping on his tie clip with the golden arches.

In the morning Brandon Bryan's biceps look like tight pincushions. I see that someone has monogrammed his socks in green thread.

My mother sat rigid in a chair and rubbed her gums with her thumbs, her eyes half-closed. Sometimes when I called her, she wouldn't answer. She wrote letters to *tia* Magda in Arizona and stopped cleaning the house.

"You can follow the coins," my mother whispered in the midnight air, when she left me on the steps of the Orfanato de Jesus. "When I come for you, I'll have so much money the coins will fall out of my pockets. Anything, I'll buy you anything. *Hijita mia*, what will you want?"

I had said a monkey. When my mother came for me, she should bring a monkey.

Brandon Bryan is still talking. He is up to his third ex-wife. She painted the bedroom two shades of green. The kitchen always smelled of broccoli.

"You trust too easily," I say.

"And you?"

"Only once. He drove a taxi in circles. His hair was dark and straight like mine."

"And?" he asks.

"And," I reply.

I lean my head out the window and close my eyes against the wind.

"People clap for the loser, but nobody stays to shake his hand," Brandon Bryan says.

He lies on his back and spreads his legs. He lets me clean him like a cat.

The phone rings. Brandon lights a cigarette, turns his back to me, his words graying the night air. I have never heard him giggle before.

Brandon Bryan snuggles back under my arm. "I like you here. You feel like a baby monkey."

His third ex-wife makes the nights grow shorter. Her voice slides up and down the scale.

“She has nothing over you,” he says. “She just calls me to cry. What do you do with your pain?”

In the bar Brandon dances with a woman who is round and spilling out of her green dress. Her head shakes slightly all the time. His third ex-wife looks like lime Jell-O.

I look at her so she knows I am sleeping with the man who has his tongue in her ear.

I take Brandon Bryan’s sock and stuff it with two *bolillos* I have gotten from the bakery. I tie a knot at the end and attach his tie clip with the golden arches.

Outside I watch the birds peck at the sock, their beaks breaking through to the hard rolls inside. The ants carry bits of its soft middle dough away.

“Feel my forehead,” he says the next morning.

His lower lip quivers in the mirror.

His dumbbells feel too heavy to lift.

Brandon Bryan twists his head like a pigeon and picks at the shirt collar that bunches around his neck.

“Drink this,” I say. I pour him a glass of amber mescal.

I run my finger over the veins in his biceps. I pinch the loose skin.

“Eat the worm in the bottom of the bottle,” I say. I have seen it done.

“Follow the coins,” Brandon Bryan says as he makes the money disappear in his hand and then reappear behind my ear. We lay on a blanket outside the Mercado de San Sebastian. My pink and green wooden earrings dangle.

I slide my hands under his clothes. Everywhere he is soft.

“Fix me,” he pleads.

“You are the magician,” I say.

“And you?” he asks.

I am only magic.

Brandon Bryan speaks in torrents. Whole paragraphs come out as if one word.

But he packs his clothes slowly, gently, as if tucking in a child.

I twist the bedsheets around my body. I can feel his arms pulse across the room.

“I have always had trouble with secrets,” I say, all the rest sinking like quicksand in my throat.

Brandon Bryan waits, but only until his taxi honks twice.

I lie alone and the monkey comes again in my dreams. She wears pink and green wooden earrings and dances at the edge of my bed. Her tail forms a question mark and teases me like a beckoning finger. Through the open window a taxi honks its horn. The monkey stands over my face and screeches.

Sean Brown

Mare Pond

That war-day the dead colour
of frozen grass warmed
with our breath:
like devils we blew clouds
of talk—fear and speculation,
drank whiskey coffee
and numbed our fingers
on the metal bait can.

Old man Fleming waved for us
to hoist the stringer full,
perch dripped with mouths agape
and I thought nothing more than
my hands were too wind-water cold
to feel the re-baited hook draw blood:
reset, recast, wait.

The old man went,
his coughing Ford sifting across
fogged grass skeins of dust, oil smoke.

Says Roger: it's a good day.
My brother had cut his chin
shaving. Daubs of alum red,
hardened pebbles. His ears protruded
like father's
raw, cold
round against the black wool cap.

We knew our places—I would soldier,
he put to ship. We blew clouds of talk:
promises without future—weddings,
christenings, travel, business alliances.

Then we silenced.
That is when what
means anything
is instilled.

David Reiter

the lift at morning tea

the scent of cinnamon in the shaft
can be intoxicating as incense

chosen for the mission you
take special joy in the fresh air
that rushes in at ground level
when the lift dispatches you

you have your orders

the programmer wants a sticky
bun, his clerk an apricot slice.
there's a run on lamingtons today
so the board secretary will have
to make do with a custard tart

thoughts of recession recede
when your hands are too full
of Krusty Korner sweets
to reach the UP button

never mind

it's only a matter of time
till some courier whisks in
to press it with panache

his sweat and his skin-tight
cycling pants stay with you
almost until lunchtime.

The Last White Improvisational Jazz Tap Man

John O'Shea

Memory: Gregory Hines, "The Greyhound," emerges Dionysian from this Denver elevator as no Back Door Man: he lays faster taps than anyone can. He gleams, slimy with the birth silk of fame, rough beast born again. Dyed red hair, bulging steroid biceps and carved pectorals molding his T-shirt, gold earring swaying under his right earlobe, a diamond slyly flashing in his left. He struts toward his Psyche: *The Great Tap Reunion*, an elixir to revivify his dying art—performances, classes, symposia, NPR. The old greyhound wins dazzlingly in *White Knights'* contests, but a lion how lopes to his oasis in the stern Serengeti, bends to drink, and finds no reflection.

Symposium talk: Jimmy Slyde, who tucks his right thigh like a stork and shimmyes one-legged across the stage, a feat no one, not even Hines, duplicates. "The worst place I ever danced? Baltimore, 1969, when things was awful for us, like now. Took anything you could, like now." Bony fingers sharpen his bony beak. "But this here hotel stage, it was carpeted. Now how the heck do you tap dance on carpet?" "How did you?" Hines challenges. "I ain't saying," Slyde laughs. Hines offers him five, and six tappers chuckle together.

Symposium memory: From 66-year-old Bunny Briggs, eyes as wide as a child petting a basset hound, his voice soft as his taps. "All I knew, since I was a boy, you understand, I'd be a tap dancer or a priest. My Mom, she put me in the seminary. One day I'm tapping in sandals, on flagstone, while Father Muerto plays the piano. Monsignor come by, said, 'Bunny, that is your Vocation, the Gift God wants you to give the world.' I prayed, and left the seminary. I've been offering that Gift up every day since. Gotten more than I've given."

Symposium controversy: Question to 68-year-old Steve Condos, burly, bulky, shocks of blonde hair and fatted muscle, no dancer here:

young face and brilliant eyes but a pug gone to seed, yes, a fading body from an ancient gallery of light-heavyweights. Boom boom with Barney Ross. "How does it feel to be the only white tapper in this group?" Condos, bursting, voluble, his manner demanding a muzzle and a straight-jacket, waves his arms. "I always been the only white tap dancer in any jazz group, except Astaire. So I don't know how it feels. I wanna say, though, that when God made tap dancers, He made our feet hear and our eyes colour blind." Slyde hugs Condos, and Hines gives the last white improvisational jazz tap man five. Six blind dancers laugh and clap, delighted by his truth.

The black moderator, a San Jose State sociologist, objects with vigour. "There was rampant racism in Hollywood, Steve. Bojangles, dancing up and down stairs with Shirley Temple. Pitiful. He should've tapped with Ginger Rogers. He'd out-waltz Astaire too, but he couldn't lay his black hands on Ginger. Three men from Astaire's time sit before us, all better than Astaire: Honi Coles, Eddie Brown, Bunny Briggs. Fred Astaire was a white star, not a tap star." Fevered applause from the crowd. Condos shifts nervously. Hines grins. The black Astaires' eyes drift, filling in the blanks in Ginger's dance card. Are they sweeping Ginger away and Flying Down to Rio? Anything Goes? The elderly rework the past, no future to fantasize upon.

A gay white man raises his hand. "Baryshnikov was asked to name the greatest dancer of all time," he chirps. "The reporters listened intently. Nijinsky, Nureyev, Ballanchine? 'The greatest?' Mikhail pondered. 'Fred Astaire. No question.' So I suppose you would say Baryshnikov's a Bolshoi bigot." The audience freezes in anger. "Greg, you danced with Mikhail in *White Knights*," a black man shouts. "Who's he say is the best?" Hines reflects. "Me," he laughs. "Gregory," a fat woman yells, "how'd it feel as a black man in *White Knights* to get the white chick?" "As a black man," Hines deadpans, "it always feels good to get the white chick." The hag-ridden moderator stands stunned as the six men laugh, hold each other's forearms and slap thighs and clap one another behind their necks.

In this audience are musicians, jazz and dance historians, reporters, dancers, tap teachers, actors, and college students furiously taking notes. I make a note myself. Hines has brought these men to Denver and funded *The Great Tap Reunion* via his \$50,000 performance fee for pay-back to them and the future. "These are the men who taught me," he roars, "in the alley behind the Apollo in Harlem. They must be recognized for the artists they are. And they must pass on their art to a new generation. Tap is dying. We must bring it back to life. That's why we're here today."

But that is not my note. Women say that men are undemonstrative,

afraid to share feelings, afraid to express their love. And here are six demonstrative, expressive men who clearly love one another.

II. *The Artist*

A true artist lives his art. He gives his back to his child and his eye to his easel. Many a minor poet achieves tenure, negotiates a mortgage, reads his work at summer symposia and plucks the fleshly lyre of finely tuned graduate students. "Ah, my only regret," the minor figure coughs while his wife lovingly stacks his seven novels upon his hospice nightstand, "is this: I did not write like "Malcolm Lowry." His choice. He married this kind woman. Then he took moonlit walks with his golden retriever to escape her, meeting his red-haired T. A. in the evergreen hollows alongside Stevenson Hall, seducing her with knowledge, wordplays, and the mystique of the mature man. The true artist eases a woman to the grass, meets his need, and demands she avoid his rented room so he may work. *The true artist is a nomad.* Gypsy List: Cervantes, Van Gogh, Coltrane, Byron, Hemingway, Durrell, Wright, Plath, Gauguin.

"I musta danced 10,000 joints," Steve Condos says, slipping into his taps in the locker room. "I been doin' this 65 years. How many nights is that? I don't know. Lorraine, she could multiply it. I even danced rock 'n' roll to earn rent money. I opened the show for Alan Freed at the Brooklyn Paramount. King Curtis and his sax men didn't know what to do, 'cause that music's so simple, see, I could dance any riff and sound better than the band. And the kids knew it. The kids applauded me. Nobody can dance *to* rock 'n' roll, you know. It's too simple. You've gotta dance around it. Slyde thinks carpet is trouble? He should try Chuck Berry. Let's go. I gotta start class." "Class is in twenty minutes," I inform him, authoritatively.

Unheeded, I follow him out, nothing better to do. We enter an unkempt scuff-floored gymnasium. Steve Condos stalks to the middle of the gym with the power of a 40-year-old welder and chants: "Right kick back step heel heel back step heel heel back step heel heel back step heel and then left." Two women in tights lazing against the wall leap to their feet. Eight of us rush out behind him. It is 2:15. This madman clearly does not know the time. Or where he is. "Okay, now right foot again, then left and right, then we'll double time it and after that we'll break it down. Kick BACK accent on the back heel step heel" and then his feet talk as he improvises in double time. "Now we triple it!" he sings. Taps flicker in the hall, students running, flinging open the door, glancing at watches. Won-

der grips dozens of faces as triple time echoes in the ancient room and this thick graceful man sends undeniable rhythms into our bodies and these dancers too rush to join us and soon we give up painfully mimicking Steve Condos to accept in awe his soft syncopated cadences, an aging lion rhythmically licking his pride's cubs. He ends with a stomp, turns to look at us, nods up and down in satisfaction, and smiles, loving us and what he's done. Our applause resounds like hail in the cavernous gym. We did not see a magician's capework. We resonated to art, a cecropia's wings beating in our breasts.

III. *The Performance*

The inviolate taught any chorus line dancer is this: never look down. Look up, smile at your audience. Show business is the magician, the bull-fighter: capework. Art begs for exposure, sharing, so the jazz tapper reverses chorus line capework: he draws the eye to what he's doing, looks at his feet to center attention there, adding to the wonder he inspires when his left foot raps three times and returns for two front stomps before the three sounds reach the audience's ear. The ear and eye battle in the brain, and the eyes have it. Tonight these tap masters step at The Casino Cabaret, a 1930's nightclub whose cellared ghosts awake, ruffled, listen, and then excitedly brush dusty tuxes and spitshine withered leather shoes, then stretch fallow cummerbunds for this splendid night. First man on stage: Eddie Brown, packing the air with arm flourishes and teasing the stage with floorplay in deference to his emphysema, a common killer of these men. Steve Condos comes out next, a surprise if the performers are ordered by skill. He's tuxedoed, and the black drops twenty pounds from him. Condos begins slowly, dancing to *Fascinatin' Rhythm* in three-quarter time, and I watch his eyes quickly drop to his feet and he moves up to time, and smoothly sails into double time, grinning at his own marvelous work, and before our eyes and ghostly ears it's

slapbabshimshamplumpbackumpbackbipbipbipbipbipbipbipshzambipp-shazamm

TRIPLE TIME and he challenges the drummer who soars to

whackbackzipcrackhumchbackbubuombaboombaboom

and Condos offers

ditditedadaditditditedadadadadaditditditdada

quadruple time, sixteen taps a second! The audience roars, stands, caresses with appreciative hands, and if there's a sociologist among the spirits he slips away in ghostly silence.

IV. *The Third Great Tap Reunion*

Two years later, June, 1990: the Reunion meets in Boston, New York, and San Francisco now. Hines, a good parent, knows it must walk on its own, and he makes the movie *Tap!* with these men and then turns his back to star in an Uzi-filled detective film. Hollywood, succulently ripe like Eve, lured Faulkner and Fitzgerald too, all called by Sirens who've not called us. Six men can't dance in four places simultaneously, and Colorado gets short shrift now. Savion Glover, the teenage tap Messiah, is promised us but does not show. But the tap classes triple in size. Forty Europeans fly here for the best tap teaching in the world. Condos begins again when he feels the mood and again his wife Lorraine fusses over him like a babysitter, remembering a step he's forgotten and telling him when it's time to break. Only Lorraine and his bladder possess this power. He teaches three classes a day and wears us all down. I take two, and drive home, twenty-five years younger than Condos, trembling in every pore. The man and his feet are seventy-one and immortal now. Not a moment of dance time slips, not an accent fades. His shirtback soaks with a V of sweat while he strips, washes, and tells me stories. Gliding with Ann Miller, the Natural. Teaching Betty Grable, The Unnatural. Dancing with Buddy Rich, the sole time the drummer danced in a film. Monday morning he's just flown in from San Francisco where Slyde and Briggs and he outdrew Bon Jovi. "Is that a group or a man?" he asks. I don't know either. "And I just got a date for Paris in September," he adds. "What a kick, Huh? All this time, and Paris in September."

Both performances, in Boulder this year, sell all the Standing Room. After Saturday's show there's a private party for the dancers and their students. Each teacher and class has readied a performance—each class but ours. The first up is "Haiti in My Soul," insistent bongos and mystic rhythms gripping the two hundred who applaud afterward. I hang around with Lorraine and Condos now, and he barks at me. "What is this anyway?" "The demonstration," I reply. "What demonstration?" "The classes. We show what we learned." "What classes?" he shouts. "Our classes," I respond. "Nobody told me that." Lorraine panics. "Steve, I told you two weeks ago." "You did not," he shouts angrily. "I don't even have my taps. I thought we was through." He mills through the crowd. "Who's got taps?" he whispers. "Jimmy, lend me your taps, you wear 11's, right?" Slyde slips his off. "And next up," says the Master of Cere-

monies, "is Steve Condos and his Improvisational Jazz Classes." Condos is hopping to fit Slyde's right shoe on. He power walks to the center of the dance floor, shoelaces trailing, Mercury with dead wings. "We do rudiments," he announces. "Rudiments anybody can use to create improvisational jazz. So we did not rehearse, we need no rehearsals, we improvise, so everybody just come on up here, and let's show you what we do."

We line up three deep behind him as he bends to tie his shoes. I'm nervous. Condos does a half-time set. We imitate. He does another to time. We imitate. "Now, I'll do a thirty-two beat solo, and everybody line up in a single line, that's it, and then starting from the left everybody does a solo taking off from the guy next to him, so here we go, one and a two and a three. . . ." He moves into his solo. Solo. God help me. I have to solo. Jimmy Slyde is watching. I am 46 years old, cannot read music, and I have to solo. Jimmy Slyde is watching and I don't know how to count thirty-two beats. I am fourth in line. Can I yell "pass?" It is my turn, and I step forward. I do a shuffle hop step shuffle hop step three raps behind me and then I blacked out because I remember nothing except Slyde's smiling and clapping.

I ascend to Heaven.

Afterward, Lorraine hugs me. "You're so much better! Steve is very proud of you!" Then Steve hugs me. "See you next June," he bellows. "And take care of them," he advises, pointing at my feet. "They're percussion instruments now."

V. Paris, September 16, 1990

In Paris, in the fall, Mr. Condos put on his normal show, eliciting demands for *Encore! Encore!* He tapped one. "*Je t'aime*," he returned, saluting the crowd. "*Je t'aime!*" Lorraine motioned him off the stage before he did another set. He strode back to the dressing room smiling his good-job grin, and sat in his chair. "That was a good idea, Lorraine, that '*Je t'aime*.'" He died then.

He'd danced over 10,000 nights: you could ask Lorraine to multiply them. If you missed them all, find his final film, Hines's *Tap!* with its black colour scheme and stars and Sandman Sims and Bunny Briggs and Sammy Davis throbbing with throat cancer challenging Hines and damn near winning and among those men who loved each other you'll find my teacher, Steve Condos, the last white improvisational jazz tap man.

Contributors

Rai Berzin's story "Omens" is from *Mental*, forthcoming from Goose Lane Editions. Berzin lives in Toronto and ponders.

Sean Brown has poems upcoming in *Phoebe*, *Sunstone*, and the *Antigonish Review*.

Lynnette (Dueck) D'anna's first novel, *sing me no more*, was released this autumn. Her poetry, stories, reviews and articles have appeared in *Prairie Fire*, *The Winnipeg Sun*, *The Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, and *The Mennonite Mirror*. She is a member of the Board of Directors of *Prairie Fire Magazine* and is working on her second novel. She lives in Winnipeg with her children, her partner, and their cat.

N.J. Dodic is enrolled in the graduate Creative Writing Program at Concordia University. She has published in several literary journals, with stories appearing or forthcoming in *Exile*, *The Antigonish Review*, and *Dandelion*.

Marianna Gartner is a Calgary artist whose work is in numerous private collections, as well as in the collections of the Canada Council Art Bank and The Alberta Foundation for the Arts. She is represented at Vancouver's Bau-Xi gallery, and has work in an upcoming group show in Prague and in an exhibition travelling across Canada this year showcasing artists under 30.

Selima Hill lives by the sea in Dorset, England, with her husband, who is a rugmaker, and three children. Her fourth collection of poems, *A Little Book of Meat*, is due out in 1993. She won the 1988 Chomondeley Award for Literature, the 1989 International Arvon/Observer Poetry Competition, and in 1992 was Writer-in-Residence at Royal Festival Hall, London.

Mark Jarman lives in Victoria. He is the author of *Dancing Nightly in the Tavern*, a collection of short stories. He edited *Ounce of Cure*, an anthology of stories about alcohol. "Lion d'Or" is an excerpt from a novel.

Nelly Kazenbroot was born in 1960 to Dutch immigrant parents. She pursues a career in both the visual and literary arts from a Vancouver Island home that she shares with her husband and newborn son. She has had a one-woman art show and has recently published both journalism and poetry.

Diana Kiesners is a writer who lives in Toronto.

John Lavery lives in Saint-Constant, Quebec. Other stories of his may be found in *Fiddlehead* #169, and *Quarry*, Winter '93.

Elise Levine is a writer and editor who lives in Toronto. Her work has appeared in *CV2*, and is forthcoming in *The Malahat Review* and *The Fiddlehead*.

Janice Levy was nominated for a 1993 Pushcart Prize, and is winner of the 1992 *Painted Hills Review* First Place Fiction Award. Her work will appear in the anthologies *Lovers*, *The Time of Our Lives*, *If I had My Life to Live Over*, and *The Gold Filling*. Her short fiction has appeared in *PRISM* (31:1), *The Vincent Brothers Review*, *The Sun*, and other literary magazines.

William Logan is the author of three books of poetry, most recently *Sullen Weedy Lakes*. He is the winner of the Peter I.B. Lavan Younger Poets Award and the National Book Critics Circle Citation for Excellence in Reviewing. In 1993 David Godine will bring out his next book of poetry, *Vain Empires*, and a book of essays and reviews, *Reputations of the Tongue*.

Lisa Moore is a Newfoundland fiction writer whose work has appeared in *Tickleace*, *Geist*, *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, and *Event* (upcoming).

James Norcliffe has taught English in New Zealand and China. He is a poet, short story writer, and a children's novelist. His most recent work is *The Chinese Interpreter*, a collection of short fiction (Hazard Press).

John O'Neill's recent poetry has appeared in *Grain*, *Descant*, and *Poetry Canada Review*. His latest book, *Love in Alaska*, is forthcoming from Oolichan. John teaches Dramatic Arts in Don Mills, Ontario.

John O'Shea has published fiction in *The Bloomsbury Review*, *Forum*, and *The Louisville Review*. He is at work on a collection of stories whose theme is modern love. He studies tap with Ginny Stolz at the Hill Academy of Dance in Denver and is a much better writer than Gregory Hines.

R.J. Powell lives and works in Ottawa. He is the recent recipient of an Ontario Arts Council grant for poetry.

David P. Reiter is a winner of the Queensland Premier's Poetry Award. He has published four books of poetry: *The Snow in Us*, *Changing House*, *The Cave After Saltwater Tide*, and *Voices from the Flood*.

Jay Ruzesky has lived in cities across Canada. His poetry has appeared in a wide range of magazines including *PRISM*, *Event*, *Canadian Literature*, *Saturday Night*, and *Mental Radio*. His first book, *Am I Glad to See You*, was published in 1992 by Thistle-down Press. A second manuscript, *Painting the Yellow House Blue* is at large in North America.

Victoria Skrupskelis and Stuart Friebert teach at Oberlin College and are circulating a book of selected poems by Judita Vaiciunaite: *Fire Put Out By Fire*.

Judita Vaiciunaite, one of Lithuania's most revered poets, makes her home in Vilnius, and her living as a freelance writer. She also translates widely, and has published a dozen volumes of poems.

Howard Wright was runner-up for the 1991 Patrick Kavanagh Award. His first pamphlet collection, *Yahoo*, (Lapwing Pubs, Belfast;) came out in 1991. His work appears in Black-staff anthology *A Rage for Order*, as well as such magazines as *The Antigonish Review*, *The Fiddlehead*, *The University of Windsor Review*, and *Negative Capability*.

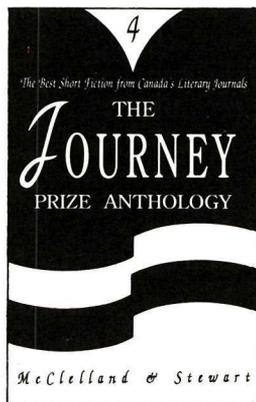
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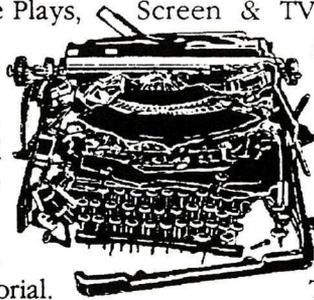


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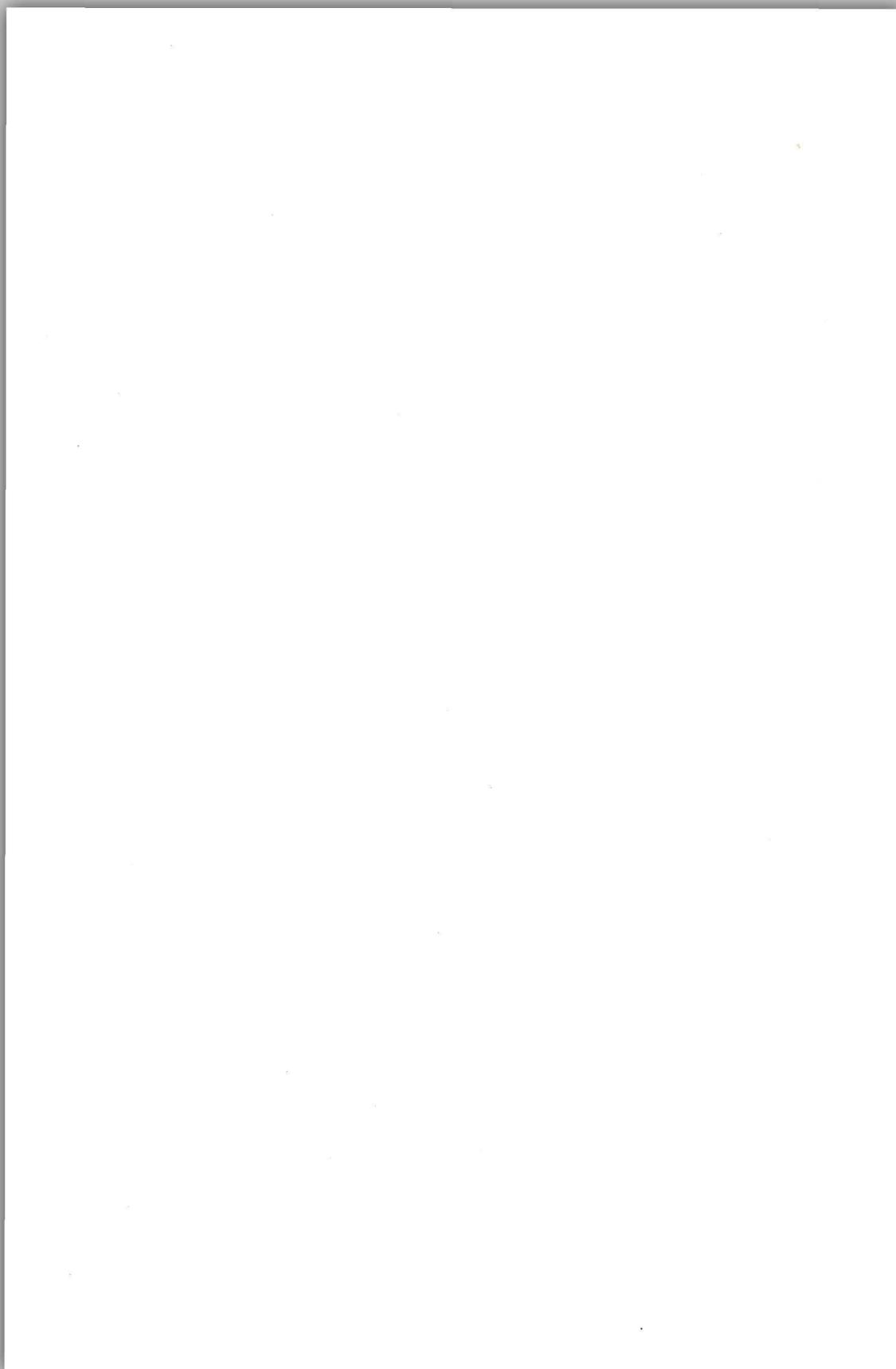
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the 1990s, the number of people who are employed in the service sector has increased in all countries. The increase is most pronounced in the United States, where the service sector has become the dominant sector of the economy.

The increase in the service sector has led to a decline in the manufacturing sector. This is due to a number of factors, including the increasing competition from developing countries, the increasing automation of manufacturing processes, and the increasing focus on research and development in the service sector.

The decline in the manufacturing sector has led to a loss of jobs in that sector. This has led to a shift in the labor force towards the service sector. This shift has led to a change in the skills required in the labor force. The service sector requires a higher level of education and training than the manufacturing sector.

The shift in the labor force towards the service sector has led to a change in the structure of the economy. The service sector has become the dominant sector of the economy in most developed countries. This has led to a change in the way that the economy is organized and operated.

The change in the structure of the economy has led to a change in the way that the economy is measured. The traditional measures of economic growth, such as gross domestic product (GDP), are based on the value of goods and services produced. However, the service sector produces services, which are not tangible goods. This has led to a need for new measures of economic growth that take into account the value of services.

The change in the structure of the economy has also led to a change in the way that the economy is regulated. The service sector is more difficult to regulate than the manufacturing sector. This is because services are often intangible and difficult to measure. This has led to a need for new regulatory frameworks that are better suited to the service sector.

The change in the structure of the economy has also led to a change in the way that the economy is financed. The service sector is more capital intensive than the manufacturing sector. This is because services often require a large amount of capital to produce. This has led to a need for new financial instruments and markets that are better suited to the service sector.

The change in the structure of the economy has also led to a change in the way that the economy is managed. The service sector is more decentralized than the manufacturing sector. This is because services are often produced by a large number of small businesses. This has led to a need for new management practices that are better suited to the service sector.

Poetry

Sean Brown
N.J. Dodic
Lynnette Dueck
Selima Hill
Nelly Kazenbroot
Diana Kiesners
William Logan
James Norcliffe
John O'Neill
R.J. Powell
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Fiction

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John O'Shea

In Translation

Judita Vaiciunaite

ISSN 0032.8790