PRISM *international*

Contemporary writing from Canada and around the world

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Not So Serious Issue

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PRISM *international*

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Richard Wagner
Translated from the German by Peter A. Stenberg

Silke F (19)

She came in, settled onto the sofa. When
the music started, she sang right along.

She knew all the texts, Leonard was her
favourite. When I touch your body

with my mind. She knew a few verses by
Tucholsky. One by Brecht

and Hesse was a question mark. My
Goodness, she said. That drove us up

the wall. And: oh the old folks, which sounded
like the elder folks. Lazily she ground out

her cigarette, showed us, how she could
walk on her hands, how this generation

walks on its hands, she still showed
us. That's enough, said Gerhard. It was the

300th cigarette, I think, and six o'clock
in the morning. We threw her out.

Neitzsche Goes to Mexico

Calvin Wharton

I'll never forget the time Nietzsche and I travelled together to Mexico. He was in his fifty-first year, had not been feeling completely well, and told me he could not bear the thought of spending the coming winter in Germany. "Such cold and dreary months find their way, eventually, into one's heart. And from there it is quick passage to the soul," he said.

"Besides," he added, fingering his thick mustache and gazing slightly upward, "I would like to sink my few remaining teeth into a *real* enchilada, and pick up a poncho, a hammock and some colourful knicknacks for the house."

I soon discovered that, despite his ailments, my companion was still spry enough to deal with a trip halfway around the world.

We took the train from Weimar to Hamburg in mid-October. The countryside was resplendent in its autumn colours; arrayed as if to welcome visiting royalty. On the train we at first shared a compartment with a parson and a bulbous, red-cheeked woman who ate greasy sausage sliced from a large coil she kept in a bag at her feet. She did not appear to be very jolly, and Nietzsche immediately developed a disliking for her.

Forty-five minutes out of the Weimar station, he had begun an argument with her, claiming that she represented weakness in the German spirit, and began fighting with her for space on the bench. This disagreement ended with her slamming Nietzsche with her *Wurst,* Nietzsche trying to beat her with his cane, and the old parson and myself attempting to separate the two.

The parson received a smack in the eye with the sausage, and I managed to drag my friend from the compartment, I found us a new cubicle occupied only by three sedate and scrawny matrons, and the remainder of our trip was uneventful.

In Hamburg we stayed one night at the Freiertag Haus, which had clean, comfortable rooms and an agreeable management. Here I dis-

covered Nietzsche's unfortunate habit of stealing ashtrays from wherever he stayed. The first few times this happened I laughed along with him and pretended it was a clever joke on the bourgeoisie, but secretly wondered to what extent our luggage would grow with there "little treasures" as he called them. He remembered every one of them (his powers of memory were phenomenal) so I was never able to leave any behind.

Our voyage across the Atlantic was wonderful. We encountered no violent storms and both of us were feeling well-rested by the time we reached the Eastern coast of the United States. The cruise continued south, then west, to dock finally in Vera Cruz, Mexico.

Nietzsche himself insisted on carrying the small satchel filled with ashtrays. He had obtained a few more on the trip; one, specifically, was a real beauty. It was made of porcelain, shaped like a miniature ocean vessel. If one rested a lit cigar or cigarette in it, the smoke came out from the tiny smokestacks.

"It is a particularly special elegance," Nietzsche said of this receptacle, "that so entirely fulfills both the aesthetic and practical needs of man." I could only nod my head in agreement.

We had decided to spend a few days in Vera Cruz and passed the afternoon searching for suitable accommodation. Again and again we turned down rooms because there were no ashtrays or only battered tin plates with the lip raised to support a cigarette. I thought this was going a bit far but said nothing. Eventually we settled on the Pensión Penultimo which had green glass ashtrays with the name printed in white around the rim.

Vera Cruz was splendid. My friend and I took daily walks along the water and revelled in the warm, sunny weather, so different from what Germany would have been experiencing. In the mornings I sat in the window of my room, watching people in the streets below. Nietzsche ate enchiladas and tamales, and haggled with merchants for trinkets and souvenirs. We enjoyed ourselves immensely in this town, but decided one day to move on to Mexico City.

That afternoon we sat at a small table in the cantina next to the station, and shared a Mexican *cerveza* while we waited for our train. Nietzsche had his satchel with him and I thought I could see a new bulge in it. He was explaining to me that the key to understanding a nation can be found in understanding its beer, when I noticed a man walking rather briskly up the street towards the cantina. He seemed to be headed directly for our table.

The man wore an olive-coloured uniform with a peaked cap. He had a think black mustache and an intent look on his face. A wide, brown belt

circled his waist, with a narrow strap over one shoulder. Fastened to the belt was a leather holster from which the handle of a pistol protruded.

"Pardon me, *señores,* but are you not the two gentlemen who were staying at the Pensión Penultimo?" he asked.

"Yes, we are," I answered, "can we be of some assistance to you?" Nietzsche watched him carefully; he did not trust uniformed men.

"Oh yes, I think you can be of some assistance. My name if Sergeant Garcia. I believe you have something that does not belong to you. I have just come from the *pensión,* and they are missing an article from one of your rooms."

"Good lord," I said, and looked at Nietzsche. He put his satchel in his lap, held it tightly, and glared at our inquisitor.

Garcia noticed the satchel. "What is it you have in there, *señor?* May I take a look?"

"Certainly not," answered Nietzsche. At that point the Sergeant attempted to pry the bag from my friend's grasp. In the struggle which followed, Nietzsche tumbled to the ground, knocked over the table with our beer, and with a flailing arm, sent the policeman's hat flying into the street. Sergeant Garcia was very upset, but he emerged from the fracas holding the satchel.

He retrieved his hat, brushed it carefully, ad put it back on his head. I helped my friend to his feet. By this time a small crowd had gathered to watch. "I think you are in very big trouble, *señores,*" Garcia said when he opened the bag.

Inside were a dozen gleaming ashtrays. Garcia reached in and brought out a green glass one with white printing. It was from the Pensión Penultimo. "Aha," he said. He unsnapped the top of his holster, removed the revolver, and pointed it at us. "You are under arrest. Come with me."

"Surely it is not such a big thing?" I asked. "Can't you just return the ashtray and let us go?"

"*Señor,* in Mexico we are *muy* serious about our ashtrays," Garcia said, and motioned with his gun for us to begin walking. The crowd moved aside and Garcia directed us to the jail.

Sergeant Garcia told us the Capitano would take care of us when he returned the next day from Bahia del Ceniceros, and locked us in a dark cell.

My eyes searched the room for a possible escape route, but found none. The walls were made of stone with one, barred skylight too high to reach. The door was wood, about three inches thick, with a tiny window made from iron slats. A locked bolt on the outside secured the entrance.

"All this for a stupid ashtray," I said, downhearted. Nietzsche didn't hear me; he was sitting in a corner, muttering something about twilight and idols.

"Pssst. Hey, gringos." I turned and saw a woman's face in the door's window. "Come here," the face said.

I helped Nietzsche up and we went to the window.

"Do not be afraid," the woman said, "I have sent for my brother to help you. My brother hates Garcia and always wants to assist the poor and tourists."

"But what can your brother do?" I asked. "Is he an important man here?"

"My brother, *señor,* is a man loved by all good Mexicans, and feared by the evil. His name is Zorro, and he will release you from this jail. Thus speaks Zorro's sister!"

Nietzsche's eyes brightened and he took out a small notebook and wrote something in it.

"I must go now. Have courage," she said, and disappeared from the window.

"We will see what sort of a prison iron bars make with a man like this Zorro on our side," Nietzsche said.

A short while later we heard shouting voices down the hall. A pistol was fired and there were the unmistakable sounds of a scuffle, then silence. We waited.

Suddenly, our door was opened and there stood a man dressed in black—black hat, cape and a black mask. "Good day, *señores.* My name is Zorro. Please come out, the sergeant would like to trade places with you."

Garcia stood behind him, scowling, obviously humiliated. Gagged and hand-cuffed, Garcia had been stripped to his socks and boxer shorts. He had been forced to wear a funny straw hat with a plastic golf ball stapled to the front and golf tees tucked in the hatband. On his chest was a large, red "Z". The muffled sound of angry Spanish came from the furious Mexican constable.

Zorro shoved Garcia in the cell, locked him in, and led us to a rear exit from the jail. On the way through the office Nietzsche retrieved his satchel, still full of ashtrays.

As we stood in the doorway, about to part from our benefactor, I spoke to Zorro: "How can we repay you, sir?" Zorro shrugged; he did not seem interested in payment.

"Perhaps you will accept this," Nietzsche said, removing the miniature ship from the bag.

Zorro took the ashtray and looked at it admiringly, "Thank you," he

said. "I know a poor *peón* family who will be very happy to have such a thing. I will take it to them this very day. *Adios, amigos.*" And he left us.

That evening we were on the train to Mexico City—a place of much beauty, wonderful hotels, and many fine ashtrays.

Susan Musgrave

Imagine

For Patrick Lane

Imagine hailing a taxi
and the driver is a poet.
You could say, "Tell me a poem
and take me to Costa Rica."
As you drive away.

Imagine getting into a taxi
where the driver is a real poet
like Patrick. You could quote
Robert Penn Warren without feeling
ridiculous: "Driver, do you truly,
truly know what flesh is?"

Imagine getting into a taxi
and its snowy Saskatchewan
and Patrick has not made a dollar.
The snow goes on falling
and now you're stuck in it; poetry
gets you nowhere faster than anything.

Imagine breaking into a taxi
and finding two poets frozen together.
You'd look at one another as if the world
had meaning for the first time,
hidden meaning, and wouldn't it be
a kind of terrible occasion.

Lesley Choyce

Milton Acorn in Space

There were plans afoot in Ottawa, Milton,
to launch you headstrong into the blue empty pages of sky,
the dark, verbless nothing of space.
Good money, yes, would go into it.
The National Research Council had found you out.
Your hide, they said, was tough as magnesium steel,
your will as strong as tungsten and you could take
the heat of heaven or hell
better than anything living or dead.

It was what we should do with all the poets, they said.
But Milton was fueled with love and venom,
so powerfully explosive with crazy politics
that he would be first
to ignite,
to burn his way into the heavens and park a steady orbit.
I've seen the feasibility studies
and it's there in print
that Acorn would make a fine new moon
that he'd be willing to do the trip
if he thought he had first crack
at God or alien or any thinking thing worth arguing with
that came his way.
Some worried over the loneliness
but others said that Milton
had been carving away at it for years,
shaping it with a rusty axe
and planing it with his imagination
so why not let him use it now
to build one new and final island
up there on the edge
of all possibility.

Leslie and the Universe

Rod Anderson

Leslie is walking down the street. People keep saying hello to her—usually men. She likes that. She hopes people will keep saying hello as if they knew her. She pushes her black hair back over her shoulder with one hand. Hello Leslie, hello Leslie, they say. And she smiles back. She knows they're just emissaries. A quaint custom from the past. Rosenkavaliers. Leslie smiles. The universe is causing all this. The universe wants to be her lover. It keeps sending her messages, like flowers, on strange men's lips. Hello Leslie, hello Leslie. Silly universe! But it's quite touching. Some day she will consent to make love. Some day she will sleep with the universe.

Ten years ago Leslie didn't know. She didn't know about any of this. She was just a young student. A doctoral student in mathematics. Hello Leslie, her professor would say every time he passed her. He passed her every day going up and down the creaking wooden stairs in the mathematics building. Hello Leslie, he always said and frowned, as if slightly puzzled at his own greeting. That's why one morning she left off her work on the Fourier Series. Stopped right in the middle. Then amused herself by counting up the number of times the sequence 08-05-12-12-15 appeared in *Wronski's Random Number Tables.* It occurred 56 times. About what the laws of probability would have predicted. This assumed that the tabulated numbers were properly random to start with. The *Wronski Tables* contain 500 pages of absolutely random numbers. They have been subjected to countless tests and come out clean. There is no order to them whatsoever.

Hello Leslie, her professor said, frowning, as she was leaving for lunch that day. Slightly annoyed, she dashed off a satirical article called "The Hello-test for Randomness", as she sat in the cafeteria munching on an egg salad sandwich. Naturally, the choice of English had been arbitrary—as, of course, was the ordering of the letters H-E-L-L-O in the alphabet. Still, her professor was amused. He smiled at her that af-

ternoon for the first time. Hello Leslie, he said, as she left. Why doesn't he ever say goodbye, she wondered.

The universe is love-sick over Leslie. If she doesn't consent soon, things will become desperate. The universe plays with itself a little. Curves on itself tightly in certain exotic regions of space. This doesn't help much. Then it pretends that it itself is merely an illusion. Maya. Something it had read about once in some book. This doesn't help either. Its hunger for Leslie keeps getting worse. Poor universe.

Well why *doesn't* he say goodbye, Leslie debated with herself. And then on a whim, she pulled out her *Wronski Tables* again. Since *any* given five-term sequence should occur about the same 56 times as HELLO, she chose the five-character sequence G'BYE, for investigation. After suitable 'normalization' into computer code (ASCII range), G'BYE can be represented by the sequence 71-39-66-89-69. Leslie was startled to find only 7 occurrences of this sequence.

Here, a well-balanced mind would have let the subject drop. Indeed, a well-balanced mind would not have investigated the occurrences of HELLO and G'BYE in the first place. But well-balanced minds don't make mathematicians. Leslie was a mathematician. At least she wanted to be one. The arcane oddities of the Theory of Numbers intrigued her. So did Fermat's Last Theorem. And Gauss's formula for the density of primes. She was not about to let an inconceivably low frequency of G'BYEs go uninvestigated.

She pulled out her dusty copy of the 2,000-page *Tchebychef Tables* and began to comb through it, squinting and pushing back her long black hair. The HELLO sequence occurred 224 times as expected. But the G'BYE sequence only 19 times! A twinge of excitement shot down her spine. A tingling dampness collected in her groin. Down she ran to the department library in the basement behind the boiler room. She got out the 5,000 page *Weierstrass Tables*. She began to run a quivering finger down its columns of figures. Each page took a minute and a half. Ten hours a day for two weeks she buried herself with her obsession. Her face was flushed. The heat of the adjoining boiler room seeped through the library stacks.

And in the end? HELLO 560, G'BYE 27. Probability theory had just taken a kick in the pants! Three months later Leslie became the youngest Assistant Professor ever appointed in the department. It was because of the publication of her celebrated doctoral thesis. She called it: "Fundamental Hello/G'bye Asymmetry in Random Events".

But, of course, she was still on the wrong track. Hello Leslie, said Fred one morning, a fellow statistician on the third floor. She thought Fred wanted to sleep with her. So they spent the noon hour making love

in the boiler room. But she could see his heart or something wasn't really in it. As if he were a puppet. There's some aspect of all this helloing I'm still missing, she thought to herself, tugging gently at a strand of damp black hair. Perhaps I've been too immersed in mathematics. She began to devote more time to her social life. She went out to parties every night. She stayed up dancing until all hours with artists, engineers, and accountants. She took strange men, mostly scientists, home to her bed. All of them insisted on saying hello Leslie as they left the next morning. All of them were captivated by the subject of hello/g'bye asymmetry, about which Leslie had begun to write so entertainingly in *Chatelaine* and *Toronto Life*. One of her lovers, a cosmologist with very long arms, developed her asymmetry theories into a brilliant proof that the universe was 'open' and would go on expanding forever. Another, a red-haired quantum physicist, refuted the then reigning doctrine that the universe was a quantum fluctuation of nothingness. He did this by smuggling a revolutionary article into the spring 1989 issue of *Science*. He called it: "The Universe as a Net Hello".

It was about this time that the universe apparently decided that its courtship was progressing too slowly. Also that its name had been taken in vain once too often. The very next year it arranged for a Moscow biologist to locate seven extra chromosomes in the human cell. They were curled up tight. They'd been curled so tight that they had evaded all detection methods used in standard biological practice of the time. The new Moscow methods of analysis revealed that the seven new helical chains each contained three trillion nucleotide components. This is quite a large number. So large, in fact, that it was treated as a joke in Western scientific circles. Until bio-research labs in Geneva, Paris, and Stanford all confirmed the findings. Then came the job of decoding.

Of course, it would take years to decode all the imbedded genetic sequences in chains as long as three trillion components. However, the first eleven trinucleotide combinations, when translated into their decimal equivalents, appeared as: 08-05-12-12-15, a sequence that all Leslie's lovers knew by heart, followed by 12-05-19-09-05, numbers which many of them had memorized as well, often repeating them softly to themselves alone at night in the midst of wet dreams. Such numbers were now encoded in genes in each of the 10 quadrillion cells in each of the 6 billion human bodies then living on the planet earth. All life seemed to begin with the message HELLO LESLIE. Further analysis of the new chromosomes revealed the complete works of Shakespeare, a few of the early issues of *Mad Magazine,* the *Bhagavad—Gita* in the original Sanskrit, and a scientific treatise on the internal structure of quarks purporting to be dated in the year 2024. The last was in-

comprehensible to contemporary scientists of the 1990's.

The universe wants to sleep with Leslie. Finally the message gets through. At first she thinks this is a bad joke. But she goes along with it. Why not? Though the first time proves to be not very good. The universe is very young—only four solar-system lives old, a thought which had always puzzled Leslie. But they do it again. She grows to like it. The universe brings her small presents. A string of pearls and a small white purse. It's nice to be cared for. She begins to grow fond of the universe. Of course, it has its bad parts. But on the whole she becomes quite attached to it. And besides, what else is there? But she guards her secret sex life from her friends. She doesn't tell her colleague, Fred. Nor his high-strung wife, the calligraphy expert, who always wears green. She doesn't tell Carol in the next apartment. Nor petite Helen who's now having an affair with the red-haired quantum physicist. She keeps it a secret between herself and the universe. It is, after all, a trifle kinky. Straight, gay, and lesbian all mixed up together. But Leslie is happier than she's ever been before. She is in love. She is in love with everything. Her face glistens with health. She lets her black hair grow even longer. Down to her waist. People notice the change in her. The universe feels expansive too. Stars, galaxies, and super-clusters spin in excitement. It seems that this is what everything was about. Leslie wears her pearls to bed every night.

Further investigation of the new chromosomes dominates the field of microbiology for decades. Recent decoding reveals thousands of future works of science, history, fiction, self-help books, birdwatchers' guides, political treatises, and cooking manuals. Strangely, none of them is dated beyond the year 2052. This is a serious puzzle. The puzzle irritates two generations of biologists. They argue about its meaning. Rival schools lobby the politicians to cut off the others' funding. The theory finally accepted is that works beyond the year 2052 presently lie hidden in yet further chromosomes as yet undetected and uncurled.

However, this theory proves wrong. In the year 2052 Leslie rolls over in her bed, gives a startled little laugh, and dies. And the unverse stops. Just like that.

Vladimir Mayakovsky
Translated from the Russian by Guy Daniels

The Birth of Mayakovsky

Let the stupid historians, egged on by their contemporaries, write: "This remarkable poet led a dull and uninteresting life."

I know
that the sinners
suffocating in Hell
won't call out my name;
and my curtain
will not come down on Golgotha
to applause from the priests. Oh, well
I'll just have to go
to the Summer Garden and drink
my morning coffee.

In the heavens above my Bethlehem
no signs whatsoever blazed;
and no one disturbed
the sleep of the curly-haired Wise Men
in their graves.
The day
of my descent to you
was absolutely—revoltingly—similar to
all other days.
And nobody thought to remonstrate
with the nearby star which so lacked
any kind of fact,
saying, "Star,
your reluctance to shine is really not fair.
If you won't celebrate
a man's birthday, Star,
is the Devil's birthday
what you're waiting for?

Judge for yourself:
when we catch, in the toils of our seine,
a puny talking fish,
and then sing,
we sing of the golden one,
and exalt our fishermen's skill.
Then why
shouldn't I sing of myself,
since I am—every inch of me—
a prodigious thing,
and each movement of mine
is a huge, unexplainable miracle.

Walk around me. Look at both sides, and
on either you'll be amazed to see
something shaped like a starfish. A hand,
this is called. A fine
pair of hands.
Now watch this:
I can move from right to left,
and from left to right.
Note, too, that I can select
the very best neck, and then twine
myself around it.

Open the jewel-case of my skull,
and a priceless mind will glitter at you.
Is there anything
I can't do?
If you like
I'll invent a new kind
of animal, with three legs
and two tails behind.

Whoever has kissed
me will tell you if there exists
any juice sweeter than my saliva.
In it there sits
a splendid red
tongue.
I can say "Ho, ho, ho"—
and my voice sings out higher and higher.
I can say, "HO, HO, HO"—
and, like a poet's pet falcon,
it will gently drop down very low.
I can't even add up all of me!
Finally,
so that I can metamorphose
winter into summer,
water into wine,
under my vest is a marvelous lump that goes
thump, thump.
When it beats on the right—weddings to the right.
When it booms on the left—mirages shimmer.
Now who else might
I spread out to love?
Who will lie down,
drunk,
disguised by the night?

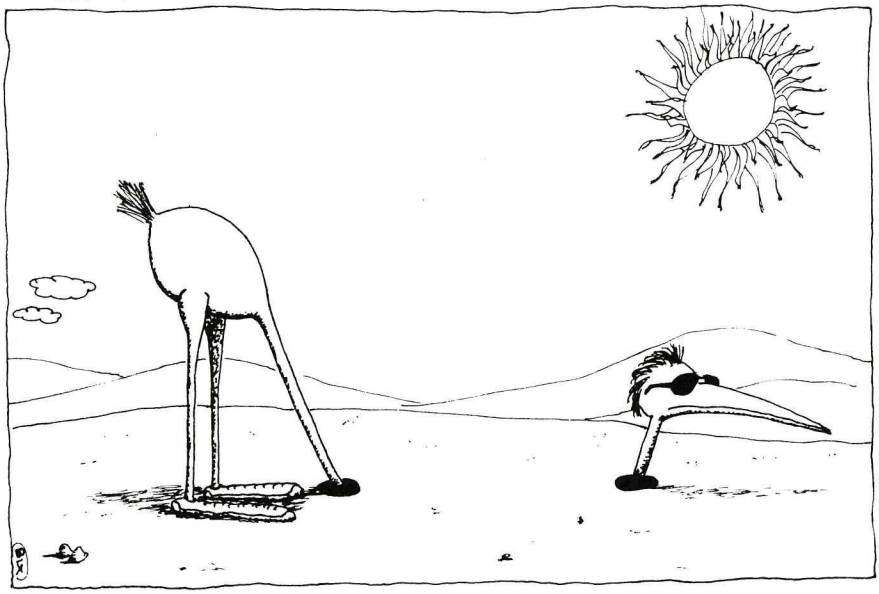
A laundry.
Washerwomen.
Crowded and wet.
You think maybe soap bubbles make them feel gay?
Look! The fat
centipede's going away!
Who's that?
The daughters of dawn and the sky?

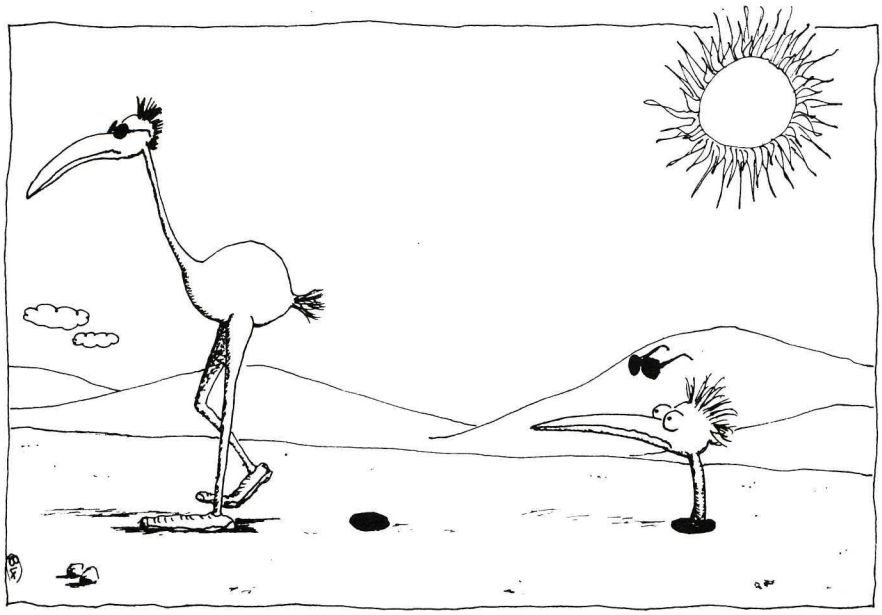
A bakery.
The baker.
His buns are done.
What is a baker?
A flour-covered zero.
Suddenly, violins'
necks sprout from the buns.
The baker's a virtuoso,
and the whole world's in love with him.

A shoeshop.
The cobbler.
A scoundrel and poor.
He has to put
some kind of vamps
on a pair of boots.
In a wink
the boot-tops flower into harps.
He's a prince—
jolly, and clever to boot.

Why
all this? Because I
hoisted my heart like a banner,
in an unprecedented miracle of our time.
The faithful have all abandoned
old Mecca; and pilgrims turn back from the Savior's Tomb.

celulli





His People

Diane Schoemperlen

Holly met Nick for the first time in the shared driveway between their two houses. She was backing out the door Monday morning with the car keys in her mouth and a wicker basket full of dirty clothes in her arms, heading the laundromat. She was also talking to herself: "And don't forget to put out the garbage, dummy."

Nick was coming down the driveway. "Morning," he said.

"Oh hi, and here I am talking to myself," Holly said, blushing. It was a hot day already and Nick was attractive in his little white shorts.

"Taking him to day care," he said. His small son kicked up the gravel behind him. "Stop that, Nicky. Right now. Three last month."

"Laundry," Holly said, gesturing at her dirty underwear with her chin, which was narrow and rather pointy, a part of herself she'd never really liked.

"Hear you're from Alberta." Nick motioned towards her red and white license plates which had expired two months ago but you had to pass the safety check in Ontario before they'd give you the new plates and Holly was still getting around to taking the car in. "I was there once went to pick him up. Cost a fortune to fly there what a place. You're lucky to be out of there. His mother was no good. Cherie."

Holly already knew that Nick was divorced, lived with his grandmother, and was just out of jail. He was looking for work. He spent whole days sitting on the front porch with his feet up, watching Nicky play in the driveway. Holly admired his patience with the boy who cried a lot and seldom did what he was told.

Throughout the month of July, Holly noticed, the whole humid city spent the evening on the porch. Up and down the block, her neighbours hauled out the straight-back kitchen chairs, drank lite beer and wine coolers, fanned themselves and swatted mosquitoes with the newspaper. Cars passed occasionally, ferrying children or dogs with their heads hung out the windows, or teenagers playing their car stereos full blast so everyone would notice them and know they were cool. In the park at the end of the block, the children were calling back and forth, pushing each other

around in the wading pool or swinging violently, trying to work up a breeze.

Next door, Gran fanned up her skirt and Nick took off his teeshirt and wiped his face with it. His hairless chest shone and he was admiring the oiled torsos in a weightlifting magazine. The day before, Holly had seen Sears deliver a whole set of barbells which Nick set up in the garage. Then he spent two hours with his cousin Frank on the punching ball he'd rigged up in the backyard. The sound was like slapping or tom-toms.

"Worst summer in twenty years," Gran called across to Holly on her porch having another beer and reading *The Dead and the Living,* poems by Sharon Olds. She'd be taking classes at the college in the fall. "It's not the heat it's the humidity'll kill you," Gran said in her gravelly voice. "Hard on them." She nodded towards little Nicky who was riding his tricycle madly up and down the driveway, whining. "Quit that. Hear me? Hyper. I never seen such a kid can't sit still for a minute. Heat's hard on them."

Nick ignored her and the boy both.

"Nick you make him stop that. Leg's bad today." Gran propped her foot up on the railing, patting a deep circular scar around one kneecap, which protruded like a burl.

Nick yanked the tricycle away and put it in the backyard while Nicky screamed.

"What a kid," Gran said, massaging her knee. "Hyper. And he's even worse since *he* come back and now he's even worse since she come back, Viv." Nick's mother Vivian and her new husband Walter, who was in the forces, had just returned from Germany where he had been stationed for three years. Nick's father Lloyd was Gran's son. "But we weren't having none of ours brought up by the likes of her," Gran said. "So him and Lloyd went out west and brung him home. She got three other kids anyway who knows where *they* come from."

When the daylight faded, Holly put down her book and went inside for another drink. She turned up the radio in the living room so she could hear it outside.

Nick appeared on her porch with a bug light. "She's gone in to put him to bed she wants to watch *Mike Hammer.*" He hooked the bug light to the iron railing and plugged it in. "Been trying to get up my courage to come over here. Thought you might be needing this." The bug light glowed a blue violet, humming, snapping when the mosquitoes hit. He pointed to the green mosquito coils Holly had arranged around her steps. "Those are no damn good." He sat down on the bottom step, leaned against the stucco wall and slapped himself vigorously. "Allergic.

See this." He twisted around to show her a large red welt on his lower back. "Swell up like a grapefruit scratch for days." He stood up and sprayed himself front and back with a can of Off. "Here let me spray you."

"They don't seem to bother me much," Holly said but stood up anyway and pirouetted slowly while he sprayed her all up and down. "Would you like a chair?" she asked.

"I'm fine."

"Would you like a beer?"

"Don't drink. You're always reading what're you reading?"

She handed him the book and by the bug light he studied the cover photograph, a man and woman nude, her front, his back, *Adam and Eve* by Frank Eugene.

"Never heard of it," he said.

"This one," Holly said, opening the book and leaning into the mauve snapping light to read:

"THE ISSUES
(Rhodesia, 1978)

Just don't tell me about the issues.
I can see the pale spider-belly head of the
newborn who lies on the lawn, the web of
veins at the surface of her scalp, her skin
grey and gleaming, the clean line of the
bayonet down the center of her chest.
I see the mother's face, beaten and
beaten into the shape of a plant,
a cactus with grey spines and broad
dark maroon blooms.
I see her arm stretched out across her baby,
wrist resting, heavily, still, across the
tiny ribs.
Don't speak to me about
politics. I've got eyes, man."

"I only read the facts," said Nick.

"What?"

"You know, *National Geographic* and Matthew, Mark, Luke and John."

"What?"

"You know, The Bible. I'm studying it every day. The priest come to see me he give me the books. Do you know the world?"

"I don't think so."

"I think you do. The Lord he says if you know the world, it'll hate you."

"Well, yes, sometimes I think the world does hate me," Holly admitted. "And I wonder why."

"All you gotta do is give yourself over to the Lord and He'll show you the Way."

"Oh I just love this song," Holly cried and jumped up, running inside to turn up the radio. She sat back down, casually closer to Nick and singing along with Fleetwood Mac: *If I live to see the Seven Wonders/I'll make a path to the rainbow's end/I'll never live to match the beauty again,* thinking of the man she left behind in Alberta but it never would have worked out anyway, she knew that. She was lonely and wondering if Nick would kiss her goodnight.

There came the sound of sirens close by.

"Fire," Holly said.

"Cops," Nick said. "Once they found a dead boy in a house around the corner you know."

Just then his father Lloyd with his new wife Freda pulled up front in his immaculate maroon Pontiac Parisienne. "He's taking me over to the mall tomorrow buy some clothes so I can go to church from now on. Nice clothes and a fishing rod, going to do some fishing too," Nick said as he was leaving.

"Gimme a ride to the mall?" Nick called from his open kitchen window. Holly was out in the driveway washing her car. "She wants to rent a steam cleaner do the rugs. Might as well do yours too while I'm at it. Missed a spot there."

He hopped in. "You're up early. Some days I'm just crawling out of bed at noon and there you are in the kitchen window all dressed and everything already and I think, Wow."

Walking from the car to the mall entrance, he said, "Sometimes I just hate coming to this mall."

"Why?" Holly asked, thinking with a thrill that there was someone inside he didn't want to see, someone from his criminal life, or maybe he'd broken into one of the stores (which one? the Radio Shack, Big Steel Man, Birks) or shop-lifted something (what? pearl necklace, suede coat, a gun) and got caught.

"Cause this is where the fat people shop. You know, from Bayridge, the suburbs."

And the two women coming out of The Bay as they went in were bulging and jiggling in their terrycloth shorts sets, laughing and licking on chocolate ice cream.

When they got the steam cleaner, Nick discovered he'd forgotten his wallet and Holly was happy to show her I.D. and count out the twenty-five dollars.

"Are you two together?" the clerk asked suspiciously.

"I guess so yeah," said Nick.

"What were you in for?" Holly asked finally. They were watching fireflies in the grass. There was heat lightning in the west but the rain never came.

"You know?"

Holly nodded but of course he couldn't see her in the dark and looking away like that to the park where some kids were drinking beer around a picnic table, a case of twenty-four stashed behind the wading pool.

"Suppose *she* told you."

"Frank."

"None of his damn business. Watch him he'll steal you blind get the chance. Just no good even if he is my cousin. She'll be sorry letting him come around here. Going to get some smokes."

Holly watched him striding across the park, past the mound of rocks in the middle which he'd told her was an Indian burial place. "They're talking to me sometime the skeletons the spirits," he'd said. "You don't believe me do you?" He stopped to talk to the kids drinking beer.

In ten minutes he was back. "Those kids, this one kid," he was laughing, "says he just got out this morning they're celebrating. So I says, You're stupid kid, you got no sense. Here I got you a popsicle."

In the morning Holly saw that those kids had left the picnic table balanced carefully on top of the Indian rocks.

Nick thought he had a job cooking down at Mr. Pizza Patio but then when he showed up for his first shift, they said forget it because they had found out he'd done time. "The boss the jerk," Nick told Holly, "he goes, When did you get out, so I go, Yeah and when'd you get off the boat, buddy?" Holly swore she'd never order pizza from that place again.

Then he did get a job, pumping gas at the 24-Hour Texaco out by the 401. His mother Vivian bought him a 650 Yamaha to get back and forth to work. "He's got money to burn," Nick said, meaning Walter, his mother's new husband. "Got a state of the art German stereo and a $8000 wall unit. Porsche. Gonna get Nicky a real jungle gym."

Nick and his cousin Frank, who only had a ten-speed, tinkered with the new bike endlessly. When they weren't taking it apart or putting it back together, they were washing it.

"Lend me some money?" Nick asked Holly one night on her porch.

"How much? What for?"

"Insurance. $150. Can't drive it till I get it."

Holly hesitated. She didn't like lending money to men because it seemed only to create complications.

"Well?"

"I don't know."

"Pay you half in two weeks get my check. Other half next check. I'll mow your grass change the oil in your car and who's gonna shovel your snow this winter?"

"All right, yes," she said. Yes, she wanted him to know she had faith in him, never mind his past. Yes, she wanted to help him make something of himself after all. "I suppose you'll never be home now," she teased.

Nick just laughed and walked her to the bank where Holly wondered if the teller counting out the cash might think they were married or something. She handed Nick the bills. "And don't you go killing yourself on that thing." She hated the way she sounded. "They'll all blame me."

"They don't need to know," Nick said, "and don't you be telling them neither."

Holly was walking through the park on her way home from downtown. She stopped at the wading pool to shift her shopping bags around. She'd bought some groceries and three summer dresses on sale, red, blue, yellow like long teeshirts which she would wear with her elastic black belt tight at the waist to show off her legs which she liked, their pretty bony kneecaps, their slim smooth calves.

From the pool she could see Gran stationed on her porch and wished for a way to sneak home without having to walk past her and hear her say yet again, "Worst summer in twenty years it's not the heat it's the humidity hard on them" Holly, being a congenitally polite person, could only nod and agree enthusiastically.

She and Nick had said little more than hello in over a week. He was working, he said, extra shifts at the gas station, going to his father's for dinner with Nicky, going to his mother's to watch movies on the new VCR, going to see his parole officer once a week. Holly could hear him racing in and out of the driveway on the motorcycle at all hours. Sometimes she was lying in bed reading and then she would tiptoe into her dark kitchen to watch him riding away. Sometimes it woke her up. Once she complained, just kidding, about the noise and from then on he wheeled the bike down the driveway and halfway to the corner before he started it. Or he'd coast in with the light off. So she never knew anymore when he was coming or going, at home or away.

He rode up behind her in the park on Frank's ten-speed, the spokes clicking. He said, "Well I don't have to worry about him, she took him for all weekend." Holly felt cosy being able to decipher this code which meant Nicky was staying with Vivian and Walter, as he often did lately. He practically lived there. Gran was insulted by this and complained about how spoiled he got there, staying up late, eating Smarties all day and ice cream. "I raised him for a year and a half," she told Holly. "Up all night and toilet training too. He flushed a toy car one time had to get a whole new toilet. I done all the work now she comes home thinks she can just take over."

Nick grunted as a police car cruised the perimeter of the park. "Hey you, I'm over here," he called, holding his arms out in front of him, hands back to back, miming being handcuffed. "They're always watching me now. Anything goes wrong around here you watch they'll be on my doorstep."

"Where'd you go Saturday?" he asked.

"Just out." Holly had gone to the show with a friend, female, from the college, and then bar-hopping.

"Heard you come home three in the morning for Godsake."

"I saw your lights on, yes."

His cousin Frank came over one night with his ghetto blaster and a large tumbler of 100 proof Jack Daniels. Nick was at work. Frank was wearing his black Jack Daniels teeshirt with the sleeves ripped out to show off his tattoos: a prancing blue unicorn on the right bicep and FRANK LOVES PENNY in script on the left, but he was going to see about getting this one covered up or removed.

"Got any apple juice?" he asked Holly. "I like it with apple juice. Divvy it up, you have some too. She got it in the States." Gran had spent the weekend visiting her brother Ted in Michigan where, she told Holly the night she returned, everything was better and cheaper than here. "Cause they know how to stand up for themselves those people" she said. "Not like here we just take it all lying down whatever they tell us. Price of coffee I'll never drink it again. You watch."

Holly went into her kitchen and mixed up the juice. Frank fiddled with his tapes and cranked up Whitesnake: *Here I go again on my own/Down the only road I've ever known/Like a drifter/I was born to walk alone.* His girlfriend Penny, who waited tables down at Mr. Pizza Patio, had recently left him for a drummer. So now Frank was renting two rooms with a kitchenette in Gran's basement and listening to love songs, loud.

They sipped their drinks, which were gruesome, and tapped their feet

to the music, singing along. They could relate to the lyrics, the loneliness, both of them.

"He'll be jealous he catches me sitting over here," Frank said.

Holly giggled.

"He thinks a lot of you, no really," he said.

"You'd never know it half the time."

"Oh that's him. She says he changed since he got out this time, got God and all that. I don't see no change. He's always been the golden boy around here. Can't do no wrong far as she's concerned. He's mean to that kid, you know. Nicky loves me more than him. He don't do a think around here. Won't even take out the garbage and her with her leg."

"I've noticed that," Holly agreed, cosy with conspiracy against Nick who hadn't been over for nearly a week.

"It won't last long. He don't like me I make him look bad. Here he is."

Nick on his motorcycle roared past them up the driveway and slammed the back door on his way into the house. They heard his helmet hit the floor. The screen door slammed again and they could hear him pounding on the punching ball out back. Holly, half-drunk on the overproof whiskey, was rather amused and flirted harmlessly in her short blue sundress with Frank all evening long until he went home to pass out.

Towards the end of August, Holly quit drinking and sat on the step angelically sipping her ginger ale right out of the can so Nick would notice and know it wasn't spiked.

"I quit drinking," she tells him.

"Yeah sure," he snorts. "Till the next time."

"If you can do it, so can I."

"Maybe. My parole I got no choice. Get caught drinking back in for six months."

A woman in a pink sweatsuit jogs past with her breasts bouncing and her Walkman turned up so loud they can hear it like an insect.

"She'll get cancer," Nick says.

"What?"

"Jogging without a training bra'll cause cancer, you know."

"That's crazy!"

"Cherie said."

"She was kidding you."

"No way. It's true. She read it in a book."

When Holly goes inside for more cans of pop, Nick nods. She can tell that he is pleased with her."

The Lord He don't hold with drinking," he says. "Once me and my buddies sat down in that field over by the Pen all day and we were drinking a case of two-four just so those poor buggers in the yard they'd know what they were missing. Was when she lived up on Concession Street. Them guys always coming around the house looking for a party drinking her rye stealing her stuff. Then I did some time and she got hit by that car drunk driver. In the hospital she was throwing bedpans at the doctors, you just ask her, till they let her out. That was my first time in, break and enter that's all I ever done wrong. Got in with that bad crowd don't see them no more. This guy I ratted on be out in three years says he coming to get me but I'm not worried, got God, my weights. Look at that."

Holly is excited to see a raccoon ambling across the close end of the park, right here in the middle of the city. And sometimes in the morning there is the stink of skunk in the air. Once she asked Nick why the squirrels here are black, when out west they were brown. And she still marvels at the sound of the cicadas, which she never heard in the west, a vibration liked a plucked high wire above them, a sign of hot weather. "Well that's Alberta for you," Nick said, satisfied.

"Groundhogs last year," he says now. Stevie Winwood on the stereo is singing: *All the doors I closed one time/Will open up again/I'll be back in the high life again.* "I been in three times now but the Lord He forgives me." Nick puts an arm around her with unusually obvious affection. "And He understands about a man needing a woman now and again too."

Holly has been waiting for just the right moment, this moment, to give him the card she is fingering fondly inside her sweater pocket. The size of a credit card, it is covered with tiny white printing on a shiny silver background, which reflects Nick's face as he leans close to the bug light to read. The blue title in italics says *Footprints:*

> One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord and across the sky there flashed scenes from his life. In each scene there were two sets of footprints in the sand: one belonging to him and the other to the Lord.
>
> Looking back at the scenes, the man saw that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. This bothered the man so he questioned the Lord.
>
> "Lord, You said that once I decided to follow You, You'd walk with me all the way. But during the lowest and saddest times of my life, there is only one set of footprints. Why did You leave me when I needed You most?"
>
> The Lord replied, "My son, I love you and would never leave you.

In your times of trouble when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

Nick was telling Holly the story from jail about this guy who tried to cut off his thing, you know, his *thing,* with a plastic spoon, then a comb, and then finally he slammed it in a steel door. "It was those doors," he said, "those steel doors slamming all night long. It was those doors made me feel like I was being tortured. Never slept the whole time for the sound of those doors slamming. It's those doors I dream about, slamming."

Holly, horrified, asks, "Did he die? What happened to him?"

But Nick doesn't know. He can't remember and seems never to have wondered. This is not the point of the story.

They are camped out on the sofa bed in Holly's living room, which is the only room in the house cool enough (not very) to sleep in, for though the quickening evening darkness of September has moved the whole neighbourhood back inside most nights, the humidity still hangs and the air will not move.

They are watching a TV documentary called *In Search of Dracula* in which the narrator says, "Storytelling wards off vampires."

Nick says, "Garlic." He does not talk much about the Lord anymore.

Talking this night before they fall asleep in each other's arms, they discover that they both always wear pyjamas for fear of having to get up in the middle of the night and run (Holly) or fight (Nick).

During this night they both dream, at different times, that someone is standing at the front door looking in at them. Close to morning, Holly gets up and pulls down the blind.

When Nick sneaks home across the driveway at six a.m., Holly can hear Gran hollering, "Where the hell have you been?" She goes into her bedroom and shuts the door so she cannot hear the details of the lengthy argument. All day long she wonders what he said.

Holly and Nick are lying on Gran's couch watching rock videos and she has her head in his lap. There is so much big furniture jammed into the little room that there is hardly space to walk around. On the wall facing Holly's house there is a large velvet painting which, in the flickering television light, might be of horses rearing or women dancing but Holly keeps thinking it's a window and she catches herself looking over every few minutes, trying to see out. Nick is telling her about the new bunkbeds Gran has ordered so he and Nicky won't be so crowded in their little bedroom. They are whispering for fear of waking the boy or Gran. None of his people, it appears, are to know about their relationship yet.

Nick says, "Don't get me wrong sometimes."

"What?" His thought processes are often hard to follow.

"Sometimes when I don't see you. Don't get me wrong. I just don't want to get serious. After Cherie I know all about love, just don't want no part of it no more. It aches my mind."

Holly reaches up and strokes his face, which she loves, consoling him and not believing a word of it.

"Just gonna live here forever," Nick says, stretching. "Never pay no rent again."

"But how can you stand it? A grown man still sleeping in bunkbeds. I could never live with my family now."

"But my people they're different, let me do what I like. They're always trying to give me things. The bike. Now she wants to buy me a car. Camaro I want a blue Camaro."

Holly is reading in bed when she hears Nick ride up. Over the sound of the bike there comes a delighted wild whooping.

Holly goes into her kitchen to peek at him. He is already inside Gran's house where the kitchen light comes on. He leans against the sink with his back to the window, his helmet still on him like a huge insect head. He takes it off, bending forward so she can see his mouth moving but she can't hear the words: the screen is closed now against the cool night. The other person puts a small hand up on each of his shoulders and he kisses her.

They come back outside, the girl drunk and staggering around in the driveway until Nick steadies her tenderly. She is wearing baggy blue jeans, a baggy light teeshirt under a baggy black cardigan with a can of beer in each pocket. She is pointing at something in Holly's backyard and laughing her dizzy head off. Holly can see her clothesline reflected by moonlight in Gran's kitchen window. She has hung from it this morning her new summer dresses all in a row. In the window in the wind they flap and collide like decapitated bodies, headless chickens, hopeless. They will hang there for two days before they dry in this humidity and then they will be spotted with mildew which will never wash out.

Nick and the girl drink the beer. Then he wheels the bike down the driveway with her on the back clutching him, saying, "Are you sure about this?"

Holly goes back to bed saying, "So what? Who cares? I don't care what you do or who you do it with," goes back to reading her poetry because classes have started.

A few minutes later she can hear sirens. They would be, she estimates, just to the far corner of the park by now, somewhere between the black cannon that points down Clergy Street and the monument to

that dead minister who founded the church on the corner in 1893. She imagines them crumpled together on the cool grass, his head like an egg now inside the helmet and hers just flattened and still like a plate.

He could end up back in jail, the fool, when they arrest him for violating his parole.

Or he could be dying even now, repenting as the scenes of his life flash like sheet lightning, promises out of the southern sky.

João Cabral de Melo Neto
Translated from the Portuguese by Richard Zenith

On Sitting/Being-in-the-World

When certain men sit, no matter where
they sit, they sit in an easy chair.
An easy chair, or a toilet seat:
not only functional but ecumenical,
the only universally sanctioned seat
where all can fit, and at their pleasure.

*

Wherever certain men sit, they sit
at hard desks, the kind used in schools;
however large and well-cushioned a seat,
they are hurt underneath by knots or nails,
and even the toilet seat denies them
the convex comfort of its friendly curves.
All their lives they sit discomfited,
and even when standing, some seat hurts them;
they carry in themselves the knots or nails,
in the buttocks of the soul, in dots and tittles.

Nellie McClung

Family Originality

At the Latin Quarter
in New York
my Aunt Irene
sat *down* on the
public toilet seat.

When I looked shocked,
she said:
"It's perfectly safe.
No one else ever *does.*"

Juiced

Rachel Simon

Me and Jake had just set down after the best darned time we'd had in ages when he got stuck in that bottle.

We'd got some kids to get us booze from the State Store, and then we'd hit up all them trash piles out back of McDonalds. When our pockets was full, we went back to our corner by that skyscraper nobody uses at night and set down on our vent and had us a grand feast. Chicken and burgers and fries and Mad Dog and whisky. We was just porks!

After awhile, I got real tired and lyed down. Jake was lickin his fingers off. "Winter's the best time of year for fillin up the belly," he said. "No competition."

I nodded. That Jake, he sure knew how to live! I was just about to close my eyes when I remembered we still had us some leftovers. I said, "Jake, we got us a whole half liter for the mornin, so don't you go finishin it up on me while I sleep." He gave me his salute and I curled up on the vent and started dreamin.

Somethin woke me, I think it was a horn or a siren. I looked out the crack in my eye and I saw Jake chuggin away at that wine like we'd never get us no more. I said, "Hey, what'cha doin?" He turned and saw me lookin at him and said, "Got thirsty." And he chugged some more.

"Thought we's in this together," I said. "Thought we's gonna save some for mornin."

He flicked his hand at me and said, "Hold your temper, boy. I ain't gonna leave you with nothing." Then he tipped that bottle up over his head and downed almost all what's left inside it.

I set up. "You ain't left nothin for me."

"Sure I did," he said. "Lookit here." He held the bottle up to his eye and looked through it like he was a pirate.

That's when it happened. Suddenly it was like he was the wine and that bottle was him. And it just sucked him right up inside himself, like it was a vacuum cleaner or a fire hose workin in reverse.

At first I couldn't make him out through the glass. All I could see was a mush of colors. Then I moved closer and made out his face and his black jacket and his hands squished against the inside. He done filled up

the whole bottle, from top to bottom. And he looked all wet, like he'd been out in the rain.

"What is you doin in there?" I laughed.

"Don't you laugh at me!" he yelled in this voice that was like a bullhorn. His nose flashed up like a horse. That just made me laugh more.

"I never seen somethin like this. You look crazier than Fat Mattie ever did."

The bottle started rockin back and forth til it tipped onto its side. It slowly rolled over til Jake could look up at me. "I ain't crazy," he said. "I'm just stuck."

"Well, I tole you not to drink it," I said. "God's gettin you for bein such a pig."

"Listen, Simon," he said, "I ain't no pig. I just like to fill up when there's a chance."

"And that's what you're doin right now, you're fillin up that there bottle." I cracked up. He looked funnier than them men in fancy suits do when they trip over the hole in the sidewalk across the street.

"Stop laughing, kid. I got to get out of here."

"How're you gonna do that?"

"You got to help me."

"Me?" I said. "I can't even keep my own belly full."

He said, "You owe me this, Simon. I broke you in, you forgetting that?"

I thought about that. It was true, when I first hit the streets, he let me share his vent and showed me how to get food and drink and keep them do-gooders away. He tole me he's a dad too, and he didn't know where his kid was neither. But he tole me we just wasn't the type for kids. We got to take care of ourselves first. So we done become a team, the two of us. I couldn't just let him get sweeped up by them city workers in the mornin.

I leaned over and picked him up. I was expectin the bottle'd be cold since it was January, but the glass was warm. I said, "I can drop you and maybe the glass'll break.

"He said, "Try it, boy, try it."

So I grabbed the bottle by the neck and stood up on my toes and let go. It fell smack on the sidewalk and a piece of glass chipped off the bottom.

"Oh no!" he yelled. "I'm slipping out!"

I looked and saw that part of him was leakin out the hole in the bottom. This brown and tan juice was pissin onto the street.

"Plug it up, plug it up!" he said. "I'm losing my leg!"

I tore through the MacDonalds stuff and found a cup. I mashed it into a wad and shoved it into the hole. The juice stopped comin out. What was already on the street began drippin into a sewer.

"Well, that don't work," I said. "You OK?"

He said, "It don't hurt but I know my leg's gone 'cause I can't feel it no more."

I began to feel sorry for him. I looked for his leg and I couldn't see it in the bottle. Matter of fact, everything he had below his belt looked funny, like it had melted together into one big puddle. You couldn't tell his remainin foot from his ass. "I don't know what to do now," I said. I patted the side of the bottle like I'd of patted his back.

"I'm getting dizzy," he said.

Just then I saw old Doc Jefferson comin towards us. He was wearin this green dress and a black cape that was draggin on the ground behind him. "Hey Doc Jefferson," I called out. "We needs us some medical care."

He threw his cape around him like he was a vampire and came over. "What you got wrong, young man?"

I held up the bottle so he could see Jake. "I got stuck in here," Jake said.

I thought Jefferson'd laugh. But instead he ran his hand over his grey beard and said, "I seen this problem before. Just went for special training. Just got my Ph.D."

I never believe nothin that old bird says but he was the only thing on the street. It was cold so most everyone was stayin to their own vent.

"We see stiffs like you all the time," he said. "Comes from too much high living."

"I don't give a damn what it comes from, I just want to get out," Jake said.

I added, "He done already lost some of his leg."

Jefferson spit onto the sidewalk. "I have to get composation," he said. "I got some fine credentials." Some spit got caught in his beard and it looked about to freeze there.

"You can have anything you want," Jake said.

"We got half a Big Mac left," I said, and I scrounged around and found it.

Jefferson snatched it from me and bit into it. "Tastes like ice, but it'll do," he said. Then he set down on the vent and laid the bottle in his lap. "Jake, my boy, what you got here is a case of grog blossom. It's a symptom, a symptom, of something deeper. What's *really* on your mind? The cold getting to you? Your friend here, he on your nerves?"

I imagined that if Jake's feet was still around, he'd be tappin them in a

fret, or else he'd be usin them to boot Jefferson the hell off our vent.

"Or can't you get a woman?" He looked at Jake. Jake just stared back with these huge eyes. He looked like he'd explode.

Jefferson pressed the bottle to his forehead, then he set it back down in his lap and said to Jake, "I know! I bet you can't let go of your mother."

At that Jake began to yell, "Get me out of here, Simon!" and made the bottle pitch back and forth in Jefferson's lap like a ship in a storm.

I grabbed the bottle. "Go back to your vent, Jefferson," I said. "We don't need no doctor."

Jefferson stood up. "Payment due for services mended," he said.

I said, "You got your damn Big Mac. Now get!"

He walked away with his cape flappin behind him.

It was gettin windy. "You warm?" I asked Jake.

"Yeah, it's like summertime in here," he said. "Only I'm getting more dizzy. I haven't felt like this since, aw shit, since I started getting sauced twenty years ago."

He sure was beginnin to look like sauce. That puddle that his legs and ass had turned into had come up as high as his shoulders, and his head was all that was left. It was floatin around on the puddle.

"Can you feel your hands?" I asked. "I can't see them."

For a minute he didn't say nothin and all I heard was this swishin sound and the wind blowin. Then he said, "I can't feel nothing lower than my chest. Am I dying, Simon?"

What could I say? I seen broken legs and folks with boils all over their bodies and once I even saw this guy's eye pop out. But I ain't never seen a man in a bottle. And I sure as hell never seen anyone turn into juice. But I didn't want to lower his spirits, so I said, "You stay with me, you'll be all right."

I looked up just then and saw that this tall lady wearin a bustle like my great-grandma used to wear was comin our way. She was walkin real straight, and she seemed to be carryin somethin on her head. She moved slow as a tired horse, and after watchin her for a bit I realized she was a horse. And there was this cop on top of her.

"Shit, it's a blue boy," I whispered, and I slipped the bottle into a pocket inside my coat. I'd just buttoned back up when the cop rode his horse right up onto the sidewalk.

"You got to come with me," he said. He stared down at me. His face looked like one of them creatures what are built into the roof of that buildin next to our vent.

I said, "I can't go nowhere. I got business to tend to."

The horse shook its head and the cop said, "You can do it tomorrow.

It's below freezing tonight and the mayor says we got to bring all you people into a shelter."

The bottle warmed my chest. I said, "This is a life and death situation. I can't go."

"You have no choice. Either you come voluntarily, or we drag you there."

I didn't want that. What if while they was draggin me I dropped the bottle and Jake spilled all over the street? I had to be responsible. "Where's this shelter?" I asked.

"I'll call someone to bring you there," he said, and he whipped out this walkie-talkie.

I hate them damn shelters. There are some real pigs in them. Once I got my shoes stolen while I was sleepin in them, and that was the last time I went. Don't get no respect there. Jake feels the same way, but I couldn't very well ask him what to do right now, not with that cop standin right there. So I just stood and waited and hoped Jake was doin OK.

After a few minutes, this cop car pulled up and the guy in front said to get in. I got in back and closed the door and he drove away from our vent.

"I don't know how you people can stand it out there," he said, lookin in the mirror to see me. My nose was runnin so I started sniffin. "You should be grateful the mayor has this new policy. Guys like you never have the sense to come to the shelter on your own. You must be crazy to want to stay out there tonight."

I didn't say nothin. I didn't want him to think I liked his kind.

He drove down all these streets I never go to. Not enough stores. The whole way I kept hopin the juice under Jake in the bottle would keep still. I could feel it splashin around. I was lucky, since the car was makin so much noise that no one'd have been able to hear the juice. Besides, the cop was too busy talkin to himself, goin on about "psychos and sickos and alkies." Just when I couldn't stand it no more, he pulled up in front of this church. "Here we are," he said, and I got out fast as I could.

I walked up to the door and this pale skinny lady came out. She was wearin a white dress. "We'll take good care of you," she said.

I didn't say nothin. I went inside behind her. She took me down some stairs and we came to this big room with mattresses all over the floor with men on top of most of them. Everything looked grey. I thought about pigeons. "This is your bed," she said pointin to one, and she went back up the stairs.

My bed was just like the rest of them. I set on it and gave my neighbors the once-over. They was all asleep, or pretendin to be. I waited a

minute til the juice settled in the bottle and then I pulled it out of my coat and laid it on the bed.

Jake's head was gone. All that was left was that brown puddle.

I stared at the bottle. The stuff was sloshin around. He must've got juiced on the way over here. I thought about what that skinny lady had said about takin care of me. Nobody that makes me lose Jake is takin care of me.

"Hey, what you got there, boy?" someone asked.

I turned and saw this old fart with a button sewed into his forehead. He was leanin over my bed and droolin on my pillow. I said, "It's mine. It's my friend."

He started to laugh. "Sure it is, sure it is. You know you can't have none of that stuff in here."

"He's my friend and I'm keepin him with me."

The geezer wiped away his spit and said, "Let me help you keep him."

I said, "No way."

"If I don't," he said, and he moved onto my mattress, "someone will. All of us here wants a friend."

I looked around and saw the other neighbors was lookin at us. Some was gettin up and beginnin to make for my bed. They seemed like they was gettin ideas. I looked down at the bottle. The juice in it had settled down.

It was them or me, Jake.

I grabbed the bottle and put it to my lips. The warm juice inside spilled into my mouth and down my throat. It was thick and salty and a little bitter. It made my head spin.

When I set the empty bottle back down, I thought about our vent. It'd be too lonely there now. I'd have to find another one tomorrow.

Visions in Reflection

Rodney L. Rhodus

Psyche 101 with Prof. Keith at eight in the morning was not at all a pleasant way to begin a day, what with Keith droning on about Freud for fifty minutes, working up, in the course of the lecture, a small white spitball which bounced from lip to lip as he talked, and with thirty freshmen sitting, facing Keith, all in different attitudes of apathy: not a pleasant way to start a day at all, except for Isabelle Gregory. Isabelle Gregory seemed to love the class, loved listening to Keith talk about id and super-ego, loved asking questions when given the chance. And George loved Isabelle. He never talked to her, or even spoke, but he watched and listened from his back row seat, learning to love everything he knew about her. The first thing he noticed, after figuring out she had a mind, was her voice: she had a Laurie Anderson voice, soft, clear, and full of curves, a voice of wind through old oaks. And now, here in the mall, just as he was walking out of Toys-R-Us, it was this voice that was calling his name.

"George Hyde-Lees. Why that's the cutest teddy bear I ever have seen. Here." Isabelle took the small stuffed animal from George's hand. She smiled into its eyes, brushed its nose against her cheek, then handed it back to George. He stared at the bear, then at Isabelle. Her eyes, brown, secret, and intense, smiled back at him; he realized he was grinning, probably a foolish, shy and silly grin, the kind third grade boys grin when they talk to teachers they have a crush on.

George started to take the bear from her, but stopped: he had bought it for her, she should keep it; how could he let her know it was hers without looking even sillier? The bear was supposed to be a present for her, a hello-my-name-is-George-Hyde-Less-and-I've-been-admiring-you-from-afar present, a way of getting to meet a vision. But now, with her standing right there, holding the bear and smiling at him, he felt stupid; he couldn't give her the bear, he didn't even know her, only knew he was in love, knew he wanted to marry her and bear her children. She would not understand, she would think he was a silly little boy. Isabelle looked at the bear again, then at George.

"This is a cute bear. Oh, I'm being so rude. I know your name, but I haven't introduced myself. I'm Isabelle Gregory, I'm in your psychology class." She smiled, looked away, "I noticed you in the back of the room

and I just had to meet you. I was hoping," she looked at George again, "I was hoping you might consider going out with me this evening." She blushed.

George blushed. "Uhm, sure. I'd love to. What time?"

At seven George was sitting in the basement of Isabelle's parents' house, holding Isabelle's hand, listening, along with forty-two other people, to the minister of the Church of Byzantium as he spoke on the second coming. Sitting in on an end-of-the-world church service was nothing like George's vision of a perfect first date, but he was with Isabelle. He tuned out the preacher and concentrated on Isabelle; she squeezed his hand and smiled. Not only intelligent and beautiful, but spiritual as well, the perfect girl, George thought, the girl of my dreams.

After the service Isabelle's parents took them out for ice cream. At the ice cream parlor Isabelle's mother suggested George might want to go on their retreat that weekend, a camping trip to Tennessee. Isabelle's father agreed it was a good idea and Isabelle just smiled; George could not refuse.

Saturday morning, at five o'clock, George got in the station wagon with Isabelle and her parents and started off toward Tennessee. The retreat was being held on a farm just outside Oneida. George had dressed for the kind of camping he had done as a Boy Scout: he wore jeans, a sweatshirt, tennis shoes; the Gregorys wore old fatigues and army boots, seemingly prepared for the worst. When they pulled off into the clearing, after five miles of dirt road, George saw why: they were in the absolute middle of nowhere, Marlon Perkins country. Mr. Gregory stopped the car and turned to Isabelle.

"Well, go on, get your stuff, and I'll explain to George." Isabelle leaned across to kiss George on the cheek; George blushed. She got out of the car, went around to the rear of the station wagon and started pulling things out of the back; Mr. Gregory turned around to look at George; Mrs. Gregory got out and went around to help her daughter.

"George, we really like you, me and my wife, and Isabelle's just crazy about finding you. She thought she'd never find someone like you." George felt the blush coming back, so he looked at his shoes as Mr. Gregory continued. "We all agree that you two are perfect for each other; not just me and Mrs. Gregory, mind you, but all the members of the church. We got together the other night and talked it over—we decided it would be just fine for you and Isabelle to get married."

George looked up, surprised at this revelation. "But we've only known each other for a few days, Mr. Gregory, don't you think we might be rushing into this a little bit? I mean, I like Isabelle a lot, but I don't know... "

"Now, George, these are hard times, confusing times—the end of the

age is quick upon us and we never know how much time we have; so, we have to move quickly. Our congregation is preparing itself for the end-times, for those days of transition between this age and the next. And so we want Isabelle to find herself a young man before the end, someone she can live out her life with, someone she can start the new age with.

"George, you're new to our church." George started to object to being included in that congregation, but decided to hear the old man out. George was getting confused. "You're new, and we feel we may owe you an explanation. You see, our minister, Brother Synge, has brought us a revelation, has shown us that the end really isn't the end, but a change to a different way, that even though our way of living will change, we will live on in the world. Brother Synge has brought us this revelation, has added to our lives a new scripture. We still live by the Word of the Bible, but now we also have *A Vision*. Brother Synge has shown the light of William Butler Yeats."

George looked in the rear-view mirror on the passenger side door, saw Isabelle sitting under a tree, polishing something, her mother standing over her, talking. George turned his attention back to Mr. Gregory. "Yeats the poet?"

"Yes. Yeats the poet. The prophet. The man who saw the new age and shared his revelation with the world. But only we know that he was right, that the old age is passing and the new beginning, only we can see that, and we are making ready for the change. And that's why we brought you out here today, George. We want you to share in our new world. Isabelle has chosen you and now, if you can pass our test, you too can live on in the new age."

"Test?" George was watching Isabelle again. She had put aside whatever she had been cleaning and was looking through a small knapsack. "What kind of test?"

"Well, George, this new age isn't going to be like what we're used to. It's going to be a violent time and we have to be ready for that, prepared to fight for what we know to be right. And so we have to be sure our new members are also ready for that fight. George, you see that little creek over there?" George nodded. "That creek runs into another creek just outside town. We want you to follow that creek, to find your way to town before evening. If you can do that, then you and Isabelle can have the blessing of the Church for your wedding. If not, then we leave you and Isabelle keeps looking."

Mr. Gregory got out of the car; George hesitated a moment, then got out and walked around to the rear of the station wagon. Mr. Gregory handed him a canteen and a sheath knife. "Now get into town before sundown, boy, cause we're praying for you to make it. Oh, and Isabelle wants to tell you something before you start."

George turned to face Isabelle, not quite knowing what kind of game this was, not fully comprehending the situation. Isabelle stepped away from him, stood there in fatigues and combat boots, her hair pulled back from her face, an Uzi hanging across her chest.

"Fair and foul are near of kin, and fair needs foul," she cried. George winced at the noise; this was not the pretty young thing with the soft and silver voice who sat in the front row of his psychology class. She took the automatic weapon in her hands and started counting, slowly.

"Go on, boy," Mr. Gregory said, pointing to the creek, "she's being sporting and giving you a lead. She'll count to one hundred before she starts." George's eyes widened. He looked from Mr. Gregory to Mrs. Gregory, both of them smiling like proud parents at a one-year-old's birthday party, to Isabelle and her Uzi, the gun black and cold in the October morning light, the girl still counting, up to twenty now, her eyes set, intent on George. Mr. Gregory spoke again.

"Best hurry, boy, Isabelle's a pretty good shot." George took his eyes off his dream girl and her weapon and looked back to the parents, saw their serious eyes, cold and scary behind smiles, looked back and saw the same seriousness in Isabelle's beautiful eyes, and ran toward the creek; as he ran along the creek's muddy bank he could hear Isabelle still counting, "forty-two, forty-three."

George ran along the creek bank, slipping and falling several times, always picking himself up, always pushing on; he never looked back, never looked to see if Isabelle were in sight, or worse, if he were in hers. After an hour George finally stopped, rested under a tree, threw up in the creek's muddy water. Sitting against a tree, George thought back, to the day he had met Isabelle, just a few days ago, when the world was sane and he was infatuated with a normal girl. He thought of buying the teddy bear.

Damn that teddy bear, George thought, damn them all to toy hell, let them burn eternally in pools of melted velour, have their eyes plucked out, their ears chewed off by rabid three year old demons, fallen cherubim. George remembered finding the bear, cinnamon brown fur, brown button eyes, crooked nose squashed to one side, giving it a pathetic charm. The bear was cute, the cutest bear in the store, probably because the nose made it different, gave it character. But as George stood in line to pay for the bear, he had noticed something in the mirror behind the counter: in it, he stood with his bear, just like on this side, but the bear was different; the bear in his hand was still cute, but the mirror bear was a parody of the one intended for Isabelle, a grotesque, demonic bear. George wondered at the transformation, wondered what he really looked like if that image in the mirror was a parody of him. A twig snapped, bringing George out of his reminiscence, bringing him to

his feet. He ran down the bank, then across the creek, splashing water and cursing teddy bears with each step.

"George!" a voice called, the voice that had counted out his lead, the voice, amplified and stripped of its innocence, which he had loved listening to in his eight o'clock class, the voice of Isabelle Gregory. "George!" it called again, closer; George almost turned, ready to give up, ready to quit the game and admit he was not fit for either her or the new age, ready to lie down in the Tennessee autumn woods and forfeit. But then he realized the voice was coming, not from behind anymore, but from someplace up ahead, that she had circled around him and was waiting for him. He looked up, looked to the head of a small ridge directly in front of him and saw her standing there, silhouetted against the sky, her Uzi held at waist level, her finger in the trigger; she sprayed bullets into the bush beside George. As he ran back, back across the creek and into the woods, he heard her yelling after him, "George, I love you."

I have to get around her and into town, George thought, I have to get into town and then I can ride back home with them and then politely decline the marriage. George wondered at Isabelle's wanting to marry him, wanting to live in her new age with someone so different from herself. George sighed; she was so perfect, except for this: she was pretty and intelligent and nice, but she was crazy. George could see her as she stood in the mall, talking about the teddy bear, her eyes, brown as walnut wood, smiling, hiding secrets, her cinnamon brown hair teasing at her tan neck, her long fingers stroking the bear's fur, her voice, soft and caressing, asking him out for the evening. George cried, sitting against the tree, not because he was scared so much as because he was still in love.

George managed to slip up the ridge, managed to slip around Isabelle as she ate her lunch. He watched her eat an apple, taking small bites, chewing, watching her Uzi, and he slowly crawled along the top of the ridge. He made it around the whole way just about the same time she finished her apple. He smiled, proud of himself, of his guerrilla tactic, of his outmaneuvering the more experienced player. As he started down the other side he heard Isabelle call out, "Bang, bang, George." George ran.

George decided to cheat. He had heard a car, knew he was near a road, and he decided to get away from the game. He headed away from the creek, over a hill, and within a couple of minutes he found himself on a narrow, winding road. He started walking toward town. After a few minutes he heard a car slowing down behind him. Turning around, George saw a beat up old Dodge truck; inside was a man George had seen in the Gregory's basement, a member of the congregation. George braced himself for the shot. The man leaned out the window.

"You're doing real good, boy, real good. You're almost home." The man smiled. George punched him in the face, jerked the door open and pulled the man out onto the blacktop.

"That's right, old man, I am almost home." George stepped over the man, into the truck. "I'm getting the hell out of here." George slammed the door and pulled away. In the rear-view mirror he thought he saw the man smiling as he picked himself up.

George had driven only a couple of minutes when he saw her; she was standing beside the road, her Uzi, held by the strap, in her left hand, a smile on her face. She dropped the gun and stepped into the path of the truck. George debated running her over, but couldn't. He stopped, she got in.

Isabelle leaned across the seat, kissed George's cheek; her face was scratched and dirty—she looked like a little kid fresh in from playing war. He pulled away from her. She smiled and now her eyes were no longer cold.

"Oh, George, now we can get married and live in the new age, just like the Church says."

George was driving again; he looked over at her, confused, annoyed. "I'm not marrying you. You tried to kill me. I'm just going home."

Isabelle laughed. "Silly, I'm a very good shot, especially with an automatic. I could have killed you anytime I wanted. But I want to marry you, you're the best prospect I've ever found, you're perfect for the new age." She leaned over and kissed him again. "I was just playing the game."

George pulled the truck into a slot beside the Gregory's station wagon in front of a diner. He had thought it through: she was everything he wanted in a girl, and she did want to marry him, she did like him, for some reason. And she was an intelligent girl, she had some sense about her. Maybe, if they did get married, he would be able to change her, to make her see that Yeats was just a poet and maybe they could just be Methodists or something. Anyway, he thought, it's worth a try.

Arm in arm they walked into the diner where her family, along with some other church members, sat waiting. The man from the truck smiled, his eye already bruised and puffy. The congregation smiled at the new couple and Isabelle smiled back. George was staring into a mirror at the far end of the counter. Isabelle squeezed him close and he felt the cold chill of teddy bears and lions in the desert.

Ben Greene

Two Poems

Nude, with Landscape

After a sky-shredding three a.m. storm
I walk naked through the backyards on my block.
I jiggle rain from the bushes, step over
fallen limbs, listening to the mud between my toes.
From these darkened windows
I'd seem part of the shrubs
rustling harmlessly.

And crouching now beneath a pear tree
listening to the gutters empty
I indeed feel like a frond
near to the ground, newly sprouted
and dangling.

American Dream

As Elvis said to Howard Hughes
in purgatory's anteroom,
"I know just what you mean there, cuz.
You got it, it's *there,* and as soon
as they smell it, they start to grab.
Me, I had my pearly gates.
Hell I could blur out with a quick jab.
It'll be *good* to remember how to wait."

Kathy Mac

Jesus Christ in a Sidecar

He's not as comfortable with skateboards
they're too dangerous
& He never had much call
to learn that kind of co-ordination
physical
dexterity

sidecars on the other hand
are a joy to Him relaxing
loosely gripping the sides
golden hair whipped by the wind
& his dark robe is tucked in all around
so not to get caught in the spokes
eyes closed He leans into a corner

Jesus Christ in a sidecar
just enjoying the ride

Glen Downie

Two Poems

"The eyes of the Lord are everywhere. . . "
Proverbs 15:3

Thinking about angels, when a man appeared at my door holding
a potato. *From the Okanagan,* he said. *I've got a truckload.*
Immediately I could see them trussed up in burlap sacks,
humming a *gloria,* their luminous wings bent and soiled from
their long journey.
Whatever he wanted for them, I didn't have. From his pick-up,
a choir of blind orphans sang *God Bless America. The voices*
of angels, the radio host insisted. I wondered if I would
ever eat french fries again.

Things I Know About Angels

their modesty
their rough pilgrim feet
the clean lines of their architecture

their love of strawberries
their watchfulness in times of trouble

their patience with the folly of humans
and the folly of gods

the rapture
when they shout one name
that threatens to tear my heart out

the softness of their
lunchbags used over and
over and over till
the creased brown paper glows
and one could believe
they live on light

Lila

Daniel Moyano

Translated from the Spanish by H. E. Francis

Poor Aunt Lila with her white dress, so tall, so spinster. A dress all the seamstresses from the sierras worked on to pleat and to give it that undulant shape of a bell, which Aunt Lila wore every afternoon when she called us to prayer. Children, drop that ball right now, wash your hands, scrub your knees, blow your noses because we're going to pray. A dress so pleated she could stand or move to any side without showing her knees. There was no end to the folds, not even when she seized the edge of the hoop and raised her dress high to become a peacock, or joined her arms over her head to become a rosette, or a perfect whirlpool if she danced, the dress turned and spread like the whirlpool Uncle Jacinto drowned in. And what lace and borders Aunt Lila's dress had, threads of every colour making two big butterflies on her breast, repeated on the sleeves finished at the wrists with fine yellow strips, all enclosing Aunt Lila in a great whiteness.

Children, today we're going to Cosquin to visit Uncle Emilio. And behave yourselves, don't take your slingshots, don't kill the Virgin's pigeons, don't trap goldfinches. Behave yourselves with Uncle Emilio who's so good and he'll give you goat's milk, crackling cornbread and honey from his honeycombs. Be careful, children, to behave yourselves, to be sensible at Uncle Emilio's, so good, so handsome. No bird hunting, no sticking pins in them; you'll be struck blind if you do that. Look at Uncle Emilio who's so good and never killed birds. So the best thing is behave yourselves, go and gather watercress peperina piquillin for Uncle Emilio and don't forget to ask his blessing. And can't we take the ball? No, absolutely not, says Aunt Lila, because then you'll play and shout too much, shouting makes Uncle Emilio nervous and besides it scares the bees.

God bless you, my dears, says Uncle Emilio, patting our heads. And now come see my flowers, my honeycombs, my little goats, my melons, my cage with Seven Colours, my pots of daisies and bridal wreath. No, thanks, Uncle Emilio, we want to go play in the ballfield. Fine, boys, run along, but don't play with the Indian kids, don't fight or abuse one an-

other. No, Uncle Emilio, because God's everywhere and He's watching us and from Heaven He'll come to judge the quick and the dead.

From the playing field we signal the little Indian kids from the shanties, who come like flies. Say, don't you have a ball? But they make signs with their eyes for us to look at the ground. And there we see toads galore which have come from the brook, looking for insects. Kick them over the playing field.

The beauty of this is that the ball helps to dribble, it dribbles by itself. Lovely leaping ball for good volleys. The bad thing is when you have to change toads. Sometimes a player cuts you off, saying Hey, that ball's no good, *this* one's the ball now. Then we argue, all hell breaks loose. Boys, what are you doing out there in the field? comes Aunt Lila's voice.

Carozo and Titilo have formed two teams, I'm on Carozo's side, Beto on Titilo's. And there are four little Indian kids on each team. And a pile of toads, which in a certain way are also players, alternately. When they're not balls, they all go hopping over the field as if they were playing; one leaps, the other lands, up *down* up *down,* from the brook to Uncle Emilio's house, to his pots of bridal wreath, everything is a beating of toads.

At that moment there's a high pass from Titilo. An Indian kid rushes into its path to hit it off his head but just in time remembers that the ball's a toad so stops it with his chest, he doesn't let it touch the ground, the kid's a fantastic player—he brakes it with his knee, dances it with the left and tosses it with the right at mid-height very violently. I'm well placed and pocket it easily. But quick I let it go, I hurl it behind over the crossbar, that ball's ice cold, several shout *Corner.* Automatically I go behind the end-line to look for the ball when Titilo cries Let it go, it's no good. And from the corner with its legs sprawled the other toad comes flying, the belly soars white as it passes over the side, a danger for me, I move at the wrong time when Caroso saves the situation by seizing the pass, a fantastic throw which takes the other guard by surprise because he doesn't even see the toad when it passes high beside the post almost in the angle and smashes I don't know where. Now we're one to nothing, Carozo and the kids and I are all hugging.

Boys, don't get dirty, says Aunt Lila from under the magnolia. And a little while later Come on, we're all going with Uncle Emilio to pray for Uncle Jacinto who's dead, poor man.

We don't want to pray or be told Uncle Jacinto's life story again. We forgot him a long time ago. We know he had a mustache and wore a hat because that's how he appears in the photo on the wall.

The whirlpool sucked him under and threw him up to the surface three times, Aunt Lila says, showing three white fingers, and nobody was able

to hold a branch or stick out to the poor thing, the third time he never came up.

He drowned because he was an asshole, Titilo and I always say. We always swim in the whirlpools. It's more fun than in quiet water. You let the whirlpool carry you, whirling a couple of yards below the surface, and at the bottom the whirlpool's a tiny point that has no force, it ends in zero. All you have to do is press your foot and with a shove go up the side and then you're outside the whirl. Then you swim up to the surface, then back into it—like a slide, but more fun. The whirlpool doesn't exist at the bottom of the river, everybody but Uncle Jacinto knows that. And those who were there told him Give a shove when you're down in it, Señor Jacinto, don't forget that the whirlpool will carry you down and up only three times. They told him that and made signs because he was dead, but it didn't sink in. He also made signs, which nobody understood, of course. The others told him three, three fingers so he could see them, and he showed each time he came up seven fingers, nine fingers. Three times, the others told him, but it didn't sink in, he was out of it, making his will, three cows, seven sheep, nine canaries, all that I leave to my beloved brother Emilio. His mustache and his hat dripping. Three times the whirlpool pardons you. But it didn't sink in. And sure enough the third time the whirlpool took him straight to hell. Then let him rot, Titilo and I say.

What're you doing, stupid? Carozo cries when I'm making a goal, when I don't see the toad that passes faster than a shot between my legs, all because I was thinking about Uncle Jacinto. But the goal doesn't count: *this* one's the ball. A kid cuts to the other side and when he goes to throw, up pops Titilo, he conks it, they get the ball and change toads.

Then there's a shot too high for me. Titilo knows I don't know how to intercept high balls and he tries like crazy to make it a tie. I leap as high as I can and manage to graze the ball with my fingertips but no dice, it gets by me, white belly soaring. Far off the toad is stopped by the cage of Uncle Emilio's bird Seven Colours. And quick the voice of Aunt Lila so good, so faithful says For the love of God, leave that toad alone, my darlings, and come to prayer. She's talking of one toad when we've already used about twenty.

Stop! Penalty! everybody shouts. I sure remember the penalty at the tie. They argued about who'd kick it. It was a big bloated toad which wouldn't stand still in front of the net while they were arguing. They'd set it in place but it headed straight for the brook every time. They put the toad in place again. Finally, as always, Titilo kicked. Titilo looked at it, backed up and booted it in a fly, which alas I couldn't intercept, just as I heard Aunt Lila cry out like leaving this world, falling into a whirlpool,

as we saw her white dress quickly change colour and heard her cry, rather soft as if it were a sign of a cry, rather languid as if instead of shouting she were saying What have you done, my darlings, don't forget that God and Uncle Jacinto are looking down on you from Heaven.

Goal! What a goal! Titilo and his gang cry, and he and Beto and all the kids start hugging. I'm squirming on the ground, ticked off, chomping grass. I let them make a goal and dirty Aunt Lila's dress besides. Now she's going to think we don't love her. Her dress so white so embroidered, so edged with lace. The toad burst between the two butterflies level with the crevice of Aunt Lila's dress, peacock and rosette.

It's torture to pray when you're sweating. Sweating, it's impossible to concentrate on Uncle Jacinto's portrait lit up by candles. We pray, stealing glances at Aunt Lila in her petticoat, crying as she washes her dress in a basin. We'll never know if she's crying over her dress or over Uncle Jacinto. Titilo prays, looking at the portrait, but his eyes are shining with joy. I pray, trying to hide my fury. A little more and I'd have intercepted the toad, grabbed its leg—I don't know—hurled it into the corner. If I'd stretched a little, we'd have won one to nothing. Uncle Emilio, who's praying with us as if he's counting goats or melons. Aunt Lila, who next summer we'll have forgotten like Uncle Jacinto because we'll never go back to the mountains. Aunt Lila believing in so many good things. Aunt Lila, who they say never could get out all the blood stains we made on her white dress. Aunt Lila not knowing we would go on killing toads.

Susan Glickman

Learning from Fish

For Lisa and William

They are tribal and territorial
and if you buy them in pairs they remain monogamous.
They dislike change, and are relatively incurious about
new neighbours.
Unless life gets too crowded at which point somebody
gets eaten.

They are discrete in their depredations, leaving
no bones.

However this existential eugenics fails utterly to repress
the exuberance of the fancy-tailed guppy,
a small decorative creature whose prime motive seems to be
self-propagation.
One's tank soon resembles a sea of mobile feathers; this
may be pleasing at first if one takes credit for creating a
happy environment, a honeymoon suite for fish.
Do not do so, as the fancy-tailed guppy would spawn like crazy
in a mud-puddle.

Meanwhile the other fish are unhappy.
Alternatively sulking and snacking on the pied beauty
of the fry.
A monotonous diet.
Everyone is getting bored—all this spawning and eating and
spawning and yawning and snacking and sulking—

What is the meaning of life? ponders the Angel Fish,
meditative saint of these waters.

This is the point at which you give the guppies away
to Chinese restaurants with empty aquaria
or children with indulgent parents.
A further advantage to fostering out your fish is that
you can't blame yourself when they die
which they do with astounding regularity.

Sometimes they nurse each other until the end
as did dear Joey, a small spotted catfish
of Dickensian sentiment.
Joey of the warm heart and cold blood
Joey of the burrowed brow and nervous, flickering fins.
A sort of piscine Florence Nightingale, he could barely eat
so faithful were his ministrations to his dying comrades.
He blanched when they sickened, recovering his markings only
when we bought him a mate.

There is something to be learned from fish.

They are utterly guileless
expressing affection or contempt with equal candour.
They live by appetite and are always hungry.
They are lazy, preferring tepid waters and modest dreams to
ambitious exertions.
They are not amused by plastic deep-sea divers
or treasure chests
littering the bottom of the tank.
They like real rocks, real plankton, real shrimp.

They never bite the hand that feeds them.

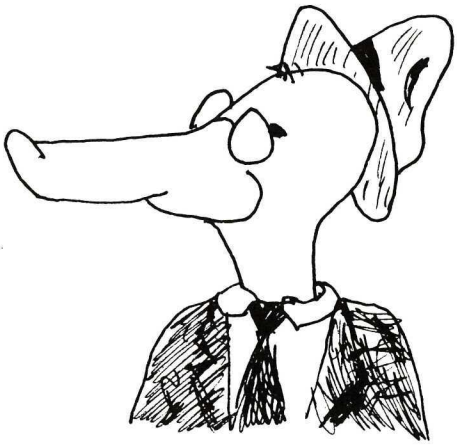
R. Mallard's
The DIFFERENCE
Between A DUCK

#19

THE FAST-SELLING RECORD IN DUCK HISTORY WAS THE ALBUM *NEVER MIND THE SEAGULLS* BY THE FOWL MOUTHED YOBS, WHICH, WHEN RELEASED IN SEPTEMBER 1977, SOLD 2.7 MILLION COPIES IN THE FIRST 8 DAYS.

R. Mallard's
The **DIFFERENCE**
Between A **DUCK**

#43



PERHAPS THE BEST-KNOWN DUCK AUTHOR OF THE MODERN PERIOD IS JAMES DUCK, WHOSE MASTER WORK PINNIGAN'S DRAKE. IS STILL DEEMED "VIRTUALLY UNDECIPHERABLE" BY LEADING CRITICS.

Why I'm Whistling

Joan Fern Shaw

I started whistling as soon as I turned off Cummer. As soon as I saw that long lane of copper crab trees and all those patients limping and wheeling around in the sunshine.

When I stepped out of the car, a yellow maple leaf touched my cheek like a Walt Disney butterfly. And I whistled my way through the fall afternoon toward St. John's Convalescent Home.

So.

You get the picture of a middle-aged guy strolling through the leaves with a box of Laura Secord soft centres under his arm. And a grey-haired old auntie with a busted hip waiting up there among the nuns. And he's nodding at the patients and smiling at what's left of the zinnias. Whistling away.

People in Toronto don't walk along the street whistling anymore. Ever notice? They used to. Back on Bloor Street when I was a kid, you'd hear men walking along whistling in time to their own footsteps as if they were damn glad to be there. Songs back then were made for whistling, like *Mares Eat Oats* and *Zippidy-do-dah*. You wouldn't often see a woman whistling; it was like smoking on the street, sort of a man's priority, back then.

Aunt Myra used to whistle on the street. Used to smoke on the street too. That's how she met my dad—she came whistling into his store to buy three packs of Exports every day.

She's not my aunt, but what does a nine-year-old kid call the gorgeous blonde who starts living with his father? In my neighbourhood in the Forties the only kids who called adults by their first names had prostitutes for mothers.

Dad and I lived at Bloor and Bathurst in three rooms above his cigar store. Two bedrooms and a kitchen. All Dad seemed to do was work in the store, eat listening to the radio, and go to bed. So we didn't need a livingroom. We had an icebox full of milk and apples and a charge account at the delicatessen on Bathurst. I never thought of myself as deprived until Aunt Myra moved in and said I was.

Their late-night conversations were better than Lux Radio Theatre:

-All you give him was a name and a nose. Just a name and a nose, she'd say.

-So what's the fuss? The icebox is always full of milk and apples. He's got warm clothes, he'd say.

-Warm clothes. So what kind of identity does he have? He's nothing. What kind of Jewish boy has never been inside a synagogue? That child don't know what a rabbi is. I asked him. I said, Morry, what's a rabbi? He says, a kind of melted cheese sandwich? Now I ask you. A kid's either Jewish with all the trimmings or he has Christmas. Morry's nothing. A name and a nose.

-He can be whatever he wants. Let me get some sleep.

-Well, I'm putting up a tree, and that's final.

-So put up a tree already. Put up a manger and drag in three wise men on camels. But let me get some sleep.

-And he'll hang up his stocking and I'll put an orange in the toe.

-Morris don't like oranges. He likes apples.

-So I'll put an apple in the goddamn toe.

-I got an icebox full of apples.

-Let me get some sleep.

I could have told Dad he'd done okay by me. Christmas hadn't seemed like a loss at all. I used to take the streetcar downtown and look in Eaton's and Simpson's windows at the things nodding and bobbing around. I'd take elevators strung on snakes up to Toyland. Free rides on little trains and cars, set up for shoppers' kids but who's to know? I'd keep lining up to see Santa and get candycanes and paper prizes from helpers who looked as if they'd just stepped out of a chorus line. When the sweaty old Santas asked what I wanted for Christmas, I'd say things like "Hitler's balls" or "a good lay" or "nothing, I'm a Jew" and watch them squirm.

If I wanted a toy and put up a convincing case Dad would reach into the till and hand me the money. And I was one of the few kids in Toronto who could watch the Santa Claus parade from my own bed.

So I had no complaints about Christmas, but what the hell, Aunt Myra wanted to defend me and that warmed me up more than the tree she dragged into the kitchen and all the presents she piled around it. I bought her a bottle of Evening in Paris cologne from Kresge's because the blue bottle reminded me of her eyes. Looking back on it now, I guess I was in love with her. But my mother had died when I was a baby and I figured what I was feeling was what you feel for a mother.

When Dad died, Aunt Myra kept the store running long enough for me to get a BA from the U of T.

-Might as well go to Toronto University, Morry. It's just down the street, she'd say.

-Might as well marry Stella, Morry. Nice Jewish girl, she'd say.

Aunt Myra sold the store, gave me most of the money and went to live in Florida with Tony, the guy who drove the Canada Dry truck.

But she always came back to Toronto and we always kept in touch. After Stella left me, Aunt Myra was my only link to the past, the only proof that I ever lived above a cigar store at Bloor and Bathurst.

Now she's in St. John's recovering from a hip operation and I'm going up the stairs to see her. Whistling.

I keep coming back to this whistling thing because I'm not what you'd call the whistling type. But today I am; for the first time in my forty-nine years, I'm the whistling type.

I own a retail women's clothing chain—one in every plaza from Halifax to Vancouver. I work, 60, 70 hours a week. Divorced, overweight, balding. I've tried gambling, travel, drugs, poetry, jogging, meditation, vegetables. Spent a week on a houseboat on the Trent River with three teenage hookers. Everything leaves me depressed. Even my children. Stella has custody; her husband's a decent guy. Doctor. The kids are Orthodox with nose jobs and new names. When I told Aunt Myra my kids don't even have my nose or my name, she says, Morry, they got identity. Something you never had. Still don't.

Aunt Myra's close to eighty now and she must have lived with a dozen men. She still bleaches her hair and wears the bright red lipstick of an aged movie queen. And she still has eyes the colour of an Evening in Paris bottle.

A couple of nuns say hello to me and I stop whistling long enough to say hello back. This place looks like a movie set of the Forties. I can see Bing Crosby strolling down the hall dressed like a priest, whistling too. There's a bit of art deco lingering around in curved lines from the Twenties, and big bouquets of tough October flowers that don't look arty at all.

But what I love most are the nuns. They have shorter skirts and veils nowadays but you still get that sense of holiness whenever they come into view. When I was a kid there were lots of nuns around, always in pairs, sweeping down the street. I used to cross my fingers and make a wish whenever I saw them. But now where are they? I don't think I've ever seen a nun in a shopping plaza.

When I first came to visit Aunt Myra, one of these sisters showed me around the chapel, dusting here and there, arranging things. She was so proud of the stained-glass windows, but proud in a community sort of way. As if she were pointing out the sunset.

I can't tell them apart, these Sisters of St. John. They all seem to be about the same age, wearing glasses and crosses, and they all have the same calm self-assurance.

Talk about identity. They don't *look* at the world, they *behold* it. They move gracefully through it and say, "I am a nun. I am here to help."

A couple of weeks ago one of my hot-shot junior salesmen told that black-and-white-and-red-all-over-nun-in-a-blender joke and Christ I could have flattened his face. And I'm no fighter, any more than I'm a whistler.

On a buying trip to Ireland once, I saw this field of black horses. God they were beautiful. Standing together, facing into the wind, manes and tails flying. Calm and proud, there on a green hill. The taxi went around a curve and I had only that one glimpse of the horses but I've never forgotten them, and I get the same feeling whenever I see the nuns.

"Hi, Morry. Heard your whistle coming down the hall. How's it going?" Aunt Myra says.

"Fine," I say, "Just fine" and I open the Laura Secords and take out the map before I hand the box to her. Aunt Myra can't stand seat belts, postal codes, maps of chocolates and the metric system.

"Lots of kilojoules waiting in here for you," I say.

"It's a crying shame they took the old Laura off the box. Her face had character. This new one looks anemic." She says this every week.

A sister floats in and does something to the plants and I settle back in the visitor's chair, whistling under my breath, just smiling and watching her like she's been sent from heaven and the more I watch her, the better my life will be. It's not at all like looking at a woman. I've done my share of gaping at women: tarty young models, glamorous business types, bitchy customers, goodhearted souls like Stella. My doctor and my dentist are both women. But there's nothing to compare to a nun. They're not sexless; they are so essentially feminine they go way beyond mere womanhood. They're untouchable, like an angel. The nun floats out and I turn my attention to Aunt Myra's roommate.

Nice old Chinese lady wearing a Sony Walkman. Through the little blue sponges at her ears, the sound track of *Cats* escapes. She keeps replaying 'Memory' and sometimes a tear runs down her cheek and she mumbles those loud unaware noises of people whose ears are occupied.

Aunt Myra is wearing blue ear-rings to match the blue blanket on her bed. She has always matched her ear-rings to odd things like flowers in the room or a chair she plans to sit in. I've seen her move from place to place and change her ear-rings a dozen times a day. Once I told her her ear lobes were chameleons and she came back with my identity problem.

A while ago, Aunt Myra had been living with Bill, a Christian Scientist, and during that time she never mentioned an illness, looking away when others talked about their deteriorating bodies. Her thoughts remained healthy until her hip got so bad she couldn't sit down without gasping and screwing up her face. Now she talks freely about every affliction she suffered silently during the years with Bill. ". . . and there I was, jogging with Bill, jogging all over The Beaches with a bunion the size of a Spanish onion. . . "

The old Chinese lady smiles and rewinds. Her leg is strapped to a machine that makes the knee bend and straighten, bend and straighten,. The movement isn't quite in time with the beat of Memory. Just a little faster and it would be in time. It's like when the windshield wipers don't match the rhythm of the song on the car radio. I have an urge to adjust the speed of the exerciser but I'd probably undo weeks of therapy.

Aunt Myra has reached her unspoken migraines. Soon she'll get to the hidden hemorrhoids. All for Bill.

This week I pay closer attention to the part where she slipped and fell on the steps of the Christian Science church. She'd gotten up and walked in and sat through the entire service and no one guessed the monumental pain she was in. But enough was enough. She went to live with James, an Anglican she met in the doctor's waitingroom.

A sister comes in with a tray of tea. "Which of you is the patient?" she asks, looking at me.

"I am," I play along. I see she has an extra cup for me. We went through the same routine last week. It's something like flirting, but it's so wholesome. Like flirting with a field of daisies. God, I love this place. If I could just fracture something. Something complicated enough to require months of therapy. Years.

The Chinese lady takes off her earphones and smiles over at us while she sips her tea. Her English is pretty limited but last week I got across the idea that I liked *Cats* too, and she says, "Andrew Lloyd Webber is the new Mozart." It took me a while to sort that one out. Three days to be exact. I was in bed Wednesday night when it came to me, what she'd said. I could see her sweet old face with all the Oriental wrinkles around her eyes, and I fell off to sleep looking forward to Sunday.

Now she smiles over at me and says a sentence. I was so sure it would be "Andrew Lloyd Webber is the new Mozart" and I'd agree and talk about a whole list of things I'd thought up. But the thing she says is nothing like that. It will probably come to me next Wednesday night in bed. I smile and nod like crazy to show I understand her, but of course she knows I don't. I try, "Andrew Lloyd Webber sure is the new Mozart like

you said last week" but she doesn't catch on. She smiles and nods her head the same fake way I've been doing. She puts on her earphones.

Still, what the hell. I'm not depressed. Two people try to communicate, right? It's the trying that's important.

I lean back, stretch my legs out and watch Aunt Myra eat her way through the top layer. Red Boston ivy peeks in at the window. Nuns pass briskly. The Chinese lady weeps to another English Memory.

"So how's James?" I ask. I've only seen him a couple of times. Something wrong with his knees.

"Managing. Except for his right sock."

"His right sock?"

"Yes. You know how he has this knee trouble? Well he can manage just about everything except putting on his right sock. I've been doing that for him but now I'm in here so he had to figure out a way. And he did."

I try to imagine how I'd put on a sock if I couldn't reach my foot. Aunt Myra offers me a chocolate and I take a Turkish delight which we both hate. I like the chocolate part but I can't stand the green jelly. I fake a cough and get the jelly into a Kleenex. "So how does he get the sock on?"

"With a plastic ice cream tub. He cut the bottom out of this tub and he puts his sock over it. Then he pushes his foot into the tub and down into the sock, like. So then he pulls up the tub and the sock comes with it. He's real good with gadgets. Fix anything."

I can see the old guy all alone, putting on his sock with an ice cream container. Maple walnut. My eyes go teary and they sting for a moment.

"Necessity is the mother of invention," I say like an ass to move my emotions along.

The Chinese lady's face lights up and she nods her head and takes off the earphones and says something like "necessity mother of invention" five or six times before she replaces the earphones.

A nun comes in and does a few things with the exerciser. When it starts up again, it's in perfect time with Memory.

Suddenly the spray of Boston ivy reaches across the window and waves at me like a hand in a Stephen King story. It breaks off and blows away with a final wave. No harm done.

Aunt Myra glances at the window. "It'll soon be snowing." I take another Turkish delight. This time I give the jelly part a try. It's not all that bad, something like the mint jelly you have with lamb.

The Chinese lady turns off her Walkman and closes her eyes. Her leg continues to walk.

"I've been up and around with two canes this week. I should be able to go home pretty soon." Aunt Myra's giving me that old Evening in Paris bottle look of hers.

I stop whistling in my head and try to look pleased.

"You like coming here, eh Morry?"

"It's okay." Suddenly I could use a double rye.

"You know something? You whistle here. When in all your born days did you ever whistle?"

"Yeah, well." Maybe I could visit the Chinese lady. Andrew Lloyd Webber is the new Mozart and necessity is the mother of invention. I could hire a hit-man to bust my leg. Do they need middle-aged male candy-stripers?

"Listen, Morry. Don't worry. Don't I always look out for you? I got to get the other hip done next and James has to have both his knees fixed, one at a time. You'll be visiting this place till the month of Sundays."

I clear my throat to cover up my gratitude and Aunt Myra comes to my rescue.

"Since when did you eat the green jelly part?"

So.

I'm whistling my way back to the car, nodding at the patients wheeling and limping in the sunshine, smiling at the brave little zinnias.

Red Boston ivy and black and white nuns all waving to me.

I can just imagine St. John's in the winter with snowdrifts wrapped around the crab trees. And in the spring.

Jesus H Christ, in the spring!

Laurel Speer

Three Poems

"Tannhaüser. . . It's patriotic music. It's their version of a Sousa march." Ward Just

A Teuton said that; a standee through the entire Ring
at Bayreuth (Bye Roit). Our Sousa, our Marine band,
stepping out to the beat, beat, beat, beat March King?

I want Richard on a 4th of July bandstand in Sioux Falls
dressed in sky blue with gold braid. And when the tuba
player collapses in heat, I want him to step down
and take his place; semper democracy.

I want him to eat hot dogs and sit through the entire
bombast of Senator Kornbittle, even if he might be half-
Jewish. And as the burning eye of sun sinks under dusty
bunting, everyone will be calling him Dick and Oh, it
will be so grand. Now that's the tradition of John P.
for all your fancy Festspiel.

Mary's Present

I'm not believing for a minute Shelley's heart
wouldn't burn. He'd drowned, that was clear.
His body washed up with a friend after two weeks.
Italian law decreed fire for stench and disease.
Friends obliged. It was a task. They had time
to think, while smoke and odors breezed the beach.
Trelawny says a seabird crossed and re-crossed
the fire, riding the heat. Trelawny was there.
He claims the heart sat at the center leaking oils,
so he fished it out. What about Williams, the other?
Falling to pieces, heart and bowels, while Trelawny
gripped his burnt palm? Mary got it. Wonderful.
She put it in a box? Her closet? In a jar
next to plums? Stunning.

Dead Editor

1. One Day in the Life of a Dublin Jew.

2. A Short History of a Pre-War Sanitorium
   (in German)

3. The Windmill, the Barber & the Fat Squire.

4. Everyman's Guide to Medieval Italian
   Mind Travel—A Religious Journey with Maps.

5. Belinda's Haircut—A New A.P. Adventure Poem.

6. After Charcot: Sexual Expression & Repression
   in the Dreams of a Viennese.

N. J. Kerby

Travels with an Empty Suitcase

empty resolutions
wayward
thoughts
wandering
lapping licking little waves
of age.

Up! Chin up!
forward back
forward back
forward forward forward forward o
v
e
r
the edge.
re s ol u ti ons
cardboard washing
little lap
age
wear chin for
up up up
KABOOM!

roses in white
scenting
the last
can of beans.

David McFadden

Little Song of Freedom

The poet tries to win back the heart of his deceitful mistress and to regain some self-respect by pretending he no longer cares for her. After "La Liberta" by Pietro Metastasio (1698–1782)

You lied to me so many times
I find I can finally breathe.
The gods have at last noticed
my sorrow. I've shed my last tear.
All the little heads of my soul
have slipped out of their nooses.
I'm free, oh yes I'm finally free.
This time, Nikki, it's no dream.

My passion's dead and I'm alive,
and I've become so calm, Nikki,
there's no longer in me any hate
that can masquerade as love.
And the stoplight of my face
no longer turns from green to red
when I hear your name, my heart
doesn't tapdance when I see you.

You're not always in my dreams
and when I get up in the morning
the first thing that pops into my
mind is often not a thought of you.
On my long nocturnal walks
each step doesn't long for you,
and when you were here yesterday
I was empty of either joy or pain.

I tell people about your beauty
and I don't feel as if I'm drowning.
I think of my long-standing woe
without becoming full of sorrow.
  Confusion never engulfs me
when you look at me and smile.
I even talk about you now and then
with that fellow you like so much.

Turn to me with that look of yours,
speak to me with your little mouth.
It's okay if you don't love me
and it doesn't matter if you do.
  And, Nikki, your lips are just
a pair of lips although they're nice,
but your eyes have somehow
forgotten the ways of my heart.

I'm happy or sad as I always was
but if I'm happy it's not because
you've been nice to me, or if sad
it's not because you've been bad.
  In your absence I find myself
enjoying the lovely countryside,
but our former unpleasant haunts
I remember as simply unpleasant.

If you listen you'll hear the truth:
you are surely a beautiful woman,
but I find I no longer think of you
as the most lovely in all the world.
  I don't want to hurt you, Nikki,
but it's important that you know
I see in your face a potential for
ugliness to come years from now.

It makes me blush to confess this
but I felt my heart breaking in two,
I thought of death when I decided
I'd had enough of your deceit.
  But passing suffering's nothing
if it lets us reclaim our self,
—no woe like the woe of freeing
oneself from woe, and no gladness.

When a naive bird manages
to escape from a branch of lime
he may leave a few feathers behind
but they'll grow back in time.
  Small price to pay for wisdom.
Henceforth that bird'll be wary
of human treachery, he'll always
have his little eye out for betrayal.

When I say my passion's dead
I know you don't believe me.
I say it so often for I'm a poet,
I don't know how to shut up.
  But everyone, not just poets,
takes an interest in narrow escapes,
and this natural instinct, Nikki,
prompts me to talk non-stop.

A freed slave will often mount
his chains where they'll be seen,
the veteran of foreign wars
is pleased to show his awful scars.
  It's our duty to tell the world
that the human spirit can bear a lot
and still survive, can visit death's
dateless night and see the dawn.

My little poem is fashioned
for my own selfish satisfaction.
It's no concern of mine that you
won't believe I've lost my passion.
  Neither the poet nor the poem
cares about your response, and I
don't care whether or not your ears
prick up when you hear my name.

For I have left a faithless woman
and she has lost a sincere beau.
Who will be the first to achieve
consolation's not yet mine to know.
  This I do know: Nikki, you'll
never find a faithfulness so true
but any old time I desire betrayal
it'll be easy to find another you.

Splitting Hairs

Sue Nevill

Oh look! said her lover, fondling one of her breasts. Look. There's a big black hair right here at the edge of your nipple.

Mmmm, she drowsed.

No but look! he marvelled. A big black wiry hair, right here. It looks so thick and dark against your delicate skin. Didn't you notice it in the mirror?

Well, yes, she yawned. I guess I did. I guess I saw it after my bath last night.

How amazing! What a contrast! This rude hair. Your vulnerable pink nipple. A whole universe in one beautiful inch, a perfect illustration of yin and yang! I love what your body says to me.

He kissed the hair.

How amazing, she thought. Somebody who thinks the hairs on my body are worth loving. And she stroked his dear head, pressed it to her breast.

Ah, that hair, he said the next night after they had made love. So many women would have yanked it out on sight. You did say you noticed it yourself? Before I did?

She smiled to herself, amused to be set apart by a hair.

Yes. I saw the night before.

And you didn't want to remove it? You didn't think it was unsightly, or worry that I'd find it ugly? God, you are so independent. So unintimidated by the opinions of others. You accept yourself, so you can accept others and set them free. And he stroked her breast while he kissed her forehead.

She was content, and not prepared to admit that she had intended to tweeze the hair. She'd only forgotten because he'd arrived early that night, and she had rushed to avoid keeping him waiting there, by himself, in her living room. He disliked waiting in other people's homes alone.

She awoke to find him examining the hair in the light of the strong

morning sun. He couldn't seem to stop staring at it. She was gratified by his wonder, warmed inwardly.

The next night, he seemed a little preoccupied. He didn't touch her breasts, nor did he mention the hair. He kept his eyes closed when they made love, a departure for someone who usually insisted on drinking in her every expression.

She had acquired wisdom through past experience and stacks of books, and didn't immediately probe for the cause of his preoccupation. It was probably something to do with his legal practice—but he would tell her, he would share. He believed very strongly in sharing, more than she did actually. Sometimes, she found sharing with him very tiring.

It was a day or two before she saw her lover again. He didn't mention the hair.

After they made love, he explained that he had a very early meeting with a client important to his legal firm, and really needed the rest of the night alone to centre himself on the project that lay before him. She understood.

She called him the next evening to ask how his meeting had gone and when they would see each other again.

There was a short silence.

Uh, tomorrow. Tomorrow night I think will be, um. Yes. Let's say tomorrow. I may have to rush off early, so perhaps if we just have dinner together? Right. See you at seven.

Her hand lingered on the phone after she had hung up. He was still preoccupied, not arcing the full force of his attention and energy toward her, as he usually did. His energy awed her, even intimidated her a bit. It was like a constant cross-examination, and sometimes it made her uncomfortable. Now she found its absence disconcerting.

By seven the following evening, she had bathed, scented and powdered her body, taking care not to obscure the hair under her nipple.

A gourmet dinner was ready for the micro-wave, her lover's favorite Greek red wine was breathing on the kitchen counter. Tapes for the evening were arranged in playing order on top of the tape deck.

She stood at the door to greet him, erect and graceful in a new silk tea gown. He kissed her hello; pecked her cheek really.

They ate trout almandine in comparative silence; trifled with the chocolate souffle. Over the cappucino, she felt the time had come to indicate her willingness to be supportive.

Love, what is it? You know you can share it with me, whatever it is that's bothering you. It's our contract, remember? Openness and honesty? Tell me now.

Her lover put down his cup and loked at her with cold eyes.

You have not been honest with me, he said. It hurts me to say this, but you haven't been honest at all.

Frantically, she tried to remember any small lies she might have told in the interests of a peaceful evening or to end a long discussion. There was nothing.

What... ?

Her voice was high and squeaky. She tried to lower it, to appear non-defensive. She was just so surprised.

Your hair, he said.

My hair?

Her hand flew to her head, patting her permed curls, wishing in her panic she had thought to mention before that her hair was really quite, quite straight. Wondering why it mattered.

The hair on your breast, he said. The hair you didn't think enough of me to remove, to even inquire whether or not it offended my aesthetic sensibility. I find that very, very dishonest. To maintain that you cared for my feelings, my concerns, as much as I did yours. My God, now I realize how unequal our respective commitments to this relationship have really been.

Openmouthed, she watched him raise his cup of cold cappucino and suck the milky froth between his lips.

It's just a hair, she said dazedly. He didn't seem to hear her.

But... didn't you say... you admired it? What about my independence, my.... ?

It took a while for the true significance of the matter to sink in, her lover said rather pompously. She was shocked to feel the poke of memory acknowledge that he often spoke rather pompously.

After all, he continued, there I was, proceeding in perfect love and trust and not expecting to encounter a betrayal of the spirit of our relationship. Upon reflection, I recognized the hair as a symbol of your selfishness rather than your independence.

In fact, a symbol of your covert desire to castrate me! he burst out. To turn me into a rug you can stride across without consideration!

His carefully shaven and moisturized face showed a touch of colour, she noticed, from the force of feeling. Foam slopped over the rim of his cappucino cup as he slammed it down. Spots of it spattered onto one of her new papyrus place mats. She stared at them thoughtfully.

Your subconscious is obviously accepting the truth of my interpretation, he said, now icy with dignity. You aren't even capable of rebutting it.

Lawyers, she thought. Everything's a debate.

Men, she thought. Mountains from molehills.

The Hair That Ate Chicago! she declaimed to herself, and started to giggle. She pushed her coffee cup aside, rested her forehead on her placemat. Shoulders shaking, she began to laugh silently and helplessly.

Her lover assumed she was crying, and became uneasy.

Now, really, he said, rising from his chair, I know this is difficult, but we must discuss it openly and rationally so that neither of us is filled with guilt and rancour which might embitter future relationships. I apologize for my outburst. You really meant a great deal to me. But we must *learn* from this, use it to measure the progress we still have to make before we are both ready for a truly mature partnership.

I think you should seek professional help, don't you? he added, to determine your true attitudes towards men and to discover just how much you really are willing to put into a relationship?

Her tremors were rattling the crystal on the table. He thoughtfully moved the brittle-stemmed wine glasses away from the table's edge, and placed a long, slim hand on her shoulder. She thought hands like this were an indication of sensitivity, and had frequently told him so. He had been pleased to accept this small tribute.

I can see, he said with a hint of kindness, that we really can't discuss the matter further this evening.

Perhaps—yes this will work: analyze your actions and their motive, really give them a good going-over, and *write* it, write it all out. Calmly and rationally. I know you mean well. You've probably tapped into some truly important prior conditioning that's preventing you from relating to me in a thoroughly honest manner. Yes.

Pleased with his insight, he straightened his shoulders and tugged at the hem of his crisply pressed jacket.

I'll leave you now, he said, in the sort of voice she thought only funeral directors used. I, uh, hope this experience will really lead us both to seminal growth and self-knowledge. Be well.

Still clutching her laughter to herself, she heard his precise steps on her hardwood floor, seven eight to the closet, she would burst if he didn't hurry. Door open, rustle of coats as he removed his Aquascutum, then more steps to the apartment door, eleven twelve and a pause. Without raising her head, she could picture him there—hand on the doorknob, coat over his right arm, body turned in careful profile for a last look at her bent figure.

A draught from the hall, a solid click, and he was gone.

Sitting up now, she freed her laughter. It rolled and gusted over the table top, making the candles flicker. She laughed for a long, long time—until her stomach was sore, and she began to get a headache.

She took a deep breath and wiped her eyes, then looked around the table. On the tablecloth, near one corner of his spotted placemat, was a hair. One of his.

Deftly pinching it between two manicured nails, she flicked it into the flame of the nearest candle; smiled as she watched it sizzle and disappear.

Animation Techniques: A Memoir

Cherie Geauvreau

At the age of eight Francie sucked her mother through a straw. It happened one Saturday morning during the Bugs Bunny/Roadrunner Hour. She'd been concentrating on the cartoon from her position, flat-bellied, on the living-room carpet. Roadrunner never came close to being caught by that idiot Coyote and Francie found this dumb. At least Tweety Bird, who in Francie's mind was vicious but cute, teetered on the lip of disaster with appropriate terror. But not Roadrunner. He buzzed coldly around the TV screen, not one feather ruffled, shaming the exuberant and brainless Coyote into acts of self-pulverization.

Francie picked up her grape KoolAid. A candy-striped straw floated airily to the surface. She sipped and watched, sipped and watched, sip...

The straw was plugged. Francie's cheeks folded in with effort, sucking. Nothing. She checked the level of the purple froth in her Peter Pan Peanut Butter glass. Half-full. She swished the straw in clockwise circles, developing a nice whirlpool at the centre. She plunged the straw down and sucked again. Nothing. Francie rested the straw atop the rim and checked for flaws. Bends, holes, slits, teeth marks? Nothing. She placed her index finger over the top and tipped the straw, bottom-up. Ah... Something was stuck in the opening. Francie looked closely. Ugh. A bug. She tap-tapped the straw on the outside of her glass and examined it again. Still clogged. Yuk. The bug, dripping grape juice, was alive and moving. Francie peered closer, then went cross-eyed peering closer still. Her eyes rounded to lakes of white, her lips parted and her small, pink tongue emerged.

Francie carefully placed the straw across the top of the glass, hitched up her legs and sprang away at a dead run. A moment later she returned,

magnifying glass in hand. She'd never really used the glass for anything but staring at the pores in her skin or scabs on her knee and once she'd burned a large brown hole through the blue cover of her Baltimore Catechism. Now, without moving the straw from its perch, she leaned down and investigated the clogged tip. Her mother loomed into focus. Mother? Mommy. This tiny flailing woman, hips and rump corked in the straw, was wearing, at least in miniature, the same Bermuda shorts and sailor top she'd had on that morning as she padded out the apartment door, clothes basket slung at her ample hip. She was shod in the same rubber thongs and the top of her tiny little head was covered with that unmistakable wild hair, now streaked purple, that to Francie always seemed to fly, not fall, to her shoulders.

Her mother was stuck, painfully it seemed, in the end of Francie's red and white striped straw. Her mother was yelling up at her. Francie couldn't hear a thing. For the life of her, she couldn't help smiling.

One thing was obvious to Francie right away: Her mother wanted out. That her mother was there in the first place, reduced to the size of a housefly, did not trouble her at all. Always the problem-solver, Francie zeroed in on the task immediately at hand. Let's see... Tweezers? She'd observed her mother plucking and fussing over stick-thin eyebrows, black mole hairs, and once, to Francie's amazement, some errant pubic hairs that were sneaking down the tops of her mother's thighs. Francie bolted to the bathroom and back again.

Roadrunner had leaned into his final horizon and Howdy Doody now crowded the screen, wooden chin clacking. Francie flicked the television off. Tweezers and magnifying glass in hand, she went to work.

The problem with the tweezer method was evident from the start. Francie's mother would not co-operate. She parried every chrome-plated thrust. She waved and kicked. The kicking was particularly comic since the bulk of her mother's thighs were solidly rooted in the straw. Francie tried for her mother's shorts. Not enough to grab onto. She tried for the sailor top. Her mother flung it off in defense. Francie thought of snapping into the limp purple tresses but decided against it. What now?

In the struggle to save her mother Francie had knocked off one of her tiny little thongs from one of her tiny little feet. She tweezed it from the mogey depths of the shag carpet her mother loved so much. It was so small. Too small, even, for her Barbie doll. She placed the thong and tweezers on the coffee table. Think, Francie, think. could she try blowing her mother out the end? Horrible, hilarious visions danced in Francie's inner eye. No. Better not. Too dangerous. She might permanently injure something in her mother's dark interior. Something vague but essential to a grown-up's life. Once a month, without fail, her mother

moped and groaned and slunk around the apartment rubbing the small of her back and glubbing a hot water bottle down the front of her pedal pushers, a victim of some mysterious curse.

What to do?

"Holy cow!" she said and slapped her forehead. The solution was so simple, so obviously brilliant. She'd suck her mother up the straw and into the warm, cushioned safety of her mouth. She'd fold her lips over her teeth so that no maternal flesh would be torn, latch her tongue to the roof of her mouth to prevent swallowing, and suck with all her might.

Francie practised the calisthenics of it several times without the straw and decided she could do it. After a moment's reflection she leaned over the end of the straw and tried to communicate, in a matter-of-fact whisper, her rescue procedure. However, her tiny little mother covered her ears, and shut her eyes in panic. Francie hesitated, then shrugged. Perhaps it was just as well that her mother didn't know what was about to happen.

Francie sat back and took a few deep breaths. She'd learned the importance of deep breathing from the Jack LaLaine Show. So Francie sucked air through her teeth and exhaled until her shoulders sagged from the effort. She laced her fingers together, turned her palms outward, extended her arms and cracked her knuckles. She was ready.

Francie picked the straw up slowly, delicately, in one hand, and formed a cup beneath her mother with the other. She exhaled until her throat contracted and placed the straw in her mouth. Then, Francie squinted her eyes shut and sucked for all she was worth. Nothing, nothing, nothing, then... Splat! Her mother slammed into the base of her tongue. Pearls of sweat beaded Francie's top lip. She sat for a second or two with her mother in her mouth. She squish-floated her forward on a squirt of spit, and, with a guilty swoop of joy, picked her mother out with the tip of her tongue. She hesitated, shot her tongue out as far as she could and wagged it ferociously. Her mother held on like a stunt man on a wing tip. Francie scooped her back inside then tipped her head forward and tenderly plucked out her mother's floundering form. She placed her in the palm of her hand and waited. Her mother struggled for a moment. Then, triumphantly, she stood erect in the furrow of Francie's heart line.

Francie had saved her mother's life.

The enormity of this realization filled Francie with an emotion she'd never felt before. She felt like crying. She didn't since her mother, as usual, had turned on the waterworks first. She crumpled into a tiny insecty-type half circle, her puny arms coddling her Q tip head, her shoulders shaking and heaving in mother-turned-bug despair. Snivelling.

Francie closed her hand protectively. She considered carrying her mother to her bedroom and snapping open the cupboard where her Barbie doll lived. She imagined finding the pink plastic pouch that held Ken and Barbie's wardrobes. She thought of choosing the fake fur that Barbie donned for evenings of fun and frolic at the Country Club, undoing its hasp, and draping the fuzzy swatch over the tiny little half-naked form in her hand.

Instead, still kneeling in front of the TV, stretching her out and squeezing her to fit, using her straw, Francie swallowed her mother whole.

Kenneth MacLean

Three Poems

Cowmedley

A rude cowhand in early Montana
played Bach on the bunkhouse Piana
but his B.S. was cowed
when that card playing crowd
really **went** for baroque in Montana!

Dark Journey

There once was a lad from St. Paul,
who grew weary of mere alcohol.
As a substitute drink
he tried India ink
and woke up in a hut in Nepal.

For Stein, On Giving up Garden Verse

Wild flowers may sour
gone in an hour

But from the stiff prose
of a thorn's hidden pose
what arose
was arose and arose.

Contributors

Rod Anderson is a Toronto writer. His poems, reviews, and short stories have appeared in *The Antigonish Review, Canadian Literature, Contemporary Verse 2, Dandelion, Poetry Canada Review, Poetry Toronto, Quarry, Rampike,* and *Waves.*

Ted Bergen is a Vancouver artist. He likes to take personal images like animals and plants or remembered and imagined scenes and cast them on a wider field of universal archetypes such as angels and demons or fire and water. His work has been exhibited in B.C. and Alberta.

David Bignami is twenty-two years old and was born and raised in Italy. He is actively pursuing his interests in music, drawing and painting. He has illustrated a book for children.

Lesley Choyce, prolific author, TV talk-show host, publisher, editor, etc. lives in Porters Lake, Nova Scotia. His latest book is *An Avalanche of Ocean: The Life and Times of a Nova Scotia Immigrant* (Goose Lane, 1987).

Guy Daniels has published some forty book translations from the French and Russian, including *Stendhal's Racine and Shakespeare, A Lermontov Reader, 15 Fables of Krylov, Russian Comic Fiction,* and *The complete Plays of Vladimir Mayakovsky,* in addition to his own books of poetry and fiction. He is now doing the preparatory work for a *Selected Poems of Mayakovsky.*

James Michael Dorsey's illustrations have appeared throughout the USA and Canada in *Bookplates in the News, Pig Iron Press, Aim, Quarry, Cicada, Earthwise, New Dimensions* and *The Brentwood Bla Bla Review.* The artist resides in Culver City, California.

Glen Downie's periodical publications include *Canadian Literature, Descant, Fiddlehead, Grain, The Malahat Review, Poetry Canada Review, Prairie Fire, Waves* and *West Coast Review.* His latest book is *An X-Ray of Longing* (Polestar Press, 1987).

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H.E. Francis lives in Madrid, Spain and Huntsville, AL, and translates Argentine literature. His latest collection of short stories is *A Disturbance of Gulls* (Braziller).

Cherie Geauvreau cooks pizza and writes.

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G.P. Greenwood, after attending the Banff Centre Writers' Workshop in 1979 and 1980, went on to be published in a number of literary magazines and anthologies, swelling her bookcases with complimentary copies. She now lives in Saanichton, B.C., where she still writes and wonders whether she should have become a yuppie when she had the chance.

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Kathy Mac's poems have appeared in *The Antigonish Review, BSPS Journal* and others. She lives in Halifax.

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Vladimir Mayakovsky was canonized by Stalin as a Soviet Poet Laureate after his suicide in 1930. Marked by wit, irony and political satire, most of his works are available in English translation.

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Daniel Moyano, an Argentine exile, now a citizen of Spain, is the author of five novels and several collections of stories. He has won many national and international awards, most recently, the Juan Rulfe Award from Paris, France, for his story *The Marvelous Flute and the Green Falcon.*

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Rachel Simon is an American writer who would give anything to see British Columbia. She has been published in *Quarterly West, Antietan Review, Missouri Review Online,* and *College Magazine.* She is this year's winner of the Writer's at Work Fellowship Competition, and third prize winner of *Playboy's* College Fiction Contest, 1988.

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Fiction

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