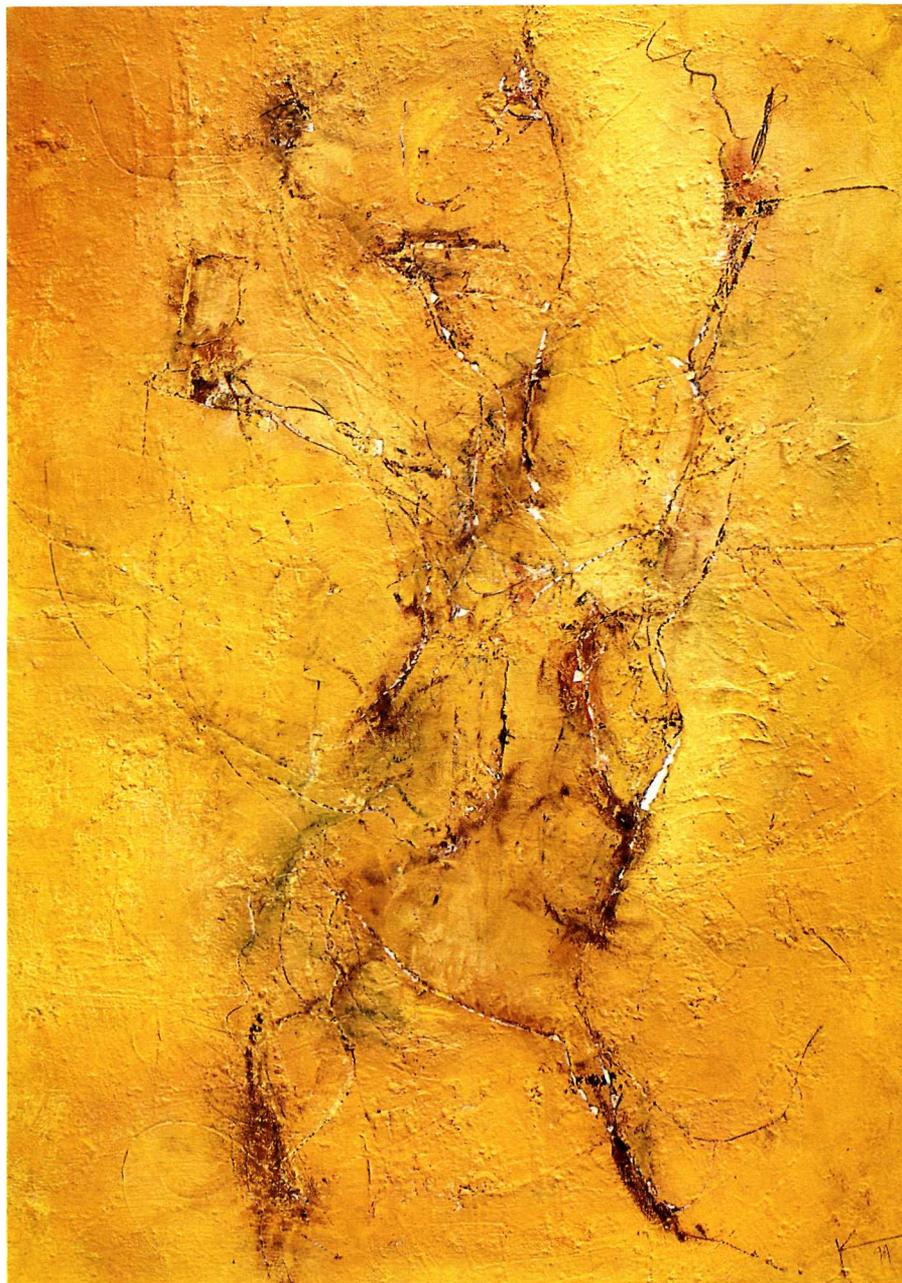


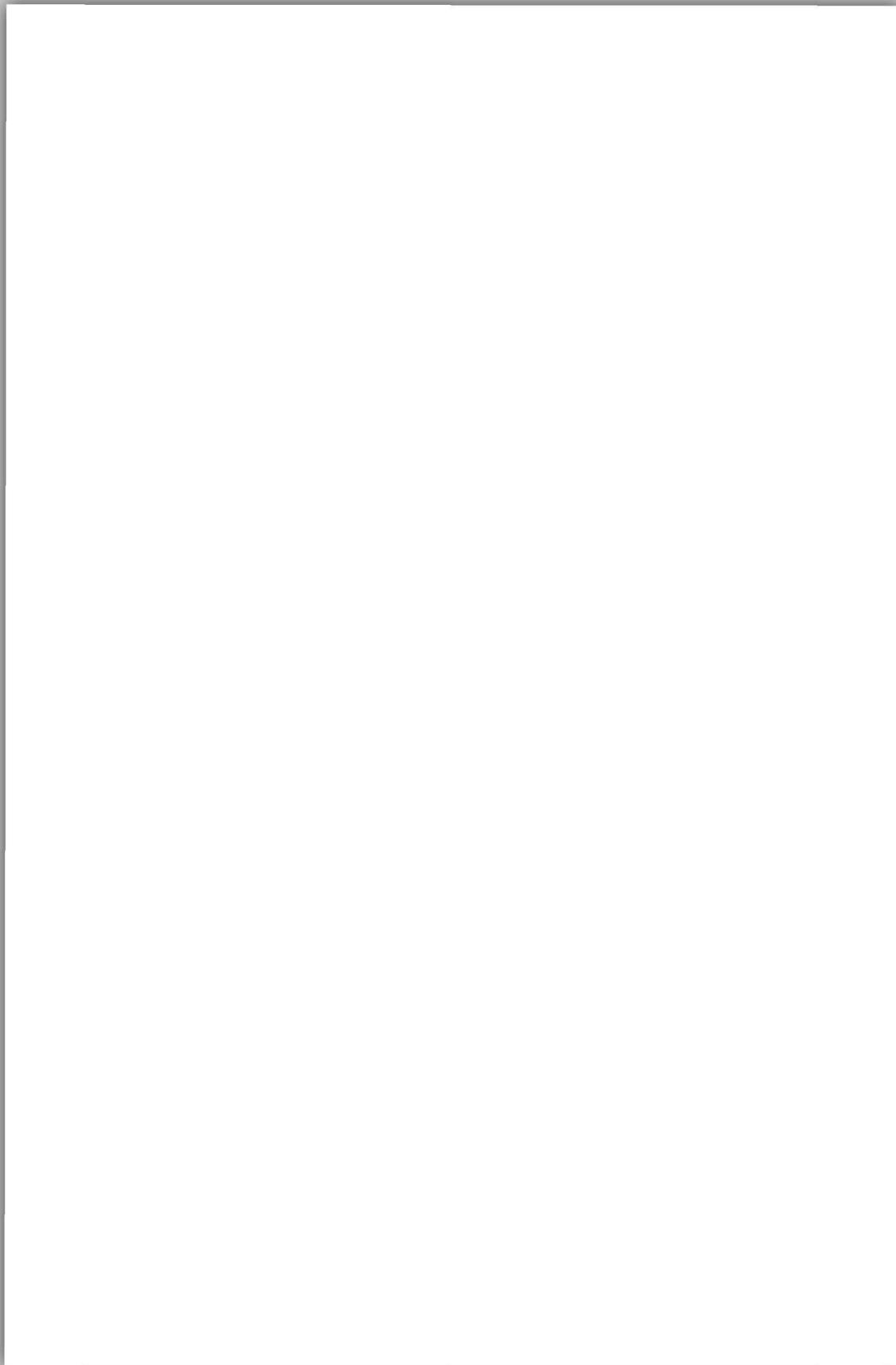
# PRISM *international*

Contemporary writing from Canada and around the world

Summer 1995

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# PRISM *international*

## The Journey Prize



PRISM *international*  
would like to congratulate  
Gabriella Goliger, author of  
"Song of Ascent," which appeared  
in PRISM *international*, Vol 32, No. 3 and  
Shaena Lambert, author of  
"The Falling Woman," which appeared  
in PRISM *international*, Vol. 32, No. 4.

Both writers have been nominated  
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and will appear in the  
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NOTE: Entries not conforming to the format outlined below will not be considered

1. Entries must be **postmarked** no later than December 1, 1995.
2. Entries must be no longer than 25 pages typed, double-spaced, on 8 1/2 x 11 white paper.
3. To ensure the anonymity of the writer, the entrant's full name, address and the title of the story must appear on a **separate cover page**. The title of the story should appear on each page of the manuscript, but the author's name should not!
4. To enter **ONE** story will cost \$20 total. There is a \$15 one-time entry fee and a \$5 reading fee for each story submitted. Two stories will cost \$25 (\$15 + \$5 + \$5). There is no limit to the number of stories which may be entered. Entrants will receive a one year subscription to *PRISM international*. Current subscribers will receive a one year extension to their subscription. Please make cheques payable to *PRISM international*.
5. Entries must be original, unpublished material. It must not be under consideration elsewhere. It should be available for publication in a future issue of *PRISM international*. We will purchase First North American serial rights for all work accepted for publication.
6. Contest open to anyone except students or instructors in the Creative Writing Department at the University of British Columbia.
7. Works of translation are eligible.
8. **Entries will not be returned.** Winners will be notified by or before March, 1996 and published in the Spring Fiction Contest issue. SASE for list of winners only.

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# Contents

Vol. 33, No. 4 Summer 1995

## Fiction

**Janalee Chmel** Pen State 53

## Poetry

- W.M. Adair** Breakfast at the Algonquin 29  
with thanks, giving 30
- Marilyn Bowering** Autobiography 11  
**Cornelia Hoogland** Drum 67  
First Bed 68  
The Girl Who Went Forth to  
Learn Fear 69
- Jean McNeil** Brazil 58  
Cachoeira 62  
Mathematics for Narcissists 65
- Derk Wynand** *Torschluss* 20  
And Yet 22  
remorse 24
- Jan Zwicky** Lullaby 48  
April 49  
Shade 50  
Bill Evans: Alone 52

## Creative Non-Fiction

- Lorna Crozier** Talking Dirty 7  
**Patrice Melnick** A White Night in Africa 32

## In Translation

- H.C. Artmann** The Miner 25  
*translated from* Horticulture 26  
*the German by* The Brushmaker 27  
*Derk Wynand* The Consummate Lifesaver 28

**Heather Keenan**

**Cover Art**

Stepping Out  
(oil paintstick on paper)

**Contributors** 70

# Talking Dirty

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Lorna Crozier

“If you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all.”

“Kiss, but don’t tell.”

“It’s up to the girl to say no.”

“If you do it, he won’t respect you.”

**M**y mother could hear me and my two girlfriends coming down the street from three blocks away because we giggled so loudly and so often. Fifteen, and we were inseparable. At sleep-overs and in the corner cafe with a coke and chips and gravy, we talked about everything (*he said this, and I said, and then he said*), we talked about everything except . . .

what I loved about Rus was the way he undid my bra with one quick twist of his fingers, and I didn’t even have to pretend not to help him. It was warm in the car parked by the dam, the radio playing, a cigarette burning in the ashtray, his tongue circling my nipples while below the surface of the water, eels slid back and forth, dark and fleshy as a wet dream (I was the only one, the only girl who let a boy touch her breasts . . .)

How do you shave without cutting your legs? Use your dad’s razor, not your mom’s. Who’s the cutest teacher in the school? I’m cutting gym—I’ve got my little friend. Did you hear Mr. Hanes fart in front of the whole class? You didn’t notice the way Dwayne looks at you? Of course, he’s going to ask you to the dance, *and he said, and then I said, and then she said . . .*

last night, I didn’t wiggle away when his hand pushed down the back of my jeans, his palm pressing against my tailbone, that pale concavity just above the rise of my buttocks, and he slowly

---

slid his hand over my hip, my belly, and down . . .

Bitch, slut, whore, cock teaser.

Why pay for the cow, if you can get the milk for free?

In the cafe after school one of the boys tells us a joke:

“Jack and Jill went up the hill  
riding on an elephant.  
When they got to the top,  
Jill helped Jack off the elephant.”

“I don’t get it. What’s so funny about Jill helping Jack off the elephant?” I ask it over and over again, and the boys laugh. “God, are you ever stupid.”

Later my boyfriend explains the joke to me in the car. He thinks it’s cute I didn’t know about jacking off. Naivete and ignorance are feminine traits. And so is a loss of words, an absence of vocabulary for parts of the body that are never spoken. I was eight years old when I first learned about that absence. Two older boys trapped me and my friend in our seats against the wall in the Eagle Theatre. The movie was “Ma and Pa Kettle on the Farm.” When their poking and fondling were over, we ran home, crying. My mother laid me on the bed, said, “Where did he touch you?” I closed my eyes and pointed, not saying anything, because I didn’t know the words.

“Where did he touch you?”

Here and here  
those places no one ever named.<sup>1</sup>

For me, writing about sexuality, means finding the names, means moving out of a learned, imposed silence; a geography of secrecy and shame. I was, after all, a nice, working-class girl in small-town Saskatchewan in the fifties and sixties. The double standard was invented there. Boys who were sexually active, or so they told us, were admired. They were bad in an exciting way, like James Dean on a motorbike, a sexy antidote to Frankie Avalon crooning on the beach to a large-breasted girl who used to wear mouse ears. The comparable girl to James Dean was a slut and she lived, like me, on the wrong side of the tracks.

Rich girls who got pregnant went off “to visit an aunt” in the city for several months, and when they returned, no one spoke of their

---

absence. Damaged, no doubt inside, they went back to school in their beautiful angora sweaters, their pleated skirts, their new city shoes. Poor girls had to stay in town, carry the shame of their pregnancies on the street, quit school on the principal's orders. One day they'd suddenly disappear, drop out of the world of basketball games, Teentown dances and trivial talk. How one dealt with one's sexuality, the penalties you paid, the old double standard, had everything to do with class when I grew up, as well as gender.

I knew if I got in trouble, there would be no one to blame but me and no one to help. The urges of the body were dangerous: do it, but don't get caught; do it, but don't go all the way; do it, but don't talk about it to anyone, even your best friend. Girls discussing desire—orgasm, masturbation, sexual turn-ons—was a taboo. It was as much a secret as my father's alcoholism, as much a source of agony and shame. My sexuality was one of the two big silences of my young life and keeping those silences damaged me.

When most adult women say they would kill themselves rather than be teenagers again, I think it has a lot to do with the muting of that major part of their lives, a suppression that created an unremitting sense of regret and loneliness. (*I'm bad, so bad. I'm the only one who lets him touch my breasts.*)

Having said all that, I don't know how I ever came to write about sexuality as much as I have, except to say that I believe it's central to our existence as human animals in the world. My motivation came from anger, love, and the many powerful women writers who spoke their female experience before me and the ones who continue to do so—writers like Dorothy Livesay and Muriel Rukeyser, lesbian writers like Adrienne Rich who seemed fearless in their expression of what had once been forbidden love, and Sharon Olds, a contemporary, who has written some of the best poems about heterosexuality from a woman's point of view.

Once I became consciously aware of the cultural inscriptions on my body, the male writer's descriptions of my desires, I felt a tremendous urge to write over them; to say, hey wait a minute, that isn't it, that isn't how I feel, that isn't *all* I feel. Listen to another side of the story. What I discovered is that it's impossible to erase the obscenities, the lies, the many they-would-be-funny-if-they-weren't-so-sad male versions of female desire, but it *is* possi-

---

ble to revise the old stories and to tell them in an untraditional woman's voice. Along with the work of many of my peers and the generation before us, my poems about sexuality have moved away from the romantic diction of the past and into linguistic areas, such as bawdiness and braggadocio, that until very recently have been male preserves.

At the same time, it was not easy for me to leave behind my reticence. I had to learn to use the language *in new ways* to speak my undeniable pleasure, something I'd been conditioned for years to hide. No wonder it was so difficult. Antipathy towards female genitals and sexuality goes back a long way, perhaps best summarized in this eighteenth-century dictionary definition of *cunt*: "a nasty name for a nasty thing."<sup>2</sup> I had to learn to reclaim that word from its usage as a curse, to dust off its ancient origins, to say it out loud at a poetry reading as Dorothy Livesay had done, that brave and sexual woman who was in her early seventies when I first heard her read. I wrote down my stories, I confessed, I kissed and told, I reclaimed my physical self with the old Anglo-Saxon words and with urgency, power and sometimes joy.

1. Lorna Crozier, "Fathers, Uncles, Old Friends of the Family," *Angels of Flesh, Angels of Silence*, McClelland and Stewart, 1988, p. 29.

2. Captain Francis Grose, *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, ed. Eric Partridge, Third edition, Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1963, p. 110.

*Marilyn Bowering*

---

# Autobiography

1.

*I was born*  
in a caul.

I was proof  
against drowning.

Green marble and a gold locket  
were placed with the caul in my basket:

flecks of white foam in the green,  
a gold penis, a gold sun on a chain;

the skin was the stretched white  
of an egg.

They put my head in a bucket of water.  
The villagers watched.

I breathed water like sunlight,  
the light I was born with. Gold.

I had a red thread around my waist.  
The caul was folded, dried like snake-skin,

tied with the thread.

*I was found*  
in the cork tree at the bridge.

A man drove his truck over the bridge and parked it next  
to the river. His tire tracks

made the long thin cries of a wounded animal  
in the red earth. He took his wide

knife and began to cut the bark.  
He finished cutting

and stuck his knife in the body of the tree.  
(He tells me this as he stares in a scrap of mirror,

picking his teeth. He touches the blood on his gums  
with his finger.)

I was high in the branches  
with my empty infant face.

There was milk on my shift,  
a wrap of dirty cloth between my legs.

(He says he saw, for an instant, the face of an angel.)  
The sun drew the shape of a small gold figure.

I can remember,  
deep in my blackness,

a rainbow as it danced into my eyes. My pupils swallowed  
her. She remained, a mannequin, in my brain.

(I wear a white cloth over my eyes.  
My eyes are colourless film.)

The man wept at sight of the angel.  
He had discovered his sins. They were in his hands,

his mouth, his feet, the gold penis that dangled  
between his legs. They were

in water, the thread of blood he drew  
on my skin with a knife.

They were like brilliantly coloured beads,  
fragile, made of glass.

He placed them, loose, in his pocket.  
I stirred in my basket.

I could smell the pines  
and the rust of the cut cork trees.

The tree trembled.  
The man saw light and shadow.

*When I was three years old*  
the man showed me the coloured glass beads.

I played with them while he slept.  
I made circles,

bodies of men and women, a head with all-seeing  
eyes.

I felt his sins.  
I held them to my eyes, but saw nothing.

I put them in my mouth and breathed in colours and sunlight.  
I breathed, with his breathing, the silent light,

the scaly lids of his eyes. I breathed amber  
and smoke, the strangled cries of afternoon bells,

the goat limping down the path.  
I put the glass beads back.

My new family was the minister and his wife.  
In church, on Sundays, he praised the Lord.

I sat in the pew,  
and felt shadows climb the thin walls of my legs.

I could hear the shores of the cork grove by the river,  
the fall of bark, its blood soaking into the ground.

I bit my thumb. I put the green marble in my mouth.

I felt the flecks of milk,  
I touched the wrapped caul,

the red thread,  
the gold locket.

*When I was twelve,*  
I was baptised.

I walked to the river behind the minister.  
I wore a white slip.

There was no one with us. But when we came to the riverbank,  
the cork-cutter waited beside his truck. The minister's wife

was at home, sick, lying back in her bed, her dress drawn  
above her knees.

I had heard her thighs, like two animals,  
hungry pieces of flesh;

I had heard the minister's words to God  
fall like bright coins into empty pockets.

He stood still with his hand on my back.  
We had entered the river. The flat of his hand

was a stone. I sank to the bottom. My hair followed  
the current. My hair was a still brown fish. The minister

caught it and lifted me up. The cork-cutter stayed where he  
was; I could feel his sharpness.

A woman came across the bridge.  
Soon I walked beside her in the dust.

I carried the water.  
At night she let me warm myself at the fire.

High in the rose-coloured mountains  
where the houses sat like white teeth,

she picked some herbs.  
I drank the tea she made from them,

*and I could see.*

2.

The appearances began soon after her death in 1962. They occurred firstly in the street near her home. Two women

saw her come to the window and knock to be let in.

We are driving down an endless road into the desert. It is

nighttime, but I can feel the heat frozen in the chevy frame. I have my feet on the hump in the back seat. My friend, Dan,

who is more experienced in these things than I am, taps his fingers on the steering wheel. He is listening to music.

Beside him the medium is quiet. The bulk of her teased hair rises above the headrest. We carry food, water, blankets,

candles, rice and salt for the ritual. I have a green stone in my pocket. Suddenly, the car swerves and we slide across the road.

The stars, bright as cat's eyes, ride the arc above the flatness. Jesus! Dan gets out of the car.

He walks to the front and kicks the tire. I open the door. The air is cool. "Someone will be along to get us," I say,

looking down the empty road. There is no one. He sticks his hands in his pockets. He is a long lean man with straight

grey-black hair—an airline mechanic. He is due back at work tomorrow. "We're on the right road," he says. I look down the road.

I can feel the strain of watching nothing. "Should we do something?" I ask the medium. She shrugs and tucks herself

into the blanket. I fall asleep and when I awaken I feel something cold in my chest. I try to move,

but I can't.

3.

*I know that by these few [remarks], I am providing not only starting points but conclusive proofs to those in whom inwardly there blazes fiery strength and a heavenly origin, so that they may indeed readily lend their ear to the great Democritus, announcing to those who wish to effect a healing of the soul and a deliverance from all distress that this doctrine is not mythical, but mystical and arcane; as also [they may listen] to that [author] who has asserted that the logos of the creative universe works by rules so that man, godly-minded and born of God, may learn by straight-forward work and by theological and mystical language.*

John Dee

4.

*I go to the King,  
show him the caul,*

*the red thread,  
the locket of gold.*

*I tell him about the cork tree,  
the wind stirring rainbows.*

*He touches me all over.*

*We go to the church and do penance.  
For seven years I live in the desert without him.*

*My hair grows long. I am brown as earth.  
I try to drown myself in a well, but the water won't take me.*

*I belong to the earth.  
I return to the King.*

5.

I would have wept if weeping  
netted continents in heart's safekeeping:  
what do you want, why call or write  
to me? My heart's closed, it's night,  
my hand will never trace your cheek in sleeping.

As dawn began its walk, its sweep  
of all good sense, you took my hand: fleeting  
touch that left its mark—I feel it yet—why should I fight  
to lie to you? I would have wept.

There are no words for this regret, a leaking  
hard, dry as drought, unstaunched by all these months: needing  
you is all it is, a wound against myself, slight  
as a sting of frost or second-sight—  
I have no heart for change, no grieving (understand?)—  
But, oh, I could have wept.

6.

We run out of water and drink from the radiator. There is so  
little. I don't mind, but I wanted to see her. She

always appears on her birthday, says she is happy but still  
looking for the right someone.

White as a candle, hot as flame, a cool green diamond. She  
sits in my mind like a foreign country, a word so dirty it

can't be said. She would cure me if I could touch her.  
Sweetheart.

7.

I remember, first, the surgeons, dressed in green hospital  
gowns, masked, wheeling intravenous carts through the street.  
There were a dozen or so of them moving through the square.  
Next, half a dozen "traffic-lights," their heads encased in card-  
board boxes of flashing lights; a woman dressed as a shower, her

flesh-coloured body-stocking showing through a transparent plastic curtain, and the chrome showerhead pointing down at her from above. I remember carrying my daughter because she was afraid of the noise and people, and a period when I could no longer carry her and Kevin held both children on his shoulders, biceps straining the sleeves of his shirt, the tendons in his neck thick as the spines of books. He and Angelica—thin, quick, pretty with her long dark hair—seemed like dream figures, companions to whom I was attached—I had forgotten why—until the sun rose or I died. Both seemed equal possibilities, because of the fever I didn't know I had.

In the cafe on the square, to which we returned for the second time to buy juice for the children, my daughter and I waited to use the bathroom. After fifteen minutes in line we went in. The bowl was smeared with shit. There was shit and water on the floor. She looked at me, "Mummy, what will I do?"

"I'll hold you, honey." There was a noise in my ears like the sea. Planes passing overhead from the base at Rota.

The five of us in one room, in Cadiz.

8.

*Awakening in time*

to see the rooms bright with moonlight  
spread in sheets, folded in corners.

Awakening, fingers wet, wet mouth,  
sweat painted like gold

on flesh,

to hear silence  
anonymous as the weather,

and understand  
it's not enough

to ask for more  
time in the hourglass:

like Dante's continents, we are hell  
and heaven in the same body,

the fingers and mouth  
the sleepy puckered flesh, the mind

on its long stroll;

the moonlight as it was when you awoke  
on the dark side of the world, spinning

towards sunrise.

Derk Wynand

three poems

---

## Torschluss\*

The air flickers and rises, everything in it.  
Breathe it in.  
Breathe out.  
Let it go.  
Stop brooding about how it works on others,  
hikers and bikers this first day of summer.  
Forget them.  
Focus instead on crickets in the bush,  
in the rising broom, clicking,  
or on the broom's thick blossoming,  
its dark pods that spiral open, catapulting  
black seeds outward, too quick for the eye,  
slow enough for earth and ear.  
And the woman ahead, shadowed  
by a younger man hot on her trail,  
who may or may not remind you of yourself—  
if you cannot say what you're after,  
take a moment to gather your thoughts.  
Consider each of the distinctions between  
the woman, her shadow, and you.  
Who cares if she rides her bike slowly,  
giving and taking her own sweet time?  
Don't even begin to pretend it's for you.  
Wipe the sweat from your eye.  
Lick the salt from your lip.  
Let her pedal, backpedal, brake, then push  
her bike at less than the young man's speed,  
ratchets clicking, tacking into and  
out of your line of vision—  
no help now from impossible Zeno!  
Is *that* what you're thinking?  
Let it go.  
She's easy to dismiss; shake him off too.  
And don't imagine her elsewhere, dangling  
first one foot, then the other,  
into lake or bath water.

Turn your back on her and your own image  
of her meticulously pumiced foot  
sliding evenings into its shoe or glass slipper  
clacking up the long wood of your staircase  
come morning, breaking into your sleep,  
kicking through sunlight that angles past  
your bedroom window.

Don't believe these promises of heat and light  
even if they make you feel decades younger.

Watch out for the easy miracles, stiletto heels  
on which your fancy's too gladly impaled.

Let the woman and the man make their own way.

Go halfway home.

Then half of that.

And another half and half again.

And if this way you reach your door,  
lock it behind you.

Set the chain.

\* Literally: shutting of the gates. Closing time. *Torschlusspanik*  
is the fear of older people that they won't achieve their goals  
or find a spouse.

# And Yet

Not long before his apartment burned down  
I tried to explain to Jim that my poem  
about the cat on a fence in snow and  
dark clouds sure enough gathering might have  
sprung not simply out of the play of light  
and dark in our back yard one November,  
my brooding as usual about the  
nature of good and evil, the latter  
hinted at perhaps by bird seed strewn on  
the ground, making the simple cat appear  
to turn complex a little—that what there  
was of it may well have had at its core  
something more basic, namely the notion  
—I know: outdated—of simplicity  
itself as a foil for the tricky new  
paradigms of both poetry and life,  
pendulum, say, attached to pendulum  
to confound the predictability  
of its singular sweep, or turbulence,  
usually of water, but also in  
our lives, especially as one begins  
to touch on the other, (note in the first  
line above how Jim's situation makes  
an enormous leap in complexity  
that will in time provide a harder edge  
to my arguments, though at the time we  
could not have divined these reasons), so I  
find myself increasingly tolerant  
of those who want more clarity in their  
writing and their lives, both complicated  
a little however by my trying  
to impose on them a small poem, and well  
enough aware that even editors  
nowadays want to read only fiction  
and nonfiction, yes, prose, and hardly share  
my interest in the surely valid

reductions of, say, my cat poem, hardly the-cat-sits-on-the-mat stuff (consider, for example, its discreet allusions to the largely chaotic systems of weather) and yet despite my efforts to convince him of the poem's virtues, not to mention its obvious, though tangential bearing on his own future, he chose two easier pieces for his magazine.

## remorse

did not work against language enough . . .  
did . . . did not say "did not"  
enough . . . did not say enough . . . did . . .  
did did did, in code . . . did  
artless enough . . . did uh, did uh  
did uh enough, did: permutations the  
mind can or cannot keep track  
of, all that intellectual and pseudo-  
intellectual twitter and flicking of wrists . . .  
did did not, did did . . . did  
uh: a—eh? uh did did  
did: b—see? c? did uh  
did uh . . . whatever language needs us  
for and vice versa, whatever we choose  
what chooses us to be conveyed . . .  
did language, did . . . did not: knots . . .  
undid them too . . . never learned though  
semaphore, but in scouts knew how  
to wave the morse flag, significantly . . .  
did did: i, flicking the wrist . . .  
see? dashes and dots made visible  
at modest distances . . . print on newsprint  
later, at arm's length visible, smaller  
and smaller, and a voice more  
or less behind: stern grandparent or  
parent or teacher, dare I say  
master? did print a little, did  
a little voice, did less, did  
more and tried to keep my  
elbows steady . . . steady wrist . . . did not  
did too . . . did uh . . . did did.

*H.C. Artmann*

*four poems translated from the German by Derk Wynand*

---

## The Miner:

1. The morning sun's early rays strike the peak of the tall mountain first—gilding it with an index finger.
2. After 4 hours walking a trail marked in blue and red, one reaches the entrance to the cavern, a hole about half a metre in diameter.
3. Close to where the little nightingale begins to warble is a tavern—the hard-working pitman stops there after work, drinks his quota and gives an account of the massif's ravines and terrains.
4. Early in the day, watchful cowherds and hunters hear the faint knocking and jangling from the mountain's innards. They know: the miner's already at work, he's excavating metal for the benefit of mankind.
5. Above the cavern entrance is a small wooden rope winch, on it sits Dalibor, consuming his modest lunch, he's just taking his break.
6. Below ground one works with the simplest lamp imaginable, but one that is just the job, for it begins to flicker fitfully should dangerous gases arise, a signal to leave.
7. In the colder season, coal and lignite are also excavated, Dalibor's signs are two crossed hammers, he's a highly regarded man, he has no wife, though now and again, as the opportunity presents itself, he does look up the skirts of milking herdswomen.
8. Waterfalls are brooks that try to fly in vain, they're no birds. Dalibor is a hard-working pitman, he has a long beard to which he always fastens his simple lantern, leaving both hands free for work.

# Horticulture:

1. A gentleman tosses his half-smoked cigar over the garden fence—the gardener is there at once with her rake and removes the foreign body; she'd rather raise asparagus.
2. A garden that belongs to everyone is called a park. Once, the majority of parks belonged to individual noble families, these were still *real* gardens.
3. Women gardeners discuss love affairs with many gentlemen, it lies in their flowery nature. The apprentice girls need to start with the basics: watching closely, paying attention, not being born yesterday and having a quick intellectual grasp are essential requirements.
4. In autumn, much foliage is raked together, asters and dahlias are cut, tied into bunches and sold to passers-by, ready cash is honoured and more. There are also corpulent women gardeners in shawls.
5. The city's biggest garden is called city park, an imposing area with trees, flowers and green spaces. During their working hours, the women gardeners have their calves bitten by swans, flocks of birds skim over their scarves, squirrels often raid their set-down lunch baskets—a daily work, then, that's by no means so easy as it first appears.
6. Libussa is a gardener in Prague, Yagoda tends parks in the city of Zagreb, both carry pruning and garden shears under their belts, have bright teeth and a pleasant breath. Libussa is a Cancer, Yagoda a Virgo—which means June and September.
7. When gardening apprentices turn nubile, a bird sings them a song. Gardens and parks are most refreshing when they have fountains.
8. The woman gardener's vocation is a sunny one, where there's grass, there's love, where a tree casts its cooling shade, there one gladly lies. One almost never gets bored, one accomplishes much and is always in high spirits.

# The Brushmaker:

1. He holds the individual bristles up to the light and checks their firmness, he numbers them, cuts them to the right length, shakes a box of wire clips, fetches the glue bucket, waters a geranium, turns to his work again.
2. No, he does not use razor blades, he really does have every number in his head, he lays everything out precisely, remains silent during the more difficult operations, mixes hot and cold with calm deliberation.
3. His daughter steps on dropped tweezers and bends them straight again, sometimes it's a question of fractions of millimetres, one could say she sweeps what's useless away, locks up her blackbird, sets out what is desired.
4. Brushes and smallish brooms are also made by hand, the following should be noted: the glue's already boiling, one turns off the stove, grabs the pot with a wet rag. Asbestos mats are advisable here.
5. The bristles of the *four* seasons should be given: Spring at 6 cm, summer at 2 cm, autumn at 3 cm, winter at 1.5 cm. Open flame or excessive heat to be avoided if at all possible.
6. Otherwise during monsoons &c., cf. South Indian, East Indian, archipelago-related &c.
7. Sometimes such bristles have a long journey behind them, they are shaved off, gathered and packed the world over. The daughter leaps to the upper storey, the master has misplaced his glasses.
8. To the north, an artificial square moon of wood or synthetic fabric, to the south, a sow with sucking pigs. East and west mean nothing here. Once brought to boiling, the glue must maintain a constant temperature, along with the clips, this is the most important thing.

# The Consummate Lifesaver:

1. *May we suffer no reversals of fortune!* He has long poles fitted out with smooth hooks, a milk-white rubber ring, an impeccable soul. No one can determine the age of his tattoo—he wears it with honour.
2. He has a pith helmet for really hot days and a whistle to warn wanderers and bathers of dangerous moors or abrupt cliffs.
3. He's less concerned with the moon than the sun. This gives him confidence with people: on one occasion, he rescues a boat from the Rhine, three persons and a little dog.
4. The greyish green of nettles is no hindrance for him, barefoot he rescues children from them, in Koblenz he spends a burning night on extension ladders, his coal-black eye glows with love for his fellow man. Oh time, oh space, oh alpha of all that's noble & true & good!
5. Praise the Lord, he sings, the wet element and mountain peaks are His subjects, He alone gives me courage and strength to conquer them and my inner weakness.
6. Whether he's ever been in love? Sensually, manly, intensely? Oh yes, Marietta it was, the brash Italian, an acrobat's child—only that was long ago, a shark wrapped himself around her.
7. Lost in thought, he gazes after the swan, tracing its bluish evening course, from the pier, the Red Cross sees the night approaching, it begins in the east; and waves splash and lick the desolate beach. Another day's work, oh Martin!
8. *Temps de vacances, temps de voyage*, July, August, and January too . . . Mombasa, yes, a line of palms and other trees. Maybe he'll change, the distance still lures him and—how often the foam-scented wave breaks, crumbling rock threatens. I warn you, swimmers, I warn you, climbers—the shark has it too easy, too easy the peak's icy geranium!

W.M. Adair

*two poems*

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## Breakfast at the Algonquin

Outside of the hotel windows, a young woman, a young man. Her linking her arms about his neck after racing toward him from out of nowhere. As a warm season sweeps early into the cold, she, too, had no regard for time or place.

For her, it was love-time. She clung to his face, a peach, and danced her apple-morning into his eyes. A straight man, he took her on, with his thumbs firmly hitched to the pockets of his trousers. He chose to ignore her feckless puppy-love when it jumped again, pulling him with all of its might. Her joy, certain to pull over the Algonquin hotel itself tugged at my heart.

I said, "Bend."

But straight, the straight man held his place. In an earthquake he would remain under lintels and gauge the arcing sway of curtains without a bit of sweat on his fine lip.

Beside him, Rose Hips fought the frost. The broad-faced dahlias had succumbed, bent at the neck. How very soon the summer ends.

# with thanks, giving

## 1. with thanks

twenty or more horsechestnuts  
we garnered from his grandmother's  
ground, the old home place on Tower Hill,  
and carried these away from the base of a wind-broken tree  
twenty or more  
the cold in them more intense than in the worm-  
scarred apples picked and tossed on the divided seat  
ending another summer. Cold, red hobs of what was creeping  
in. Around the blueberry fields we drove,  
circling, rodeo riders. You showed me  
the place where your sister stood sucking her thumb,  
the hills reflected in her eyes and the horse, sheering  
past, free of harness, and running  
with the cutter  
for home.

For good measure, you broke a vital branch  
from the horsechestnut tree, and this, also,  
we carried. At Brockway you doubled back  
to filch from the road-side used surveyor's stakes. These,  
you said you needed  
to brace the yew, the cedar and pine  
and the wisteria which made it through  
one winter, and who knows,  
may come again. On top of all of this you added  
that the one  
person in the whole world a boy is allowed to love,  
and love without shame,  
is his grandmother.

I saw you both then,  
a kerosene lamp lighting your faces.  
The giver and the gift  
settling into sleep.

2. giving

several chestnuts to the newspaper girl  
and her little friend at the mail box,  
they chime at you, "What are these?  
Aren't they pretty?"

They carry them in their hands  
like new puppies,  
their young cupped breath  
full of care as  
they take their steps  
protecting something,

larger than a man it is.  
And as perishable.  
Gentle they

transport us  
beyond  
this doorstep and this day.

# A White Night in Africa

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Patrice Melnick

Candlelight and shadow pulsed over Engime's temples as if he were still alive. A warm wind stirred the sheet that covered his body and a wiry, coffee-coloured woman pulled the end of the sheet over Engime's feet and tucked it under. I pushed my hair out of my eyes so I could see better.

Marie Claire, Engime's wife, squeezed her eyes tightly as she screeched, "*Lo kwi awé, lo kwi awé,*"—he died, he died, "*lo kwi awé, lo kwiii . . .*" She rolled on the ground and curled up like a drying snail. I tried to show respect but my mind shot pictures and my imagination took notes.

"Why don't you cry?" a young girl asked me in French.

I had never seen a corpse before, much less spent the night near one. I was afraid that if I cried out loud, people would think that I was faking it.

I had been in the Central African Republic (C.A.R.) for six months but had only been in Bangassou for three. I taught English at the high school, *Lycée Moderne de Bangassou*. I taught English poorly, my French was wretched, and I knew only a few words of Sango, the national language of the C.A.R. I was grateful to Jeff, another Peace Corps volunteer in Bangassou, for helping me adapt. I needed to become fluent in French to communicate with the school faculty and other educated officials. But to talk to most people outside of school, I would have to speak Sango. Speaking Sango for me was like juggling pineapples.

"I want to learn Sango," I told Jeff as we tried to siphon kerosene from a barrel into a jug to fill the refrigerator in my kitchen. Sango was the language people used to complain about mothers-in-law, to discuss the number of wives the mayor had, to gossip about girlfriends, to curse out their children, to laugh about a *pomme cithère* fruit falling on someone's head, to mourn a death, to whisper what they really thought of the president, to cry.

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"Get Engine to teach you Sango," Jeff said.

"Engine?" I looked up from wiping the spilled kerosene off the floor.

"When he gets well." Jeff hadn't seen how sick Engine had become.

"Jeff . . ." I knew he really liked Engine. "Okay, when he gets better," I said.

Jeff lit the wick to start the refrigerator and shoved the tray back into the fuel compartment underneath. On his hands and knees, ear close to the floor, Jeff watched the wick and adjusted the flame until it burned clean and blue. We would have cold water in a couple of hours.

I lived alone in an old, French colonial-style house, but Jeff ate lunch with me every day. A cook worked for me, the same man who had cooked for Peace Corps Volunteers in that house for seven years. Jeff helped me keep the refrigerator running, offered advice on how to deal with the school authorities, and suggested which of the three town markets to shop at.

I liked the idea of learning from Engine. But I had seen him at the hospital the day before and felt that I had seen a dying man. I didn't know what to tell Jeff. I rarely heard anyone in my family talk about dying and had not learned to talk about death myself. My parents talked about "passing away," "fading away," and "slipping away." My mother sent get well cards to terminally ill relatives, like a denial of imminent death. Friends sent jars of candy to hospital patients with no appetites. Visitors ate the M&M's to calm their nerves. We rarely talked about a past death, and never about approaching death. I was afraid that saying the word "die" would make it happen.

Engine and his family lived next door to me. Our houses on the school grounds were scalding hot in the dry season but didn't leak in the rainy season. People considered us privileged to live in tin-roofed houses with cement floors rather than in mud houses with hairy roofs of dead palm fronds.

I went to Engine's at seven every morning before school to buy soft *beignet* doughnuts from his wife, Marie Claire. She fried them outside in a cooking hut constructed of three sides of mud bricks and a low, palm leaf roof. Three large stones held the wok-like pot above the wood fire. Engine's robust wife squatted next to the fire. Marie Claire took a soggy ball of dough out of a deep bowl and rapidly rolled it between her palms. Working like a machine, she rolled about thirty balls at a time and dropped them into the oil one by one.

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When I arrived, the *beignets* were rising to the top of the oil, floating like toasted ping-pong balls. I bought ten. "*Cadeau*," she said in a husky voice as she wrapped the three extras with the others in a scrap of used notebook paper. All the ladies who sold *beignets* wrapped them in their children's old English tests and algebra assignments. The *beignets* burned my hand as the oil seeped through the fifth grade lesson. The next time I brought a bowl to carry them home in.

Engime often sat outside the front door, right next to the cooking hut. He drank coffee and ate *beignets*. Sometimes he had student papers or a book in his hand. Other times he just rested against the back of his lounge chair, his long legs stretched forward, and watched people passing by on the road near our houses. He usually wore a pair of slacks for school but relaxed in his bare feet and open shirt. He waited until the last minute to put on his leather shoes. "*Baramo, Mo yeké sengé?*"—Hello, how are you? he asked and smiled. Formal Sango lessons hadn't begun, but he tried to teach me a few phrases, and would test me later.

"*Aaah, mbi yeké sengé,*" I answered back, waiting for the first batch of *beignets*. I only knew basic greetings.

While Jeff's senior mathematics class shrank from fifty to forty students and my English class dwindled to only twenty-five, students packed into Engime's History-Geography class. The seniors studied anxiously because at the end of the year they would take the Baccalaureate exam. Only four to ten of the sixty-five Bangassou seniors were likely to pass. Maybe none would. Those who passed would continue on to college to become teachers or engineers, depending on their specialty and the needs of the country. Those who flunked took it again the following year. If a student flunked twice, he took his limited knowledge of chemistry, philosophy, English, geography, literature, and trigonometry out to the field to plant cassava with a short-handled, wooden hoe. There are no private employers in the Central African Republic. If students didn't find work with the government, there were few options beyond planting their family's fields and selling the crops in the market at the end of the season.

The seniors knew Engime was a serious teacher because he never came to class drunk. He never spent his ten o'clock mid-morning break at the palm wine stands on the street corner.

Even the headmaster, Monsieur Kandé, went out on a morning drunk. If someone needed to talk to him, it was best to catch him before he drove away on his moped at mid-morning. The students

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mumbled to each other, as they stepped aside to let the headmaster by. They watched the tall, rigid man ride away in a straight line. Everyone knew where he was going. The students wished they were going too. But they didn't even have enough money for cheap palm wine which tasted like fermented lemonade in the mornings. By late afternoon, when the teachers returned to the palm wine stands, it had become more potent and tart.

When Monsieur Kandé returned to school, he wrung his sweaty hands and stared out his open office window. If you tried to talk to him, he nodded his head with his eyes glazed and his shoulders slumped. He could no longer listen attentively to problems of crowded classes or disruptive students.

When the palm wine professors returned to school, they walked more slowly, but their eyes squinted into grins. The school recess lasted for fifteen minutes, just enough time for some of the teachers to wander off the school grounds to visit the palm wine vendors. Engime, and a few others, stayed at school reviewing for class. At noon, the end of the school day, the students, professors and headmaster, would all gladly leave the stuffy classrooms and burning walls behind them to go home for lunch and an afternoon nap.

After my first few weeks at *Lycée Moderne de Bangassou*, I saw Engime less often sitting in his front yard with a cup of coffee. His wife said he was sick. When I saw him, he greeted me, "Baramo," and smiled, but his eyes looked tired and dark. As he coughed, his chest shook. His jaw grew sharper and his elbows, knees, and ankles protruded more every day. Sweat beaded up upon his broad forehead and narrow chest even in the cool evening when he only wore a pair of soccer shorts. Week after week he dropped pounds, and then began missing classes. Students talked about the day Engime would come back, but there was worry in their faces.

After a couple of weeks, Engime seemed to get better.

"How are you feeling?" I asked him one day when I saw him in his yard.

"I'm feeling good. I can eat better and I feel much stronger, though I still have headaches. I expect to be back in school any day."

The next day, in the afternoon, he came to school. My house was on an incline above the *lycée*, so I could see the school from there. I walked down to see what he was doing. He was drawing maps on the board with coloured chalk, having scheduled extra classes for the seniors to catch them up on the History-Geography program.

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They were worried about the Baccalaureate. Students were relieved that Engine had returned and hoped he wouldn't have a relapse. Engine taught most of his classes, though occasionally he would leave school early to sleep off a recurring headache. We watched Engine for signs of returning strength.

Marie Claire had left town to visit relatives now that Engine was stronger, and I no longer saw him in the mornings. I bought my *beignets* in Banguiville's morning market, Jeff's neighbourhood.

I felt better since I saw Engine at school every day. I was sure he had put on weight. So the morning I looked out my window and saw Engine leaning into a friend's shoulder and walking in the direction of the hospital, I was surprised. He took small, unsteady steps, like an old man. He looked as skinny as ever.

Several days later I went to the hospital. I didn't recognize the skeleton lying on the bed with his limbs angled awkwardly. Engine trembled, struggling to move an arm or foot. The dry season had set in and the heat and dust baked the room. Engine's head curved like a brown eggshell with veins about to crack open. I could almost see the pain in his temples racing to his skull and jaw. His skin hung loosely about his bones, and he riveted his hands to his head as if trying to grip the pain. He didn't notice anyone in the room.

He must have been whirling around in his pain, as he rocked back and forth to the throbbing and his toes grasped the wrinkles in his unmade bed. He rolled to the edge and one of the teachers, Ndega, pushed him back into the centre. As the sheets slid off, Ndega tucked them back around the edges of the foam mattress.

I became dizzy. In the long room full of sick people, I leaned against the molting, salmon-coloured wall. Flakes of dead paint fell against my neck. Six beds lined the walls and two stood in the middle of the room. At least the breeze from the window cooled Engine's area.

In the bed next to Engine's, a wrinkled girl slept on her side with her hands tucked under her cheek. I noticed an old man on the other side of the room, with young and old women all around him. He smiled, pleased to have company. There were pots of stew and cassava meal under the bed. The hospital served no food. The families of the patients brought food and water jugs. They filled their jugs from the water faucets outside. Visitors also brought food for their friends at each visit.

"Wake up!" said Ndega, shaking Engine's shoulders. "Patrice is here to see you. Say hello."

"Don't do that . . ." I said, shocked at how Ndega treated a dying man. "He needs to sleep."

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Ndega agreed to leave him alone but stood by the bed attentively. There was nothing to do.

I later learned that the sick in the Central African Republic don't get a lot of sympathy. Engime's friends treated him well and visited frequently. But, if you have a cold or the flu and tell someone about it, more than likely they will reply, "I'm sick too"—and it would probably be true. So much illness fills people's lives that poor health is the norm. Few people live without bouts of malaria, tapeworms, ringworms, diarrhea, acute dehydration, lice, pneumonia, schistosomiasis, influenza, or colds. Central Africans work when they're sick, because they're sick most of the time, and work needs to be done all the same. The sick aren't given any special food, like chicken soup or extra liquids. If they have an appetite, they eat the same stew that the family eats every day. Few families have the resources to give a sick person special food.

Engime had no appetite. His only concern was to get rid of that pounding in his temples. He was oblivious to his friends and fellow teachers who stood around the iron bed helplessly and made lame jokes. In spite of Ndega's brusque attempts to wake Engime, I could see he was a good friend and very upset. When Engime tried to bend his legs, Ndega very gently took each one and bent it for him.

"The doctors can't cure him," said Ndega, staring at Engime's closed eyes. "He needs traditional medicine. I'm going to the country to get some. I know a traditional doctor there who will know what to do. I'll find something. Engime will be fine."

Engime's breathing went fast and shallow. Ndega looked at me and I nodded.

Marie Claire had received word of her husband's relapse and returned to town. As I approached the hospital room a few days later, I heard women wailing. I stood at the doorway of the room holding a loaf of bread in one hand and a bunch of bananas in the other. I couldn't hand them to his wife, who wailed and clung to the other women. Engime lay on his back, his ribs moving in and out slightly.

I worried that in the next moment, his ribs wouldn't move, that he wouldn't make the next breath. The wailing women didn't notice me. I didn't know what to do with the bread and bananas. Engime gasped like a fish with his head twisted back, and I couldn't imagine how that jutting jaw could open to eat.

"Thank you, Engime will like these," Ndega said, as he took the bananas from me. "I got some medicine from the country."

"When are you going to give it to him?"

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“I already have. He will get better.”

I couldn't stand watching. My eyes watered, as I heard Engime struggle for each breath, his legs frozen into V-shapes. He could no longer indicate if he wanted Ndega to move them or not. The women swayed back and forth, crying over Engime, who seemed neither dead nor alive.

As I walked through the hospital grounds, I realized how lucky Engime was to have a bed since there were not enough for all the patients. Others lay on blankets under trees. Wives squatted near the ground and cooked over smoking fires, as they must have done at home. The patients who lay outside may have been farmers, hunters, or brickmakers. Engime probably had a bed because he was a professor. Nurses came into the room to check on Engime more often than the old man or the wrinkled girl.

Two days later, during my eleven a.m. class, I stepped out for a moment and noticed how quiet the air was. Silent masses of students and teachers drifted across the school grounds, and they gathered at a hill near Engime's home. Silence spread like smoke. I ended class. The other professors had already dismissed theirs.

Marie Claire and the other women of Engime's family walked out of the house. She ran ahead of the others across the field in one long wail, through the tall savannah. Her heavy legs seemed to move in slow motion, as if running through water, and she held her skirts high, barefoot in her sorrow. I thought she would never make it across the field, to the road, to the hospital. I went home to tell Jeff, who was having his mid-morning coffee. He put his face in his hands for a moment, then looked at me with red eyes. “Let's go,” he said and stood up. We followed the others to the hospital morgue.

Outside the morgue the women tugged at each others' braids until the hair stuck out in wild clumps. The wife, children, brothers, and cousins paced back and forth in ripped up clothes stained in red dirt. They went barefoot and screeched hysterically. The boys wailed and shrieked, as they ran aimlessly like trapped antelope.

One of the teachers told us the funeral would be at the house of Engime's relatives in a nearby neighbourhood. He described how to find it. Jeff and I returned home to rest. We would return at sunset.

When Jeff and I arrived at the funeral house, I was surprised to see dozens of children. In Central Africa, if parents go to a funeral, they don't hire a babysitter to watch the kids. The husband, the three wives and all fifteen kids attend. Who could pay a babysitter for one, two, maybe even three days and nights?

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I didn't know how to stand, how to hold my hands, or what to say. Most people spoke in Sango. Jeff kept his hands awkwardly in his pockets, though he spoke French well enough to talk to the other teachers. The red mud huts surrounded an open area where women constructed a canopy of palm leaves. The doors and wooden window shutters of the houses stood propped open, and children carried chairs outside. I wondered where the corpse was.

I sat down on a chair, and one of the older students, a twenty-year-old, sat down next to me to tell me about how hard English was for him. I was relieved to remember his name, Bapai. In class, Bapai always sat tall and silent in the back of the room and knew all the answers. He took off his round glasses and rubbed them. Without the glasses, he looked less serious.

I tried to listen to Bapai talk in his deep, gentle voice, but I was distracted by the movement around me. A pick-up truck arrived, the back loaded with the long bench-tables from the school. The older students lifted them out of the truck. Families arrived carrying sleeping mats under their arms and narrow, sway-back shaped bamboo beds on their heads.

Mats surrounded the canopy. Several fires heated huge caldrons of *gunia*, a leafy green sauce. Women prepared pots of tea and coffee and placed them over the fire to keep them hot. Bapai noticed that I was studying the scene and explained that the women were good friends of the family and helped by cooking the food.

Finally, two men carried Engine out of one of the mud houses on a bed. Bapai left me and joined Engine's son under the canopy.

A sheet covered Engine's body up to his neck. He looked more comfortable than when I'd seen him in the hospital. One of the ladies lit candles. The air grew cool.

Even in the dark, Engine's skull looked polished. His cold, brass-coloured forehead reflected the candlelight, and small flames burned like half moons on either side of his face. The eyelids barely closed, and a dull gleam peeked out from the narrow slit of one eye. Or did I imagine that? I imagined the slightly parted lips were about to greet me, "*Baramo*," with one of the few Sango words I understood.

A sheet covered the rest of his body and bunched up under his arms like bleached cow hide. His chest rose a fraction of an inch—or I thought it did. I was glad that I'd brought a jacket. Before the night was over, I would wish I'd brought my own bed so I could sleep like the children who lay curled up on mats and in the centre of the curved bamboo beds.

Ten or fifteen members of Engine's family sat on straw mats

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beside the body. Marie Claire lay on her side like a small child. She uncurled and sat up slowly, staring at the broad, polished forehead. She wiped a line of saliva from her mouth and brushed the flies from the corpse's lips. Engime's son, David, sat on the other side of Engime, across from his mother. David bent forward and squeezed his eyes tightly, drawing creases across his forehead. He wrapped his long, cardamom-coloured arms around his legs and rocked back and forth. He took the hand of one of his younger brothers. As he rocked near the candlelight, I could see the red dust coating his face—the make-up of mourning. Red dirt covered the arms, legs, hair, and necks of all of Engime's people. It was embedded in their wrinkles, pores, and fingernails. Red clay dust stained their shredded clothes. The mourners looked like a family of clay figures that had just stepped out of the ashes of a fire. I stood towards the edge of the pack of mourners. Outside the tight, clay-coated family stood about seventy professors, students, neighbours and friends.

"Coffee?" More tea?" Ladies circulated among the guests and offered drinks to keep us awake. I took a cup of hot tea loaded with sugar.

"I see you have something to keep your eyes open," said Ndega in English. He taught English and liked to brush up on his own speaking skills by talking to the Peace Corps volunteers when he had the chance. He held his coffee delicately, as if at a cocktail party.

"How long will people stay?" I asked.

"This is *La nuit blanche*," he answered.

"What's that?"

"That is a 'white night.' We will stay all night. But you don't have to. You can go home."

I hadn't stayed up all night since I was a high school student. I wanted to see what it would be like to stay awake, to feel that fatigue with the others.

"I want to stay. Why do you stay awake?"

"To keep the family company on the hardest night. Why don't you take pictures? That would be very interesting."

"I'm afraid to. I don't have my camera. Wouldn't people think I was rude?" In Peace Corps training, I had been warned not to flash my camera in people's faces like a tourist. I'd had enough rotten papayas thrown at me in other countries to know not to push my lens in people's lives indiscriminately.

"No, it is fine. Take pictures. Take many pictures," said Ndega.

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He didn't seem to realize how upset people might become.

"No, I better not. I don't want to," I said. And yet my mind flashed frame after frame of the frozen body and the well-dressed, smiling ladies offering small, murky glasses of coffee.

Several teachers gathered around Ndega and me. I was pleased. During my two months in Bangassou, other teachers had rarely spoken to me. I was too shy to speak to them at first. I feared they didn't like me, or that they had nothing to say to a white woman unless they were flirting. I envied Jeff, who knew the other professors well enough to join them at the palm wine stands or school soccer matches. I was the only woman teacher in Bangassou other than the principal of the upper school, a French nun.

"Are you tired yet, Patrice?" Mbolinguera, the philosophy teacher, asked me in English. I was surprised how well he spoke. The others leaned forward to listen.

*"Non, pas du tout."* I wanted to practice French.

"You look tired. Why don't you go home?"

"Why do you want me to go home?" I asked, smiling. The other professors looked confused. Mbolinguera translated into Sango.

"No, stay," said Adabi timidly. He was the superintendent of the school.

"You are in the Peace Corps, yes?" asked Trepaye, the French teacher. They all wanted to practice English.

*"Oui, je fais partie des Peace Corps,"* I answered.

"I think you are very curious," said Mbolinguera.

*"Oui, je suis curieuse."*

"You speak French," Trepaye said.

*"Oui, je parle Français."*

"Very good," said Mbolinguera.

*"Un peu seulement."*

"Are you and Jeff going to stay all night?" he asked.

"We're planning to."

"That's good. We stay here to say good-bye to Engine's soul, to keep it company before it goes to heaven," Mboli said waving his hand towards Engine's body.

"What do you mean? Does he know we're here?"

"The soul stays for a few days. We keep it company before it leaves the body."

"We'll be here for a few days?"

"No, just one. We used to stay up for three days, but now it's just one. We used to play drums, dance. But we don't do that any more. We have a party and dance one year after the death."

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The teachers started to talk among themselves in French. I couldn't understand much of the conversation but listened and tried. Mbolinguera spoke and smiled slightly. Sango words mixed into his French, and as he began to speak more quickly, he changed into Sango altogether. The others were quiet and attentive. Mboli's hands gestured rapidly. He began talking faster and faster, excitedly, and then ended his monologue with a few slow words. The teachers began to chuckle at the joke. They laughed and guffawed, holding their bellies. Mbolinguera gurgled and laughed hysterically, his arms wrapped tightly around himself. His shoulders shook in laughter. He put his hands over his face, still shaking. His shoulders jerked once, twice, then he sobbed and tears dripped between his fingers. Ndega moved closer and put his arm around Mboli. The other teachers stood silently.

I heard the students singing church hymns in French. They sat on benches facing Engime's family. I took a free chair near the canopy, so I could hear better. Jeff sang with them and shared a hymn book with Bapai. I wondered if they sang for Engime's soul or for the family. Marie Claire didn't seem to hear. She lay her head on her arms, and she looked at the ground as if she were a leftover rag doll.

The harmonies sounded strained. The tunes quickened and became so loud that the students sounded as if they were yelling anxiously. Bapai leaned forward as he sang, his eyes squinting into his hymn book and his neck stretched forward. He sang as though forcing his voice from his tight throat. I felt too nervous to try to read the French and learn the melodies. When the singers took breaks, some got up and sat elsewhere. Other students took their places until the benches were full and the students sang again. Bapai and another student, whom I didn't know, sat next to me.

"Madame Melnique, it's very good that you and Jeff are here," Bapai said in French. "Did you like the singing?"

"Yes, it sounded good."

"We sing to keep Engime company. We will sing all night."

"That's good."

"Many students are here. They will miss Engime. And they want to help David. Do you know his son, David?"

"Not very well."

"That's David over there." Bapai pointed to the long-legged young man with his arms wrapped around his knees. He was looking in the direction of Engime's body, in a daze, as if he was looking through the corpse. Bapai talked to his friend more rapidly. I listened to the French.

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"Look, the school headmaster is here. The principal of the lower school is here," Bapai said.

"Everyone is here," his friend agreed.

"Everyone but Soeur Bet." Soeur Bet was the principal of the upper school, the French nun. For at least fifteen years she had occupied the small school library, which was more like a storage room. She made up the teachers' schedules, passed out books, and scolded students for "insolence." I hadn't noticed her absence until Bapai mentioned it. Her obligation to come hadn't occurred to me. She must have appreciated Engime as a teacher. She probably saw him at the cathedral every Sunday.

Bapai's voice hardened. "Where is she? It's a shame. Everyone came. Why isn't she here?"

I wondered if Soeur Bet hadn't come because there was something un-Catholic about the funeral, but I didn't know enough about Catholicism or funerals to be sure. She must have realized that all of the teachers and the other principals would come, and that people would notice her absence. Did she decide not to come because it wasn't right for a nun to be out in the neighbourhoods so late at night? I tried to imagine her at the funeral, with her silver-white hairline, in her white habit, but I couldn't. Maybe she would have come to a funeral held during the day.

I wondered if she objected to the kind of funeral being held for Engime. What about the belief that the soul stays around for a few days, that those at the funeral must keep Engime company before his soul leaves the body? What about the all-night ritual? There didn't seem to be any Christian component to the funeral beyond the hymns. Were Soeur Bet to come, would she scoff at the references to the spirit staying close, would she mumble "Pagan" under her breath?

"Madame Melnique, *ga ti te kobé*," a girl said to me. She knew I didn't understand her. She sat next to one of the pots of *gunja* helping the other women build up the fire and stir the food. I wondered if she were one of my students. She looked to be the right age, twelve or thirteen. "*Ga*," she repeated, flapping her fingers downward to call me over. I came and sat on the mat next to her. Though she smiled, I saw tears on her cheeks in the light of the fire. The heat felt good.

"Why don't you cry?" she asked me in French. She looked familiar, but I wasn't sure if she was one of my students, or Engime's. I had two hundred and fifty and had not yet gotten used to the African names. I felt sad and hoped that I looked sad. But no tears would come.

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"I'll cry later, when I get home."

"Are you hungry?"

I realized that I was. She gave me a bowl of *gunja* with a spoon. I had eaten *gunja* before and liked the bright green leaf sauce cooked in palm oil with garlic, onions, and peanut butter. She didn't offer me any *gozo*, a thick cassava paste which Central Africans eat with every meal. A big bowl of *gozo* sat on the other side of the fire. I asked for some and a woman gave me a lump the size of a baseball, as heavy as a shot put. *Gozo* is a filler.

"*Mo tené na Sango apé?*" She laughed at my puzzled expression. When I finished eating, she brought me a bowl of water to wash my hands in and a towel to dry them with. Five other girls her age gathered around us. They talked with each other in Sango, and I thought the girls sounded like chattering weaver birds. The sounds rose and fell, for Sango is a tonal language and pitch contributes to meaning. But it still sounded like birds to me.

One of the other girls held up a finger in front of my face and said, "*Oko.*" Was she asking me to wait for her a moment? After a pause, each girl held one finger in my face and said, "*Oko.*"

"*Oko,*" I held up one of my fingers.

"*Usé,*" they shouted and held up two fingers each. For an hour we practiced numbers and greetings, one of my first friendly contacts with students. In the classroom, they either competed for attention by throwing pencils across the room at each other, or avoided my questions. I was intensely curious about their personal lives. When I taught my next class, I remembered the names of the students I had met at the funeral and soon learned others.

Jeff joined me and said, "The other teachers wonder why you aren't sitting with us. You might want to sit with our group pretty soon." Jeff pointed to the teachers sitting on a circle of benches.

"Do I have to sit with them?" I enjoyed the girls' friendly company most of all.

"No, you don't have to. But if you don't, they may wonder why." Jeff left in the teachers' direction.

I understood that I was classified as a teacher and was expected to socialize in certain ways. Yet I felt excluded. I wasn't invited to drink palm wine with the teachers on Friday afternoons because that was considered a man's affair. They didn't see me as a regular teacher because I was female, and yet I wasn't viewed as a regular woman because I was an educated professional. I dreaded going back to sit with the professors. I liked their com-

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pany but resented the pressure. And I was irritable with sleepiness. The caffeine didn't keep me awake—the trips to the out-house did. I stood up and thanked the girls for teaching me some Sango and walked over to the cluster of teachers.

Someone screamed. Engime's wife began another round of wailing. It was almost three a.m. and I hadn't heard her mourn for several hours. As if following a cue, the others sat on the mats near Engime, put their arms around Marie Claire and wailed with her. I wondered about the grief she must have felt. And at the same time, I wondered if she was obligated to mourn loudly, if the others in the family were also supposed to make an appropriate amount of noise. I thought it made sense, when in mourning, to put on rags and scream.

Weeks later, I learned more about how my students felt about funeral ceremonies. In my English class, we discussed different ways of dealing with death. I was surprised how open the students were to talking about death and funerals. I described the embalming done by a paid stranger, eulogies given by people who didn't know the deceased, expensive coffins and burials, black suits and dresses, and the twenty-minute funeral service. I explained how carefully Americans avoided talking about death. The students were astonished by the complexity and expense of funerals in the States. They didn't think the American system sounded right.

But Bapai told me that he didn't like all the loud crying that goes on at African funerals either.

"It's not good to show your emotions, whimpering like a dog. That won't bring the dead back," Bapai said. While the students were disturbed by the distant American attitude towards death that I had described, most of them were in favour of reserved ways of mourning. Quiet tears, silent prayers.

I wondered if these students thought that wailing rituals were too primitive after learning of the controlled, weepy, formal funerals of the missionary churches?

Every culture has its funeral rituals, but I think that if I were mourning, really mourning, I wouldn't want to dress up in a conventional black dress with stockings, black heels, and make-up. That seems too refined for the raw emotion felt when someone dies. To wear rags, go barefoot and wail like a lost jackal comes closer to real grief. To mourn loudly would be like turning myself inside out, showing the naked raggedness of my feelings.

When morning light came and a pick-up truck arrived to take Engime to his home town to be buried, Jeff and I left, walking in

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a daze. We passed others who had slept at their houses but were returning to see the last of "*la nuit blanche*," and to watch the rusty white pick-up truck drive away with Engime, Marie Claire, David, the other children, and friends, for the burial.

I never found out what gave Engime those headaches, caused him to lose weight, and killed him. I later knew of many people who died of "God's will" and "unknown causes." That same year the principal's mother died. "Cause unknown." One of the teachers' wives died in childbirth. "God's will." While playfully chasing a rooster, the neighbour's five-year-old boy fell down a well. "God's will," again. A student died in a knife fight. The school mourned for days. People didn't expect to prevent death, though they grieved just the same. Mboli said Engime died of tuberculosis. Jeff speculated AIDS. I didn't catch all the interpretations in French, but I heard no one speak with certainty.

"It was his own fault," Soeur Bet told me. She said he had been feeling bad for years. "I told him to go to the hospital for a check-up." She looked disturbed. "I told him. Maybe they could have helped him then. But he waited too long. This shouldn't have happened."

Later on, when I was at the hospital waiting for antibiotics to treat my infected mosquito bites, I again faced the questions surrounding Engime's death. While I sat in the doctor's office, I saw a small jar on his desk. A stringy white piece of human tissue the size of a chicken gizzard floated in the formaldehyde. ENGIME was printed on the label wrapped around the jar.

"*Qu'est ce que c'est?*" I asked. The French doctor pretended not to hear and seemed uninterested rather than evasive. I asked him again and he answered in rapid French. Maybe he named a piece of anatomy, the part that didn't make it into the white pick-up truck with the rest of Engime's body. Maybe he named the disease. But I didn't understand. I wondered if the jar held a part of the brain, for I remembered how he had held on to his aching head. The doctor gave me my antibiotics and sent me away. Cause of death, still unknown.

The morning after the funeral, classes were cancelled, but we had flag-raising. The students usually sang the national anthem mockingly. While they were loyal to their families and ancient tribal nations, they didn't feel much for their twenty-five-year-old country. They giggled while the flag was raised and purposely sang off key. Some swayed from side to side during the song and carried out the last note several beats longer than necessary. The headmaster had to lecture them every few weeks to sing the anthem respectfully.

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This time the students stood absolutely still. All our eyes watched the flag being raised slowly, and I felt a pang of sadness when it stopped halfway. The students stared at the midway flag and began singing. They were thinking only of Engine.

Standing in the crowd of singing students, I saw the girls who had taught me Sango. I scanned the lines of students and found Bapai. His head, like many of the other boys', had been shaved clean in respect. I thought of Engine's brown, skull-like head. I would never see Engine's wife or David again. Marie Claire and the children moved to her hometown. Friends cleaned out Engine's house, and Mboli moved in the next semester. This time the students sang the anthem for Engine and carried out that last note in perfect, mournful pitch.

*Jan Zwicky*

*four poems*

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## Lullaby

Don't let grief frighten you.  
Standing out there, in the mind,  
its silhouette is winged and cavernous.  
But what brought you here: is past.  
No need to lock the door.

Don't let grief frighten you.  
It comes to let you sleep.  
Bring it in to sit down by the fire.  
In the hearthlight,  
you will see its face is human, its hands  
are empty like your own.

# April

How the light is sad.  
How it will not leave us alone.  
How we are tugged up staircases  
by the way it angles across landings.  
Or just our faces—tipped  
to the clear, depleted sky.  
How, because of sunset, the imagination  
headquarters in the west.

Spring in the north: all that  
tawny grass and gravel and nothing  
green to sop up the excessive honesty.

Outside our windows,  
something like youth or promises.  
How the wind blows right through them,  
blossoming. Fleet.

*plants actually emit light for a short  
time at the moment of change from light to  
darkness*

*Plant and Planet, Anthony Huxley*

## Shade

is not dusk, though it is often then  
I think of it: the grape-hung oak  
and hickory and maple trees  
paused after the day's heat,  
motionless. Nor is it shadow—something  
a little sad, subtracted-from, where other  
things get lost. Shadow is  
what lengthens into dusk, the exhausted image of the world  
laid out across itself. Shade  
goes straight down, espresso,  
dense with intent. And yet  
it's not as though shade isn't what we think of  
when we're tired.

And as we learn from paintings,  
shade is not mere absence, isn't black; and does  
resemble shadow, being  
many-coloured, subtle. So,  
not single (though in this kind of heat  
it feels like an embrace  
to stretch out on the dark grass, breathe green  
under the canopy, and doze)—shade is  
multiple as leaves, each  
cupping light, light spilling  
over to the next, rilled, glinting,  
until here, at the bottom,  
it sways through the clearing, thick  
as taffy; glossy, braided, sleek

—but that's

the light; and shade  
is other.

Other,  
then. Which is after all  
a kind of absence, neither a  
breathing out or breathing in, top  
of the swing. Maples at dusk,  
not dark but still—  
even in wind.

Some place  
where we are no one but ourselves  
and in that moment of transition  
give off light.

## Bill Evans: "Alone"

Sound that makes night fall around it  
like the glow from a reading lamp.

Rain on the roof, straight down.  
The name of your name  
spoken without another's.

Rubato is a hand  
you thought indifferent  
laid, briefest of moments,  
on your sleeve.

It walks away, then,  
that sound, without looking back.  
Lights up a Lucky. Says

we hadn't the ghost of a chance, says never  
let me go.

# Pen State

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*Janalee Chmel*

**T**he recess bell sounds with a clang clang clang and hundreds of children run into the playground silently. They run past the basketball blacktop. Past the tetherball poles. Past the jungle gym. Past the swings. They run all the way to the back fence and wait. A very few children remain back near the school building on the blacktop playing games. These children hold a distinguished position at Central Elementary.

At the fence, children line up shoulder-to-shoulder, chests against the fence, fingers white-knuckling chain link. No one speaks. They listen to one another breathe and watch the steam exit their own mouths. Lips curl through chain link. Breath shoots through to sacred ground. The fence, topped with barb wire, rattles against its poles as the children lean on it and shake it demanding. The shaking increases until the top of the fence resembles the zig-zag function on a sewing machine.

Across the adjacent lot, the doors of the huge minimum security prison grind open and hundreds of breathless women rush out. The children erupt in screams of delight as their mothers, all dressed similarly but recognized immediately, rush to their places on the fence. Huge breasts bounce like basketballs on blacktop as the mothers race to their little ones. They do not have to hunt for each other. Like students who insist on sitting in the same seat all year, each child and mother have their place on the fence. Some mothers greet two or even three of their children. A few women remain back by the building. They do not have children at Central Elementary.

Grubby little hands push through chain link to touch mommy-cheeks. Well-manicured fingernails (they have the time) reach through link to stroke uncombed locks. How's school? How's the dog? How's your aunt? Rarely, how's your father?

School is OK. The dog ran away. Aunt Martha is fine. I made you something today.

Gifts are acceptable because the mothers are strip-searched when they re-enter the prison; a situation well worth enduring to

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see their children once a week. The mothers and children spend the fifteen minutes questioning, laughing, scolding, pleading. And always touching. Lips reach through link to press chilled cheeks. Noses poke through link for silly Eskimo kisses. Ears are stretched through link and inspected. Bodies lean against each other in mock-hugs as fingertips grip fingertips. They cling desperately to the seconds—all three hundred and sixty of them.

Then, clang clang clang, and the children unlink themselves obediently. If they are not back in their classroom seats within five minutes, they will not be allowed out for recess next week. The mothers know this fact well and release their flesh and blood as painfully as birth. It is twelve fifteen p.m. on Wednesday at Central Elementary, also known as Pen State, Link U., and Momma-Got-High High. (Most of the women have at least one drug offense to their name.)

Johnny Appleseed heads back to the school with the other kids, ready to start math class. While in a cult, his mother changed her name from Annabeth Warren to Jesus-Mary Appleseed and Johnny Warren suddenly became Johnny Appleseed. Luckily, his transcripts still say John Paul Warren.

After everyone takes a seat, the teacher walks in behind a small girl. A new girl. New students are pretty common here. Families move into the area specifically to be near mothers who have been locked up. Sisters, cousins and best friends take responsibility for the kids of locked-up moms and keep in touch through the weekly chain links. If a mom is released, the family usually stays in the area to let the children finish school with their friends.

Sissy Hanson is introduced. The teacher places her in a seat behind Johnny, who immediately writes her a note and passes it over: *Looks like you missed this week's link-up. We do it every Wednesday for recess. Is that why you're here? Is your mom here? I'm Johnny.*

She responds and flips the note back when the teacher turns: *My mom is here. She got here about a month ago and I'm living with my brother. He's 24 and I'm only 10. Funny, huh? I can't wait to see her. She's innocent.*

That's the first thing every new student says. "She's innocent." They soon learn that no one cares about innocence, guilt or even offense. They care about time.

*How long?* he writes.

*Five to ten years. You?*

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Johnny responds: *Life. I've been here since sixth grade. I go to the high school for ninth grade next year. I don't want to leave her alone, though.*

The note tossing stops when the teacher looks at them accusingly.

Wednesday is the best day of the week—even better than Saturday—and all the children are in good moods and anxious. At the end of the day, Johnny Appleseed walks Sissy home since it's on the way to his aunt's. Sissy again says her mom is innocent and Johnny tells her that it really doesn't matter because she'll be hugging chain link next week just like the rest of them. Sissy listens, but once again insists that The Lawyers will make it all better soon. Her shiny blonde hair and determined blue eyes are a sharp contrast to Johnny's sticky brown hair and dull, boiled-mud eyes.

They arrive at her home and Sissy thanks Johnny Appleseed. Her brother walks out on the porch and she hustles to his side. She explains that the boy's name is Johnny Appleseed. Funny, huh?

The week progresses as usual. Johnny introduces Sissy to everyone and by Friday afternoon she is no longer explaining her mom's innocence. She is giving time. Johnny even introduces her to some of the children whose mothers have gotten out. They explain the time they had and how it feels to be free. Sissy likes her new friends and is a little sorry The Lawyers will make it necessary for her to leave.

The next Wednesday comes and Sissy is introduced to the silent run, the shaking fence, and the beautiful sound of mothers on the approach. Johnny pulls her to the fence next to him and listens as she describes her mom. As the women rush across the yard, Jesus-Mary Appleseed finds Johnny quickly, kisses him through a link, and listens as he describes Sissy's mom. Jesus-Mary has bad news.

"She's been denied kid-yard access," Jesus-Mary explains. "She bit a guard."

Sissy stumbles back. "What did they do to her?"

"Honey, you don't need to go asking questions like that. From what I hear, she'll have access in a month."

Sissy breathes back her tears and lets her hand fall from the fence. Her mom taught her never to hurt others or be mean. What did they do to her?

"You can use my mom," Johnny says, and he pulls Sissy's hand

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up to his mom's link-circled fingertips. Sissy and Jesus-Mary look at him uncertainly and then at each other suspiciously. But the touch is too much for Sissy and she immediately leans against Jesus-Mary's chain-linked chest and cries. Jesus-Mary coos and cuddles with the talent of a ten-year link veteran, holding Johnny with her other hand all the while. The others are too engrossed in their three hundred and sixty seconds to notice Sissy's sobs and Jesus-Mary's tender response.

When recess ends, Sissy asks Jesus-Mary to tell her mom to be nice. Johnny gets a kiss from his mom and passes her a picture of his bedroom. He rearranged the furniture last month and wants her to see. Johnny pulls Sissy back to class.

When Johnny and Sissy walk home, they find her brother waiting on the curb.

"Well? How is she?"

Sissy cries and Johnny Appleseed explains.

"But my mom was real nice to Sissy," Johnny says. "My mom said she'd tell your mom to be good so Sissy can see her real soon."

On the third Friday of every month, English class is spent writing notes to the moms and they are delivered on Saturdays during the moms' breakfast. Sissy writes about their new home, her new friends, and the Wednesday recess she can't wait to share with her mom. She says The Lawyers are calling a lot and her brother doesn't like them, but she knows it will be all better soon. Johnny writes about graduating from Central Elementary in four months, the meal his aunt burned during the past week, and he thanks her for being so nice to Sissy. When they are done, all the letters go in a big metal box for transport to the prison. On Saturday, the children imagine the moms receiving their letters and smile proudly.

Monday arrives and Sissy is not waiting on the curb to walk to school with Johnny. He arrives at Central and cannot find her. When class begins, the teacher stands before them and does not look up from her hands. Johnny knows something is wrong with Sissy.

"Class, I've been asked by Principal Cooper to tell you that Sissy Hanson, the girl who joined us less than two weeks ago, has withdrawn."

She pauses to find words. She looks up and finds Johnny. "Her mom killed herself yesterday."

None of the children speak. They each think of their own mom. This has happened before and they know it will happen again.

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Each time, the abandoned child withdraws from school and the family moves. It's like being forced to play Russian Roulette with someone else's finger on the trigger.

Johnny stares at the blackboard behind the teacher. He's supposed to leave Central in four months. What will his mom do? She says he is her only reason to live. He wants a job, maybe even a wife and a big house with lots of green grass. He doesn't want to visit his mom in a prison once a week for the rest of his life. But he will. He'll never get to leave this neighbourhood. His aunt will always burn dinner. His children will go to Central and visit Grandma once a week.

Johnny and his mom will only be free if she does what Sissy's mom has done. Johnny Appleseed flinches and ducks low in his chair. His fantastic dreams escape like circus clowns emptying a funny car, and he shrieks.

Jean McNeil

three poems

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## Brazil

### 1. Landscape

A cake-batter landscape, silly in its frilly  
pretty G-stringed splendour. The wind-whipped  
meringue-peak mountains swirl and thrust  
the city's white-sheen flanks apart  
spreading it like butter along the *litoral*  
the slum-shacks first baking in the sun then  
turning rancid.

### 2. Women in Bikinis

*Cariocas'*

*Aí, é, Ta? Na?*

Puerile exclamations gurgled in the throats of animals  
pre-linguistic, presumptuous and staccato.  
Sounds which threaten to become sex-cries  
without provocation, emanating  
from women whose bodies are—for them—  
the UN, the ecosystem  
and the international timetable  
of Air France—in short  
everything.

### 3. Amazon Jungle Adventure

The veined hand of the Amazon  
reaches out, and its index finger  
the Tapajós, thick and blue  
catches my sleeve.  
The night is arching over the Amazon  
as it used to at home  
barrelling down from Greenland,  
equally slaked of light  
equally deadly.  
The flight is hushed. Everyone knows  
if we go down  
we never get up.

We start our descent  
into the liquid forest.

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I study maps as the cowboy pilots  
whoop and rope another mining-field airstrip  
like a daft calf bucking out of the forest  
or young women sold into prostitution and consumed alive there.  
Suddenly red roads carved across the forest's skin  
like thin knife-fight wounds appear  
leading to hulking sugar-mill creatures  
left over from the special effects department  
of some space wars film. Outposts are the same everywhere  
Uranium mines of Great Slave Lake, logging camps of Alaska  
oil rigs parked like whales off the Orkneys  
a thin skin of purpose, a tarpaulin of elevated salaries  
thrown over stiff pricks, violence and a mean little lassitude.  
The pilots tuck into the tarmac  
just as the wheels come down  
—*Itacoatiara, Oriximiná*—  
They are having fun  
branding us with fear.  
They are bored.

\*

*Salvador, Aracajú, Maceió.*  
After two months of airports and no sex  
I can now mimic the breathy voice  
sex-wet, lust-paused  
of the Varig airport announcements:  
*Recife, João Pessoa, Natal, Fortaleza,*  
I even know the flight itinerary  
of the nightmare circular plane:  
*Sao Luís, Belém, Santarém*  
*e Manaussssss . . .*  
Manaus is the climax  
the voice greases into the hole  
of the word swishes out again  
a slippery condom-covered  
ssssssss . . . a hissing coagulant of juices  
my abdomen revolts  
I have no business being here

among gold miners and their drooping women  
Something tinder  
is crackling, the wet animals  
of the Pantanal, a swamp as big as Europe  
claw at the bottom of my stomach.

*Jacaré, pica-pau, onça*  
they are rioting there, in their cloud-humid  
abdominal slew.

"You,"  
they squeal.  
You.

#### 4. *Indigenous Groups*

A map of the hunchback continent covers the wall behind her  
desk  
bent like a pregnant woman, or a child with *spina bifida*  
the Andes snake too close to the Pacific  
a too-thin spine to support such bulk.  
Brazil's businessman's stomach  
hangs over the belt of Argentina.

We chart each other's movements on this map:  
One of us in Redenção, ("*no final do mundo*," he laughs  
down the phone line) there to talk to Piakan, leader of the  
· Kayapó  
and convicted rapist, who above all wants a satellite dish.

One of us in São Paulo, where a man comes up to her in the  
airport,  
visibly shaken, saying: "I've just had a gun held to my head.  
They took everything.  
Can you lend me 20,000 cruzeiros  
to get into town?"  
"Try somebody else," she says.  
She believes him.

#### 5. *Tropical fruits*

In the Amazon the 5:30 night has no sieve  
for draining the light from the cucumber sky.  
Only the night's lacquered façade  
tacked down like a groundsheet  
over the breathing flanks of the jungle.  
In Belém it rains at the same time every day, all year

the hour at which my friends—the ‘girls with big hair’  
ready themselves, purring their voices—  
they speak Portuguese with a meow, the long  
wailing vowels draining down the throat  
where they rattle, threatening to become  
sex-cries. They use the *tu*, and conjugate it correctly  
in their black lace, red lips, small black dresses, a  
*patient* Madonna-who-has-never-heard-of-Freud expression.  
Waiting for a man to scoop them up  
like Amazon icecream, lick its riotous flavours—  
*açai, cupuacú, cajú*.  
Make them purr.

#### 6. Football

A black boy—a future football hero—five years old  
rises from the flames of his *Mãe*. He watched her  
shrink into ashes. Disappear. She poured kerosene  
over her body and pushed him away.

*Brazzil! Brazzil!*

This country has drunk his blood:  
“when I was a boy they tried to make me be the woman,”  
he says, cryptically. “So I learned to fight.” He has  
a Nelson Mandela face. Then the film cuts to  
1970 where he runs, or rather skims, through  
the night-field, his shirt a sail of sweat  
his arms rigid in the air.

*Brazzil! Brazzil!*

He has just scored  
a World Cup Goal. The military President  
hugs this black man, a faint residual distaste  
hanging off his lips. The man turns, saturated.  
Tonight, his cruel lover of a country will burn him  
up. Eat him alive.

Make the ghost of his mother disappear.

*Brazzzzil! Brazzzzil!*

# Cachoeira

*Tap, thock, tap—*

we hobble to the staccato limp of my broken-legged friend  
who tripped over a television in Paraguay.

Her Rastafarian boyfriend also limps, kicked in a Salvador  
barfight.

We are also an English biographer, excavating

the recent artifacts of the life of a novelist

who passed through here and slept with a man called Luis

whose eyes—the writer wrote in his journal, what was it about  
his eyes?—

the tightness of his jeans, the way they slipped like octopii  
reluctant to relinquish their grip

on his hard buttocks.

There is a melancholy to the rust-oyster houses

their bleeding yellow, like the baroque serpentines of piss

drawn by taxi drivers on the wall outside the London bookshop  
where I worked for a hot summer.

Time has become a sap running down aquamarine  
against peach against a green

I can only call piss- (again) houses. Wet colours

mixed with four-hundred-year-old dried slaves' blood

from Dahomey, Ouidah, Angola and Guinea

their midnight faces bound for the sweet fields of Pernambuco.

Now we sit by the river below the *cachoeira*

drink from tall feline bottles of Brahma *cerveza*

not far from the old slaves' marketplace

in a town that has become a slow, prosperous place,

pretty like a high school cheerleader, the same kind of town

I thought I would never escape.

The crumbling railway bridge leads to the abandoned station

where the rust-track trickles in a thin line of blood from the  
building.

The green Bahian Railways cars were imported from Britain

to carry sugarcane and sisal, and have metal seats whose rust  
skeletons

are frozen corpses in an incinerator, hands thrown out in  
supplication  
not to be burnt, not to be forgotten.  
The novelist stopped at this station, enchanted by the damned  
*guano* façade  
of the mottled baroque clocktower, modelled on Prague  
where he would also live, before dying.  
We cross the open spaces between the wooden slats  
of the railway bridge, we step over these spaces of time,  
one moment behind the novelist's retreating back,  
as he walks with Luis  
to the square for a mute beer, a sour tryst  
a lingering noon-struck sundown of a kiss.

\*\*

*Oy Tía! Oy meu amigo!*

The Rastafarian shouts from the back of the tiny car  
where he is being crushed by white people.  
We are asking directions to the cigar factory  
in Maragojipe. The biographer shifts facts  
sautéing the recent history of his friend's life  
separating the onions from the peppers.  
Another town heat-peeled, the apple skin colours  
greet us, another eczema town topped by the carbuncle  
of a thick-walled church. We find the cigar factory  
owned by a Dutchman who met a typical tropical end  
by asking a man with a cyst that sticks out at least six inches  
from his jaw, his grey cotton suit and polished wooden skin  
like an African politician—he could be Kenneth Kaunda  
on a village visit.

Slowly, we realize he is drunk  
at high noon on a Sunday, because when the fireworks start  
sounding like rifle-shot, he tries to tell us it is Pentecost.  
But that was a month ago.  
This is where the novelist came, we think. A breath  
of his existence against our cheeks.  
The Rastafarian picks up a cigar end  
dropped outside the door as the factory shut forever  
three years ago. The biographer drives, excited  
as topography begins to take the shape of literature  
his own sentences blooming like the rough sisal plant  
in his mind.

Back at the convent, the whispering ghosts of nuns  
are our backup singers, as the Rastafarian and I sing Gershwin  
until 2 in the morning, and then he teaches me Djavan  
who will later haunt me, his Bahian-pop sugar regrets.  
The biographer and I share a room. We wake  
to the sound of cars gunning their engines  
—Saturday morning entertainment in Cachoeira  
go to the convent, rev up under the Gringo's window—  
and of children being slaughtered.

I come into the blue of morning  
with the biographer's unfamiliar grey mop, propped up  
in the bed beside mine reading journals.  
“‘A colour of wrecked oyster . . .’” he reads aloud  
or some such baroque, art-valuer, trained-eye poetic  
evaluation—  
(the middle-class eye will of course see the *exact* colour).  
This I could never hope to approximate, except by theft.

The air conditioner whirrs its cheap time sound  
*click clack, click clack.*  
The children go on being slaughtered  
outside the convent-prison walls, thick parapets  
(someone has brought their parrot to market)

# Mathematics for Narcissists

1) - i.e.: division—the narcissistic division of self:

divided self  
= projected self  
+ desires  
x potential expressed as indefinite potential (i.e. always  
projected in the future = dream)  
– (minus) execution  
= dream

2. y - is relative. In an algebraic world it is a radical waiting to be assigned a value, or meaning.

i.e.

y = musicologist  
hairdresser  
windsurfing instructor  
poet

3.  $\pi$  = constant (i.e. pi)

A value that does not change. A principle  
which exists. The mountain  
which has yet to be acknowledged.  
(The pi of disappointment is the same as the pi of  
happiness.)  
 $\Delta$  the same amount of progress can be made through  
failure as through success.

4. Equations:

Tumble.

Their oyster-mottled façades  
(either Versailles-yellow or heaps of Galapagos guano)  
melting under scrutiny like:

certainty = doubt  
transience = uniqueness  
experience = transformation.

[insert here a sequence of futile calculations]

5. The Unknown: In the process of alchemy  
the third element—the free, the bound  
the singular, the divine, the passion—  
is not given  
but must be found.

Cornelia Hoogland

three poems

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## Drum

When in the morning  
your hand finds my face  
fingers curve round bone  
thumb draws me to you gently  
as first light then

I do not know if  
I am your lover or your child

the sex that beats  
is a woman's for her lover  
but the heart is a child's

ear pressed to the earlier road  
the soft shoulder  
angora *eau de cologne*

# First Bed

I was scared. You were elsewhere, going without me. My body raced to catch up—it didn't know what yours knew, or how to draw you a common tongue.

I thought of your word: *fibrillate*.  
The fine root hair of the plant; vessels flush with memories that here, with me, drive you underground. Intent

on the child  
who always lost  
control, who lived in the split/  
second before the convulsion

seized his thin life. Knocked  
him senseless; fisted  
against brick like the root ball  
of a pot-bound plant.  
Bare as panic;  
that tendrilled underground.

Its delicate whips  
collapse the nerve-endings between us  
and your body muscles a wild molecular search  
—a way out of the concrete floor coming  
up at it. Or in.

# The Girl Who Went Forth to Learn Fear

In every crowd a child cries.  
But here? With you?  
I call between rocked  
gasps any breath the air  
off the lake all the air  
in the world I need then  
when you enter me.

Where does the wild noise come from?  
Your hand gropes over library spines  
for the rhymed alphabet. The trick  
is to let just let. Call it childish—  
it is that and nothing  
but the brave child with her collection of pain  
orderly as shells—oyster, sea and razor  
clam—on the window ledge. While  
in that other-world your penis

accomplishes safe crossing. Love  
making the distance between  
home with its stepmother  
and the fox at the edge of the wood  
easy. But like a third,  
uncompleted task, the shudder

of this baby,  
who has cried so hard, so long  
that when help arrives  
when the milk comes  
it cannot drink

for the huge convulsing sob  
the gulf it must cross

to the human side  
where drinking and being  
held are possible.

# Contributors

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**W.M. Adair** writes from her home in New Brunswick. She is currently interested in whale anatomy for a literary work-in-progress entitled "Heart Like a Whale."

**H.C. Artmann** is one of Austria's leading literary innovators. He has recently published *Der Zerbrochene Kaug* and *Register Der Sommermonde Und Wintersonnen*.

**Marilyn Bowering's** most recent book of poetry is *Love As It Is* (Beach Holme Press). She was writer-in-residence at Memorial University of Newfoundland in 1995. She lives in Sooke, B.C.

**Janalee Chmel** lives and works in Denver, Colorado. She wrote "Pen State" while visiting New Jersey—a state her father still defends. Her greatest writer's block buster is the Rocky Mountain Range and her greatest inspiration is her mother, Sylvia.

**Lorna Crozier's** *Inventing the Hawk* received the Governor General's Award for Poetry in 1992, the Canadian Author's Association Award and the Pat Lowther Award. Her latest collection, *Everything Arrives at the Light*, was published by McClelland & Stewart in the spring of 1994.

**Cornelia Hoogland's** second book of poetry, *Marrying the Animals*, is due from Brick Books in September 1995. Recent readings of her work include an Animal Alliance function and the XV Commonwealth Games in Victoria, British Columbia.

**Heather Keenan** is a Victoria artist. She had a solo exhibition of her work at the XV Commonwealth Games and she has won the honour of being one of the artists featured in the Winsor and Newton Artists' Materials 1995 Limited Edition Calendar.

**Jean McNeil** is a writer and editor who lives in England and works for several months each year in South and Central America.

**Patrice Melnick** received her M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. She currently teaches Creative Writing at Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana.

**Derk Wynand's** newest collection of poetry, *Closer to Home*, will be published by Brick Books in 1997.

**Jan Zwicky's** previous books include *Wittgenstein Elegies* (Brick, 1986), *The New Room* (Coach House, 1989), and *Lytic Philosophy* (University of Toronto Press, 1992).

THE 18TH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL

# 3-DAY



## NOVEL CONTEST

***Labour Day Weekend (Sept. 2 - 4, 1995)***

HOW IT WORKS (BASICALLY):

- Entrants must register by Friday, September 1st.
- Writing begins no earlier than **12:01 a.m., Saturday, September 2** and must stop at or before **midnight, Monday, September 4**. (*Outlines are permitted prior to the contest; the actual writing must take place during the Labour Day Weekend.*)
- Novels may be written in any location. (*Yes, the honour system still exists!*)
- First prize is an offer of publication and world-wide fame.
- Entry fee: \$15.00
- Copies of previous winning entries are available.

***For a copy of the rules, send a SASE or fax request to:***

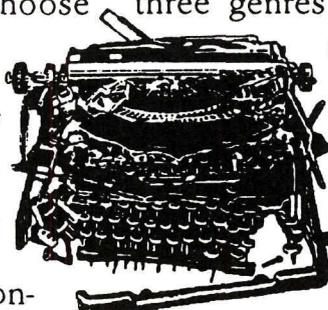
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Sue Ann Alderson  
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Jerry Newman  
Linda Svendsen  
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For further information, please write to:

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Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1W5

the 1990s, the number of people with diabetes has increased in all industrialized countries. In the Netherlands, the prevalence of diabetes is estimated to be 6.5% in 1995, which corresponds to 1.5 million people (1).

Diabetes is a chronic disease with a high prevalence of complications. The most common complications are retinopathy, nephropathy, neuropathy, and cardiovascular disease. The prevalence of these complications is high, and the risk of complications increases with the duration of the disease. The prevalence of complications is also higher in people with type 1 diabetes than in people with type 2 diabetes (2).

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**Fiction**

Janalee Chmel

**Poetry**

W. M. Adair  
Marilyn Bowering  
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