PRISM international

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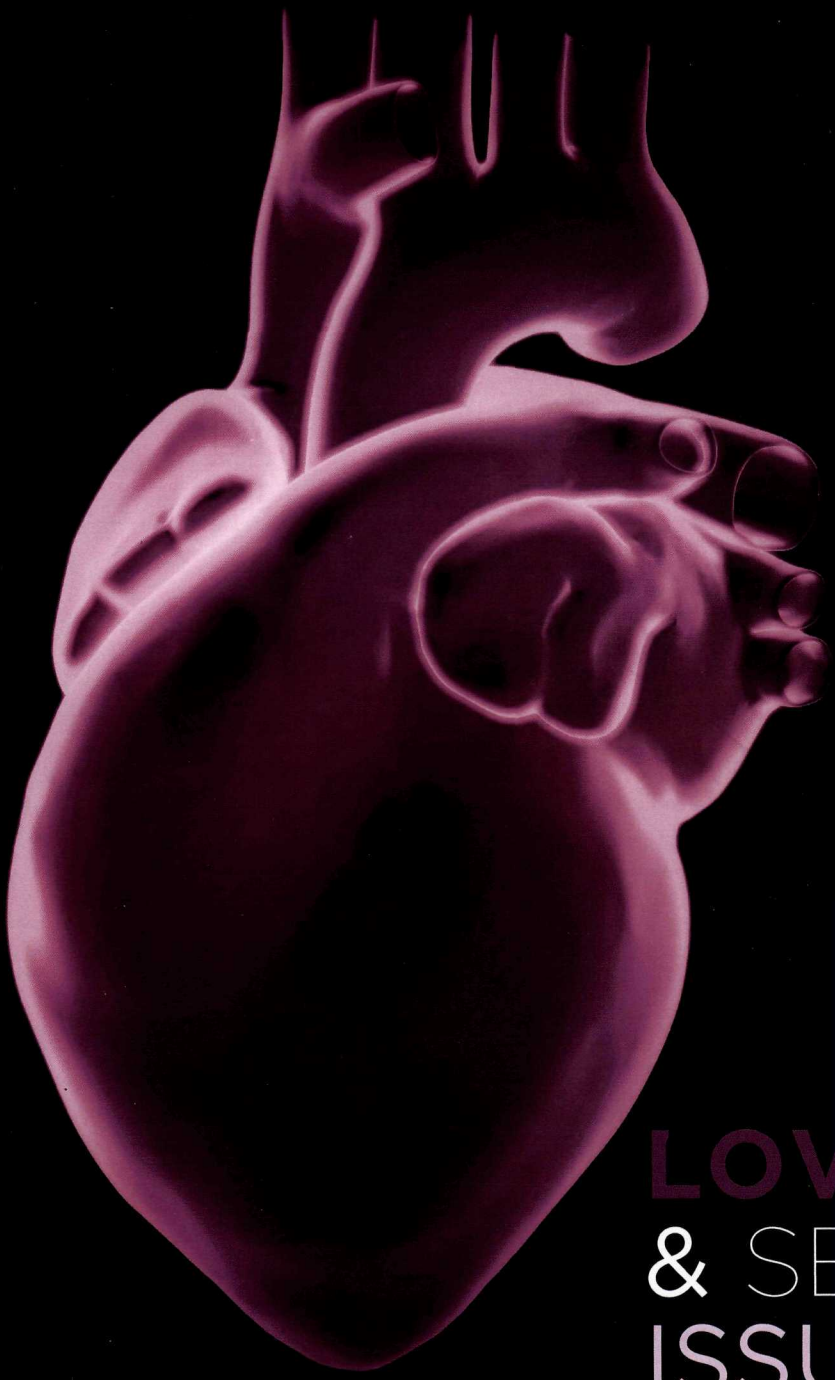

LOVE & SEX ISSUE

PRISM international

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Bev Craddock

THE BODIES IN THE LAKE

1.

Kit doesn't like any of my music choices, which are all sad and depressive, even the happy ones. She turns off my car stereo and says, "Not that sad-depressive woman again." Lucinda Williams goes mute.

A musician broke Kit's heart and now music makes her stomach turn. I know exactly how she feels. I remember the Christmas I was ten and gorged myself on cranberry sauce. Now I can't even look at a cranberry without wanting to throw up.

I turn the stereo back on, but keep it low. I'm a sucker for the tortured soul. Are you alright? Lucinda keeps asking, though quieter than before.

2.

A promise is a sacred thing. At the Crisis Centre, I talk people off the ledge—or from ever getting on the ledge. There is a protocol we follow. Do they have a plan? Do they have the means? Then we contract with them. Make them promise that if they feel they might hurt themselves, they will call us, a friend, or 911. Even in their darkest hour, people don't like to break a promise.

3.

At Kit's apartment, clean laundry is heaped on the bed, the dining room table buried in paper. In the bathroom, the mirrored vanity above the sink has been hung off-centre. I wash my hands and look up to see half a woman looking back. "How do you stand that?" I ask.

"I never even noticed," Kit answers.

The light fixture in the hallway is missing. Exposed wires dangle invitingly down. If I were a few inches taller I could reach up and electrocute myself, or at least do serious damage. Kit has four inches on me.

In the kitchen, Kit arranges the peonies I have bought in a vase.

"So is Kit short for something?" I inquire.

It turns out that it's short for Katherine, but she answers, "Short for Kitten," and bats her pale blue eyes. Eyes like that can cast a spell.

Folding laundry is soothing. There is a rhythm to it, the picking up, the shaking out, the matching of socks, the ordering of seams. I fold and stack while Kit works in the kitchen preparing a plate of bread, olives, and cheese. From the bedroom doorway, I can see her arranging everything just so on the plate.

"I love folding laundry," I say.

"You're a funny one," she answers, as she pops an olive in her mouth.

When I finish folding, I hold out the basket of perfectly folded shirts, pants, and intimates. Kit's eyes sparkle as if I have given her a gift.

While I carry the plate of food into the living room and set it on the coffee

table, Kit lights candles—a dozen or more. The peonies make shadows on the wall. Everything flickers and glows.

4.

My friend Leo works with mentally ill homeless people. He says that I could be the new Oprah. He says that people with my life usually end up as his clients. "Only you and Oprah," he tells me.

Neglected, abused, on my own at fifteen, I have transcended the circumstances of my life—a responsible job, a home, no addictions or mental illness. "The exception proves the rule," I say.

I tell Leo I'm not an Oprah fan.

"You've got to hand it to her though," Leo continues, "she broke the mold, smashed every boundary—female, black, poor, overweight, abused."

He once used that line on another Oprah detractor, who shot back, "Well, if it wasn't Oprah, it would have been someone else."

I say to Leo, "Hey, that's my life too. If it wasn't me it would have been someone else."

5.

"Heel-toe," Kit admonishes. She is teaching me how to walk in heels. Apparently, I have been walking toe-heel, which is wrong and bad for your feet. "Roll through your foot, back to front," she tells me.

I am wearing this tight little black number that has a tendency to ride up. Kit instructs, "Never pull it down. No smoothing. No straightening. Just wear it." She says this like she is delivering life-saving advice.

Kit could get a job telling people what to wear and how. It's her true calling. Instead she works with an agency assisting artists with grant applications. That's how she met the musician. Less than two years after she helped him with his grant, his career took off and so did he. The year before he left, he wrote her a song, something about moving on but remembering fondly. She didn't know the song was about her, not until he told her it was over. Then it hit her.

When Kit plays the song for me, her heart burns through her chest like a flame.

The song has a catchy tune, but the lyrics are one long cliché—a wandering minstrel, the open road, time to be moving on. Kit asks me what I think. "It's beautiful and sad," I answer, the only lie I ever tell her.

6.

There are people who can predict the exact moment the world will end, though not, to date, with much accuracy. Calls at the Crisis Centre increase when the world is expected to end. People want to jump and beat the rush.

At the Centre, I train volunteers to work the phones. One of them, a guy named Rodney, is griping about the woman he just got off the phone with. The woman who is disabled and homebound complains to Rodney that no one—friends, social services, or the drugstore delivery guy—ever calls her back. Apparently, she has dial up internet access and is on the internet all day. When

people call, they get a busy signal.

Rodney says with apparent irritation, "What I really wanted to say was: Why don't you just get off the internet?"

I tell him this is not a logical place. I tell him that we park our judgment at the door. But what I really want to say is: There are some people who just aren't meant for this work.

7.

When Kit comes over to my place, my dog, Lucy, sniffs her over.

Lucy is thirteen and her legs are failing. On Sunday mornings we used to walk through the ravine and back. Eventually though the six blocks home got too much for her. I was always stopping, waiting patiently for her to catch up. Now we only do short walks to the park.

Sometimes I have to carry Lucy down the stairs for her walk.

"You're going to hurt yourself if you keep that up," Kit warns.

Kit is skittish when it comes to dogs. Something in them unsettles her. Every time Lucy puts her nose to her, Kit flinches as if an open wound has been grazed. Wherever Kit moves, Lucy follows, then sits and stares. I call her off, but the normally obedient Lucy doesn't listen.

Kit moves about trying to shake her. "What's with her?" she asks.

"I've never seen her do this before." I answer. "Except maybe in the lake."

I tell Kit about Lucy's swimming heroics. I tell her how I used to take her to the lake to swim, how Lucy would do circles around any swimmers and no amount of calling would get her to leave them.

"The circles would keep getting smaller and smaller and smaller until the person was guided to shore," I say.

Kit shakes a finger at Lucy as she ducks around the kitchen counter. "I'm not drowning," she scolds.

8.

A friend of mine works at the Marine Unit. He says they are always finding bodies in the lake. Mostly you never hear about it though, unless there's foul play.

He tries to shock me with all the grisly details, like how it takes about two weeks for a submerged body to float to the surface and how by that time maceration of the exposed hands and feet has already occurred. It's not a pretty sight, skin falling away from bone.

When I tell Kit about the bodies in the lake, she asks me how they identify them.

"They use dental records," I tell her, "but mostly the authorities already know who it is."

"How?" Kit asks.

"The families tell the police she was wearing a blue hoodie when last seen, or he had a tattoo of an eagle on his left arm. The police break it to them slowly, first telling them they pulled a female body wearing a blue hoodie from the lake

or a male with an eagle tattoo. In that way, the families are prepared."

Kit says, "Who would drown themselves wearing a blue hoodie?"

9.

There are people whose joints ache when a storm is approaching. Animals are even more sensitive. Apparently, in San Francisco there is a statistical correlation between lost pet ads and the dates of earthquakes.

After the Boxing Day tsunami, a woman was interviewed on CNN. She told how Charlie, her cockatiel, was squawking and beating his wings against the cage before the wave hit. "He was making a terrible racket," the woman told the interviewer. "It was only in the last few moments before the wave hit that Charlie went quiet."

The woman was pulled from the wreckage but Charlie was never found.

Sensing disaster is not the same as escaping it.

10.

Kit is teaching me how to flirt. She says my straight up manner doesn't fly with men. "You've got to work it," she says. "Watch," she tells me, as she angles a shoulder forward, tilts her head to the left, gazes up.

I'm a hapless student. I get the shoulder right, the head tilt perfect, but when I gaze up I make my eyes go crossed.

Exasperated, Kit frowns. "Pretend adoration," she instructs. "Like when you're going down on a man."

"What?" she asks when she sees the way I'm staring.

11.

Leo is the worst insomniac. Because of this, he has every TV channel known to man. When Leo can't sleep, he watches TV until all hours of the night. He is always telling me about his shows, real life murder mysteries, or medical anomalies, such as a woman who gave birth without ever knowing she was pregnant. "Twins!" he says. "And she didn't even know!"

But the shows he really loves are on the National Geographic Channel—lost tribes, the shrinking rainforest, the mating rituals of chimpanzees. Recently, there was an entire hour on crickets. Leo enlightens me about how you can calculate the outside temperature by the rate of a cricket's chirping. The relationship between the number of chirps and the temperature is known as Dolbear's Law. Leo writes the equation for me on a napkin, pushes it in front of me. $T=50 + [(N-40)/4]$. "Look," he insists, "it's poetry."

"Very interesting," I say, while rolling my eyes and feigning that I am falling asleep.

12.

Kit once dated a brilliant scientist whose logical mind was unable to express the depth of his emotions. To help him along, she gave him a book of poetry—e e cummings. One morning she awoke to find him madly scribbling in a notebook.

When she asked what he was doing, he said, "Writing a poem for you." She

begged him to show it to her. He told her it wasn't ready, but she couldn't resist. She chased him around the room and eventually wrestled the book from his hands. When she looked at the page, all she saw were scientific formulas.

"Dolbear's Law," I tell her.

"Huh?" she says.

"It's a kind of poetry," I try to explain.

Kit is having none of it. That poetry thing was the second last straw for her. When her scientist wouldn't go down on her, she threw on her clothes and said, "That's it, I'm out of here."

In Kit's stories, she is always the powerful one.

13.

Because he didn't want me to see him wounded...

I tell Kit about a man I once dated and how on our third date I was waiting for him in his living room while he showered and shaved upstairs. I tell her how he'd cut his lip shaving and when he couldn't staunch the bleeding he'd hid in the bathroom for over an hour.

"I waited while the clock ticked and ticked and ticked."

"What were you thinking?" Kit asks.

"I was thinking: What could he be doing in there?"

"I was thinking: He's really into me, wink-wink, nudge-nudge, say no more."

"I was thinking: My CPR is out of date."

"I was thinking: He's not that into me."

"I was thinking: I should let myself out."

14.

The vet feels a tumor on Lucy's spleen.

I stroke her softly as the vet gives the injection through the port in her left front leg. When I get home, I call Kit and sob into the phone, "Lucy... Lucy... Lucy."

"I'll be right there," she says.

When Kit arrives, I am bawling like a baby, "I always thought it was me walking Lucy."

"But...it was real...ly..." I collapse in Kit's arms and exhale, "Lu...cy walk...ing me."

Kit hands me Kleenex, one after the other. "I'll be your walker now," she says.

We drive to Kew Beach, link arms and go for a walk. Like Misses Enid and Eulalia, we walk along the Boardwalk arm in arm.

"We'll never get dates like this," I quip.

"Or maybe we'll get more dates," Kit says with a twinkle.

Overhead the clouds threaten. The waves jump and spit. The sky opens up. Laughing and holding hands, we run for cover. When we reach the Boardwalk Café, we shake our skins like wet dogs.

15.

At a chi-chi vodka bar we run into her musician. He introduces the twenty-something girl hanging on his arm. Kit plays it cool. She doesn't even flinch when the girl asks, "Do you do music too?"

It turns out Kit's musician is not on the open road after all, but living with the girl in one of those waterfront condos that obliterate lake and sky.

Kit downs three drinks before I can persuade her to leave. "Do you do music?" she mocks, as I pour her into a cab.

The cab driver has the radio on. Annie Lennox sings, Here Comes the Rain Again...Falling on my... Kit sighs, puts her hands to her temples, "Not that sad-depressive woman again."

Back at her apartment, we drink wine while Kit rails and rails.

"I did everything for that fucking guy."

"He gets what he wants and what do I get?

"What is she? Fucking twenty?"

"I got him the fucking grant!"

Kit finishes one bottle of wine and opens another.

At two in the morning, I hold her hair back from her face as she pukes in the toilet.

16.

All the vegetables at the Brick Works Farmer's Market are heirloom. The stalls are brimming with things we've never seen. Kit asks the crunchy-granola woman how to use garlic greens. "Slice them like onions," Crunchy-Granola answers. We buy over-priced bouquets of wildflowers. Everything we buy makes our eyes water and itch.

On a bench by the ponds, we eat our vegan carob gluten-free muffins. The wildflowers wilt in the heat. A blue heron pokes in the reeds. Crickets chirp, frogs croak. Under a liquid blue sky, I show Kit my scars. I reveal everything. Kit puts her hand in mine and squeezes. We sit that way for the longest time.

When I ask Kit about her darkest hour, she stares glassy-eyed into the dark pond, "I have had a charmed life," she says.

I squeeze her hand. "Whatever it is, you can tell me."

But she doesn't tell me anything.

17.

My entire wardrobe is in a heap on the bedroom floor.

Kit has invited me to a party at some hipster gallery. A show of an artist she'd helped whose grant was approved. She goes through my closet, pronouncing everything I own unsuitable.

"Dowdy."

"Boring."

"Outdated."

"Mousy."

She ends up lending me one of her dresses, something purple and strapless. "Passionate purple," she says, handing me the dress.

When I put it on, Kit claps, rapid staccato movements, like the beating of wings.

The artist is from the East Coast, charming, rugged and windswept. He takes a shine to me, spends the whole night ogling my dress, trying to get close, to touch me softly. Kit keeps shooting me looks.

At the end of the night, the artist insists on giving me a gift, a four by six inch lithograph. On the cab ride home, I show Kit the phone number I discovered on the back of the print.

She looks at me with total disdain. "I've created a monster," she says.

18.

Kit dates a twenty-something musician wannabe, follows up with a photographer, a chef, an artisanal baker, and an almost-famous writer with performance issues. She sleeps with all of them, even the one she doesn't like, even the one who can't.

"Why?" I ask.

"That's what you do with men. You take them home and try them out."

When she says the word men, I distinctly hear friend.

19.

It's July. The temperature rises. The crickets chirp faster and faster.

Kit takes sailing lessons. "That's where the rich boys are," she tells me.

She invites me to a party on the El Condor. "Dress casually," she instructs. I follow her advice, a pair of capris and sandals, but Kit shows up in a manic white dress with a beaded bodice and feathery skirt. Her lips are bright red, like a scream.

On the El Condor, there is Greg and Didier and Vlad and Hans, all doctors, she tells me. Kit is sweet on Greg, or is it Didier, or possibly Hans, but most definitely not Vlad, who the others keep calling Dr. Vlad.

There are six little pills on the table.

"What gives?" I whisper to Kit, nodding in the direction of the table.

"They're doctors," she whispers and then lets out a laugh.

Didier takes out his phone, plays a tune. "A beautiful song, for a beautiful lady," he says. Kit is lapping it up. Dr. Vlad pulls her up to dance. Then Greg and Didier take their turn. They whisper in her ear while Dr. Vlad takes pictures on his phone. As Kit moves, her feathery skirt parts, revealing a bare white leg, the curve of a hip. When the song ends, there is just the lonesome sound of waves lapping. Kit continues dancing, swaying to some music I don't hear.

My joints begin to ache. I feel a force guiding me to shore.

"I'm queasy," I tell Kit when she finally sits back down. She won't come with me though. As I leave the marina, I glance back to see something white swaying in the darkness and disappearing.

20.

In the morning, the phone rings. "Can you pick me up?" she asks.

When I pull into the parking lot, she is standing barefoot on the dock, a cigarette in one hand, shoes dangling from the other. In her feathered dress, she

looks like a bird with a broken wing.

"I didn't know you smoked," is all I can think of to say.

21.

Crime doesn't pay.

I meet Leo at the Dora for a drink, something uneasy settled on my face. "Oh God," Leo exclaims when he sees me. "What's eating you?"

It's been the mother of all weeks. I'm upset about Kit, while Leo is upset because one of his clients has jumped from a sixth-floor balcony.

Nothing surprises me, but still...

"I can't believe they house mentally ill people in places with balconies," I say.

"Yes!" Leo says in that agitated high-pitched voice he assumes under duress.

"And," he says, "and he landed on a drug dealer."

"Landed on a drug dealer," I repeat.

"Yes," Leo says. "Smack on top of him. Like a bolt from heaven."

I laugh and laugh and laugh.

"Stop!" Leo says. "Stop! Stop!" his voice trilling higher.

22.

"Practically an old maid," Kit says on the occasion of her thirty-sixth birthday.

She's arranged her own party in a private room of a fancy restaurant. There is Leo and me and twenty of her closest friends we've never heard of before. Heel-toe, heel-toe. Kit strides through the restaurant in her killer red dress, a pair of wicked peep-toe pumps. Dazzling. Mesmerizing. Every head turns. I follow behind, loyal and adoring, one of her entourage.

"Who are these people?" Leo asks, alarmed.

I shrug, put my gift on the gift table.

The clock chimes twelve. I hand her the gifts, one by one, saving mine for last.

My gift: something I picked up at the hipster gallery, a glass heart, in hues of purple and red.

"You're so sweet," she croons for the crowd.

Under my ribs, a shaft of ice.

She kisses me on the cheek, a Judas kiss, then sets my glass heart on the table amidst the bubble bath and the dime-store earrings.

23.

Kit is hanging with her new friend.

I meet them at the Treehouse Café for lunch. I hardly recognize Kit—no makeup, a hippy skirt, hair in unflattering braids. She introduces me to her friend. "Mary is an organic farmer," she says.

Mary has the look of an earthenware pot, wide at the bottom and slightly baked.

It's late September, the air tart as a Northern Spy. Still, Kit insists on eating on the patio. All through lunch, they talk a language I don't understand—the

best ways to do up pickles and preserves, how to build a parterre garden, graft apple trees.

When we finish our tofu and sprout salads, Kit lights up.

"You do get the irony," I say, pointing to the empty plates with the remnants of organic salad greens. She ignores me, blows smoke rings in the air.

"Do I know you from somewhere?" I ask Mary.

Kit smiles an odd smile, as if there's a joke that I don't get.

When the conversation turns to garlic greens, it suddenly dawns on me. Crunchy-Granola!

"How did you two become friends?" I demand.

24.

Leo tells me about the memorial service for one of his clients, a schizophrenic violinist named Mike. Mike died suddenly of an aneurysm. "Death," Leo says, "you get used to it in this business." At the service, there were people from Mike's "home" and workers from Leo's office. Leo delivered a short eulogy and then put on a CD of Mike playing his violin.

The violin made an eerie and percussive sound. The col legno technique, Leo explains to me, telling me how the violinist uses the wood of the bow to make that uncanny sound. Leo learned about col legno from a show on PBS; learned how some violinists refuse to use the technique because it damages the instrument.

At the service, Leo didn't talk about col legno or damage, but when the music finished he asked if anyone wanted to say a few words about Mike. One of his clients stood up and said this: "I hate rappers. Why doesn't God kill all the rappers? Why does God take someone like Mike and let the rappers live? Why does God have to kill beauty?"

There are questions no one can answer.

25.

The vet calls. Lucy's ashes are ready.

The $750 "Remembrance" package comes with a clay paw-print memento and a condolence card from the pet crematorium—Our deepest condolences on the loss of your beloved friend.

When the box is safely in my car, I text Kit. Tomorrow I will put Lucy in the lake. She will always guide swimmers to shore.

All day long I check my phone for messages. Only silence.

Tomorrow comes. The sun breaks through the clouds in fingers. The lake is flat as a table. I stroke the box, "My beautiful girl. My sweet beautiful Lucy." A family of ducks glides by. I imagine Lucy in her heyday, limber and swift, sailing off the rocks into the water. "Go on, girl," I say as I release her to her watery grave.

The forgotten clay memento falls into the water. I reach out, almost toppling in after it.

"You're going to hurt yourself," I hear Kit say.

But when I turn around, there is no one there.

26.
Before disaster an eerie silence falls.

I'm working the late shift at the Centre. It's a full moon, which means it should be a crazy night. But the phone doesn't ring.

"Once in a blue moon," my partner says.

We spend the long night drinking coffee and watching the local 24-hour news channel. In the morning, there is a report that a woman's body has washed up on the rocks near Kew Beach. The reporter states a police spokesperson says the death is not suspicious.

It's just another body in the lake.

Although it's seven in the morning and I haven't heard from her in two months, I send Kit a text, something light and breezy. When I don't hear back, I send three more, Are you alright? Are you alright? Are you alright?

27.
The body on the rocks, it's no one I know.

Ping, the answer comes. Lovely to hear from you. Your concern is appreciated. I'm well. You're such a dear to worry. Been crazy busy. Hope you are well and happy. We must do coffee someday soon.

Who are you? I type, but don't press send.

28.
Because I have seen her wounded. Because I didn't see how wounded.

29.
Winter comes.

A heavy snow has fallen and it's hard slogging up the banks of the ravine. Breathing hard. Legs turning to jelly. At the top, no respite, only a biting wind and six blocks to home. Instinctively, I glance back for Lucy.

A chunk of snow falls from a tree and shatters on the ground. That last year of Sunday mornings, like a life in the moment before death, flashes before me. Stopping and waiting. My blind selfish cruelty. She walked me. She wasn't able to walk me anymore.

If I could go back, I would pick her up and carry her.

There are still six blocks to home. No choice but to trudge on.

"Only you and Oprah," I hear Leo say.

30.
Echoes.

I am buying a birthday card for Leo. Man's best friend. All the cards have dogs on them—big dogs and small dogs, dancing dogs and sunglass-wearing dogs, cartoon dogs and even singing who-let-the-dogs-out cards. But then I see it. A mirror hung askew. Two girls playing dress-up, posing in their long dresses, their floppy hats, and too-big high heels.

"Just wear it," Kit instructs.

Inside the card. Only this. Love Always.

Patrick Grace

LAYOVER

Ascend. And here's this crowd, it's reached the end
of metal body scans. And here's this guy
among the cougars, the business cubs:
his eyes are blue, they catch my own, I ask
to sit, he says *Sure man, I'm Bjorn from Iceland*,
and clasps a thick, rough hand on mine. Smooth jaw,
clipped accent. Something gives inside: I want
the two of us to sample berry wine
in bed. O imagination, how you twist
man's apprehension! But shit, I'm not like that.
Not like that sleaze by the bar, his hands on her
skirt. Been a rough afternoon. She just wants
to keep on serving beers to passengers
while me and Bjorn people-watch side-by-side.
We shoot the shit: the Habs, a naked infant's
teeth around her mother's nipple, anything
to stop my open hands. The walls are glass.
We watch the sky, the way it falls, plane
propellers trimming bird wings. Bone-dull thump—
the waitress coldcocks the sleazy man. No one
gets involved. There's a voice in the walls
and it calls out a name. *That's me*, says Bjorn.
The sun breaks through the glass. He takes his leave
in faded jeans, my head a bloody mess
like the sleaze on the floor by the bar. Hands open.

Jessica Saunders

KANANASKIS (CAN I ASK THIS?)

you are vacant now
there is nothing of me left in you
not even a knuckle
not even a request
that I might still withdraw

and it isn't long before i've
resumed my ritual testimony
and i've cowered again
over whatever
you've struck me with today

you've crafted it into a form so singular
it is unrecognizable, you say
and unrecognizable is invisible and invisible is disappeared and disappeared is gone

and what i'm grieving for is also reducible like that, you say
just shift it to the right a bit with each repetition
this is the logic of your absolution
it is the rhythm that makes you come

strange positions
in which we find ourselves and each other:
what you would write here just behind my own words as always
my tongue sideways up your thigh just once

but love is not the receiving of it
love is itself, you say
and it is mine and you reward me for it with yourself, inches at a time

Karen J Lee

HAPPY HOUR

It never occurred to me we wouldn't have a chance to talk about what went wrong. I waited for an epiphany, an acknowledgement he had been unhinged but was now recovered and ready to give our marriage his full attention. Or end it nobly. I didn't anticipate his third option—a trial separation to test the durability of his feelings for Sylvia. He said he needed time to find out if she had "warts and carbuncles." My consent to this iniquitous arrangement left him giddy with relief and chomping to go public. I was embarrassed for me (the about-to-be-benched wife) but equally embarrassed for him, my sixty-one-year-old husband, who was certain the kids and the relatives back east and all our friends would welcome his paramour into their lives, once he explained how well she met his needs. He was smarter when he loved me.

The children knew we'd separated, but not why. There was no good way to tell them Daddy was cheating on Mommy and the necessity pained me. My therapist pointed out they were adults and trying to protect them implied I didn't think they could manage on their own and, yes, that was precisely the attitude I resented most in my own mother, but I argued anyway: "How can I not help them?" Meaning how can I not be needed?

He wanted to explain Sylvia in person and set off with a spring in his step to meet with the people least likely to welcome the news. He was back east right now, driving his sister crazy while she tried to get ready for her daughter's wedding. I wondered what shirt he'd packed, if he'd remembered his dress shoes. He planned to tell his family about our separation after the ceremony and stop in Calgary on the return flight to tell our daughter. He was as happy as I'd seen him in years and why not? His wife had authorized his mistress; we were locked in a slow dance of absurdity.

My lawyer had prepared a letter, suggesting an equitable disposition of assets if our issues couldn't be resolved. It was in my canvas tote.

I'd never been on the island without him. By the time I unpacked my provisions, watered the flowers on the deck, and loaded the wood box beside the fireplace, I felt almost happy. Even the incident at the marina had ended well. I set the choke on the boat motor exactly as I'd seen him do hundreds of times, said a prayer, which I'd never seen him do, and yanked with all my strength. Nothing. I tried again and again, until it flooded. Bloody obdurate man knew I couldn't start a manual pull motor, but he refused to purchase a keyed ignition claiming more stuff could go wrong. There was damp under my arms and my hands were dirty and tears were coming when I spotted three men at the other end of the dock, loading a Whaler with supplies. God bless strong, friendly men.

I threw open the doors to let in more sun. My housecoat still hung in the closet, my afghan hugged the bed, my favourite recipes were filed in a kitchen

drawer, and the clock my staff gave me when I left my last job dangled from a chain above the television. There were cobwebs on the ceiling fans, the rugs needed a vacuum, the dishwasher hadn't been emptied, and a mishmash of opened and unopened mail covered one end of the dining room table. Familiar work. Comforting. By the time my fingerprints were back on my house, it was nearly five o'clock. The bedroom, I decided, then a drink in front of the fire.

With one practiced motion, my left hand stripped the top sheet and my right grabbed his pillow. The sight was crude, brutal, unexpected—like a mugging—nailing me in place. My fingers stretched taut and the dark blue sheet dropped with a whoosh over its mate. I backed away, breath short and high in my lungs, stomach in free-fall. I walked to my side and whipped the covers to the bottom of the bed. More stains. My breathing was fast and high, but my heart seemed to hardly beat. This was our bed. He knew I was coming. Didn't he care? Didn't I matter? How was that possible, when he filled my every thought?

There was something on the floor. I bent carefully, as if I might frighten whatever it was. We were planning to buy end tables so we'd have separate reading lamps and hadn't yet replaced the plywood flooring with laminate. The edge of my hand disturbed a dust bunny. Panties, white, faux satin, lace-edged. Yes, of course. She dropped them there and nudged them under a bit. I walked into our bathroom. Shampoo and conditioner in the shower stall. Not mine. I retraced my steps to the great room and surveyed again, spotted the hair clip on the windowsill and, unbelievably, her hiking boots sitting neatly on the tray next to my front door.

And now it was real.

The underwear caught with a hiss, flared briefly, and melted over the kindling, curling into black tendrils. I watched the flames, rocking forwards and backwards. The shower was scrubbed, the toiletries removed, the hairclip buried in the garbage. The boots still sat by the door, where I could see them. Soft music played in the background. I rubbed my hair slowly with the towel, pausing occasionally to sip the mahogany liquid in my glass. It was happy hour on Cooper Island. I wandered back into the bedroom. Fresh sheets covered the wide bed, neatly turned down below two fluffed pillows. My hand reached for the striped terry robe in the closet and I brought the sleeve to my nose, inhaling him. I dropped my bath towel and thrust my arms into the sleeves, one at a time, without relinquishing my drink.

It was dusk; the picture outside the tall windows had dimmed. There were fewer boats at anchor now that summer was unofficially over and a rough chop marred the surface of the ocean. My flowers had perked up, though, grateful for the watering. In the grey months, while I waited for the sun to touch the corner of our deck, waited for the rain to stop, waited for the first whir of a hummingbird, waited for new green to show against old stubble, the promise of them was the only reason I got up each morning. The flowers were mine: planning them, choosing them, transporting them, preparing the soil, feeding and watering them. The tomatoes in their wire baskets sat in a row outside our bedroom slider, nasturtiums fell off the dormer deck, bridal veil, thick with

delicate white flowers, cushioned red geraniums and pink pelargonium so that whenever I looked out my windows, I saw colour. They would perish without me.

The vibrator was in the drawer on his side of the bed. I settled between the clean sheets and felt its smooth cold touch, my pelvis rocking in anticipation. I began gently, chased the familiar, deep tingle, backed off, chased it again, not rushing, not wanting to cheat myself, each time a little closer, lingering longer, plunging deeper, concerned only with my pace, my need, my pleasure, me. The tingle changed shape, started to insist, rushed, arched my neck, pushed the back of my head deep into the pillow, scissored my legs and held them tight. My hands dropped the vibrator and clamped the mound between my legs, nursing the pulse. I stroked myself quiet, feeling the slippery discharge coat my fingers. Lifting the covers with one elbow, I inhaled, then reached up and ran my hands back and forth across his pillowslip until they were dry. I used his housecoat to blot the damp thatch between my legs before hanging it back where I'd found it on his side of the closet.

After breakfast, I tucked my recipes into a file folder and climbed onto a stool to lift the clock from its hanger above the television. The vibrator nestled in one of my socks at the bottom of my tote with the two-toned afghan folded on top. I added the letter from my lawyer to the pile of unopened mail on the dining room table, locked the door, returned the key to its hiding place, and followed the trail to the dock. The motor started on the first pull.

Billeh Nickerson

MY MONTREAL VAGINA

At times I've wondered
how it would be

to know its deep well
from within,

not just some visitor
fumbling around

as if searching for keys
in a pocket or purse,

but given the unlikelihood
I'd ever have that opportunity

I never lamented the loss
of what could never have been

until I was surprised
by a doctor in Montreal

whose medical chart
perplexed him so deeply

he spent an entire minute
alternating between

looking at me and then
back down at his chart again

Do you have a vagina?
Do you own a vagina?

and part of me wondered
if only for a few moments

whether this was my chance
to say *Yes, I do*

to that chorus of well-meaning
friends who liked to joke

it didn't matter
I didn't have a vagina

because my asshole was my vagina
only in disguise.

So, you are a man then? With a penis?
You are a man without a vagina?

Yes, I'm a man, I said,
a man without a vagina,

though for a few moments
I fell in love with the possibility

of what a misplaced medical chart
could offer my anatomy,

my Montreal vagina appearing
as if by magic

then diving back in
to the well of itself.

PETRIFIED

for Bernhard Friz

We were having drinks in his hotel room,
a rather ordinary occurrence given our long friendship
and penchant for meeting in random cities,

but this room offered an amazing view
of the floating gas station in Burrard Inlet
and the lights strung along the Second Narrows

as if there were a route
to heaven or at least some place fabulous
just a short drive away.

He remarked that there was a time
when even a crappy hotel room
presented an opportunity

to hook up with strangers,
and how peculiar it was now,
when he finally had rooms with views

worthy of sharing,
the dread of putting in the effort
outweighed his desire to share.

In movies, loneliness is often depicted
as a rundown room
littered with empties

when really the loneliest moments
are those when we can't share
something spectacular.

Of all the things we talked about that night,
I remember most his excitement
about a recent museum visit

when the curator invited guests
to decipher between
petrified wood and bone

by placing fragments on their tongues
as even after 100,000 years
capillaries will still tug at your flesh.

It's pretty sad, he told me,
when an old bone's more romantic
than most of the guys I've dated.

Now I can't stop thinking
about the resiliency
of those capillaries,

the unviewed rooms
within ourselves
aching to be seen.

RED MAILBOXES

For months you avoid busy streets
and their red mailboxes,

which look like your ex
in his red ski jacket.

The red fire hydrant, the stop sign,
neither of these cause concern,

only that right size of red
in the distance

as if your ex realized
the futility of sending letters

and became the mailbox
instead.

Ariella Jenkins

Spanish by Ezequiel Zaidenwerg

MI VILLANELA ES OBRA DE LA SUERTE

Mi villanela es obra de la suerte:
la compuse dormida en mi caballo.
Estás muy lejos. Muero por cogerte.

Un camión casi logra darme muerte,
pero vivo. Venía como un rayo.
Mi villanela es obra de la suerte.

No me importa: aunque trates de esconderte
o de pedir ayuda en morse, te hallo.
Estás muy lejos. Muero por cogerte.

Con mi afán de besar, voy a extraerte
las amígdalas. (¡Ay, qué voz de gallo!).
Mi villanela es obra de la suerte.

Cuando te monte, intentarás moverte
como un potro. Aunque en vano: te avasallo.
Estás muy lejos. Muero por cogerte.

¿Qué esperabas? No quise repelerte,
pero tanta pasión no me la callo.
Mi villanela es obra de la suerte.
Estás muy lejos. Muero por cogerte.

MY VILLANELLE IS JUST A STROKE OF LUCK

My villanelle is just a stroke of luck:
I wrote it while asleep upon my horse.
You're far away. I'm dying for a fuck.

I almost died. There came a giant truck
Speeding towards me. But I live, of course:
My villanelle is just a stroke of luck.

It doesn't matter if you try to duck
Or dash-dot-dash an SOS in morse.
You're far away. I'm dying for a fuck.

I'm so eager to kiss you that I'll pluck
Your tonsils out. (Your voice won't be so coarse).
My villanelle is just a stroke of luck.

When I'm on top of you, you'll try to buck
Like a colt, to prevent our intercourse.
You're far away. I'm dying for a fuck.

I didn't mean to make you go: "Ew! Yuck!"
I'll have my way with you—zero remorse:
My villanelle is just a stroke of luck;
You're far away, I'm dying for a fuck.

MI VILLANELA LA HIZO UNA BIZARRA

Mi villanela la hizo una bizarra
que soy yo, en una lengua incomprensible.
*Estás muy lejos. Muero por [*chicharra*].*

Entre ambos hay un monte. Arriba hay farra:
en la cima, una luz se hace visible.
Mi villanela la hizo una bizarra.

Si no durmiera yo, en mi yegua guarra
el viaje no sería tan terrible.
*Estás muy lejos. Muero por [*chicharra*].*

Traé el camión. (¡Qué pila de chatarra!).
Yo quiero un hombre, no un llorón risible.
Mi villanela la hizo una bizarra.

Sos muy débil. No llores. Me desgarra
tanta humedad (más húmedo, imposible).
*Estás muy lejos. Muero por [*chicharra*].*

¿Vas a cavar para plantar tu parra?
(Al menos, dejá un cheque transferible).
Mi villanela la hizo una bizarra.
Estás muy lejos. Muero por [chicharra].

MY VILLANELLE WAS WRITTEN BY A CREEP

My villanelle was written by a creep
Who happens to be me. It's in Old Norse.
You're far away. I'm dying for a [*beep*].

Between us there's a mountain, high and steep;
On top I see a light—look, there's the source.
My villanelle was written by a creep.

If it weren't for the fact that I'm asleep,
I'd travel to you ASAP on my horse.
You're far away. I'm dying for a [*beep*].

Go get your giant truck, that useless heap
of rusty junk. I want some manly force.
My villanelle was written by a creep.

You're such a wimp. Oh, please, don't start to weep.
It's damp already. (When it rains, it pours).
You're far away. I'm dying for a [*beep*].

In order to go up, you should go deep
—at least, write me a check I can endorse.
My villanelle was written by a creep:
You're far away. I'm dying for a [*beep*].

Mark Anthony Jarman

BUTTERFLY ON A MOUNTAIN

They are ill discoverers that think there is no land, when they can see nothing but sea.
—Francis Bacon

Perhaps there is no station waiting, no mouth. In lovely Roman streets a young woman begs for coins among drunken pub-crawlers and Bengali men hawking red roses. A child and a young man wait nearby, all three faces handsome, but unhappy, a troubled trifecta, their cursed aura palpable, an urban detail you take in, like the dimensions of a sooty Gothic doorway.

My cousin Eve and I have seen this trio in the street before, the way the young man glares at the woman: clearly their situation is *her* fault, saddling him with a child and no prospects in a joyless city. The child plays with a toy and the young man tries to ignore them both. The young woman's hair is longer than Eve's and she wears a long skirt mirrored with silver threads and platelets, looking medieval amidst the tourist shorts and singlets.

Eve studies the three, says, "I wonder if they are Roma."

"Can you tell?"

"Well, they may be *zingari*, gypsies, or they may be Croatian, or Tunisian, or they may be from Iraq or Afghanistan. Who knows these days."

The locals complain, *merda*, too many gypsies and too many illegals coming on boats from every direction, more every day! It wasn't like this in the old days, they say. And last week a stowaway fell from the sky, crushed on city pavement, the poor guy, his head broken open after he dropped out of a DC-9's wheel-well. The stowaway wanted this city, and he had such an amazing view of Rome's river and steeples and temples until the wondrous diorama rose up to kill him.

The young man crosses the road and straddles someone else's parked motorcycle, his body bent forward and his hands wide on the grips to pretend that the powerful motorcycle is his own hard machine, and on this machine he is far away from everyone, zooming freely up some fine valley in a soft leather jacket, wind in his stubbled face and a fat roll of Euro notes in his pocket, a dream valley with no begging for a stranger's pennies and no child glancing sideways to gauge his surly moods.

He hunches over someone else's motorcycle and the young woman approaches merry drunken tourists for coins. Tour groups follow a flag-holder down narrow cobblestones that shake with tour buses; a bus kneels at a hotel door like a camel, a hydraulic trick. In the undeclared war, the winners are winning, but you know money is there, money walking past in wallets and purses.

"Let's go," Eve says.

I can't move. I feel I can read these three like watching actors work a lit stage: she is trying hard, but such streets are not paved with gold, there is no work, and in the script the young man blames the young woman, in the script the young

man will take it out on the young woman.

In Rome goldfinches pass my eyes like laser beams and goldfinches zip by my house in Canada. When I left Canada wobbly tulips were trying to straighten up under goldfinches flying in crab-apple blossoms and flooding rivers withdrew to let fiddleheads open their tight furls.

My maple tree was starting to fill out and throw down shade on my lawn, but this Canadian season could not be called summer—winter still looms, too huge a recent memory, like an army departed in the night, raw gashes left on salty ground, grass boulevards in ruins and chunks of ice and straw and flotsam caught in the river's muddy trees.

That stunning crashing freshet and river ice seem only hours ago, I can't forget it, an icy spectre that was just there. But stumble from a plane and Italy is already furnace-hot, no ice in this murky chocolate river and horses dreaming in the shade and heat addling my brain.

"Hotter each day," warns my cousin Eve.

I am not made for it, my thermostat very different from the Italians'.

My cousin Eve gazes around the empty piazza with her movie star sunglasses, looks north as if she might glimpse the Alps seething with snowy vapours just past the old city gate. The crowds in Rome will get much worse in a few weeks. Eve prefers the north of Italy, *Italia Settentrionale*. I only know the south, often seen as wilder, trashier, savage, dangerous. Rome is a pivot, a door. I try to stop staring at her. Her face, her body in a silk blouse, her hand, eyes; how many genes do we share?

"Do you miss the mountains?" she asks. She used to race the Downhill event, was fast where I was a coward.

"Especially in the spring," I say. She knows that spring skiing is a compulsion of mine. But not this year, it is too far and I have no money left. Last spring in Canada I saw an orange butterfly high on a snowy mountain.

"How on earth did it get there?"

Eve smiles as I try to convey my amazement. "Did the butterfly ride up on the gondola?"

"That's just what I wondered."

In Canada the puzzling butterfly fluttered the chalet's snowy sundeck, lighting on the boards under our massive ski boots. How did the tiny creature survive, map its way to such a cold altitude, flying in snow above the tree line? In a nearby hanging valley a lordly black bear once chased me, tried to kill me, and now a butterfly pursues me. Why did the bear want to kill me? His strange loves, no existential ennui for him! The bear wants me, I want Eve, and the butterfly wants satori on the mountain top. What primal urge drew the butterfly to this lost world in the sky?

When skiing I forget that I am connected to the rest of the world, I am elevated, changed, separated in some odd land in the sky. Years ago at Tod Mountain—new owners immediately changed the resort's name because in German Tod means death—the chairlift carried us through clouds and above, clouds now a floor under us, an escalator piercing the clouds. A brighter separate world out of time, mythic, exhilarating.

I rise up a mountain and a stowaway sees the city for the first time as he falls from the plane, as his head hits the street. Now all our grandparents are dead and my parents are dead and I am separated from my wife and children and this café in Rome seems a separate world from Canada. I left my father's house decades ago, fell into the city; my mother and father are dead so there are walls between us, but I still see them, still dream of my mother and father.

The butterfly opened and closed its wings, flew a few feet, but hurried back to us; I worried our great ski-boots might crush the creature after it moved like a genius so far across the planet and climbed to us on these windy hiemal heights. Guttural ravens I am used to at this altitude, white ptarmigans exploding out of a snowbank hiding spot, demented jays begging for snacks. But never a butterfly, especially when winter is still with us. How many million movements of the creature's wings carried it from Mexico to this mountain top?

That same day my worn ski boots, also orange, fell to pieces. I'd skied on them so long, frugal decades in the same boots, that the aged plastic simply gave out and trailed debris on the slope and I kept skiing hard down the mountain, bent over, staring ahead, thighs hurting and my poles barely ticking the bathtub moguls, I didn't even notice the debris behind me. My eyes were bloodshot, almost snow-blind from the bouncing light, so my sister lent me dark glasses, clunky rectangles that looked like they came from Ray Charles. I skied all day in a white crater ringed with teeth in a kind of ecstasy, a king of ecstasy.

Is there anything left of Keats in the graveyard ground? All the bodies in rows, but it's the bloodied cat walking the poet's grave—I'll never forget that mangled cat in Rome's Protestant Cemetery, the cat's face sneezing blood and doesn't look like a cat anymore, its nose completely gone, like the faces of so many broken Greek and Roman busts.

In our group is a twenty-three-year-old American who was injured in Iraq; he has a Purple Heart and 30% loss of hearing after an IED blast under his vehicle. He has a crush on Eve (I suppose we all do), tells Eve he is depressed and pissed off because he wanted to be an officer, but his military career is toast now; the army caused his loss of hearing and discharged him because of his loss of hearing.

"They say officers have to be perfect and now after the IED I'm less than perfect. As if they're all perfect."

"That's terrible," says Eve.

"It's a fucking crock," he says.

On the ground by Keats's grave are oranges and on them ants and butterflies acquiring their vitamins.

"You know what," the young American says to Eve, "I don't want to be in any graveyard with cats."

He's going to golf, going to Prague for pilsner under the spires. After so many corpses in Iraq this is not what he seeks, another bone orchard; after the sniper at the sandy wall he doesn't share our interest in dead Romantic poets. He's been injured at war in Iraq, so I expect him to have wisdom, but he seems a bitter witness with little to tell that is profound.

Someone walks past. "Dude, where's Jim Morrison's grave?"

"Wrong city, asshole," says the ex-soldier.

Eve bends over the headstones. "Corso the beatnik buried with Keats and Shelley? So you can just buy a spot here? How did Corso do it? Look, this one is Antonio Gramsci. He was a Member of Parliament and they threw him in prison."

"Who? Gramsci? How do you even know of him?" I ask.

"My older brother was really into Trotsky and had Gramsci's book *Prison Notebooks*. Gramsci was a hunchback, terrible health, got on Mussolini's bad side and died in prison."

"Mussolini was an ass." Saved once by Hitler, but then strung up by the heels at a gas station like a dead hog.

"Do you believe in an afterlife?"

"I have to," Eve replies. "This one ain't working out at the moment."

She surprises me. My eye and mind are imperfect: Everyone seems fine to me and they are *not* fine. I remember hearing from my mother that Eve was involved with some addict, painkillers from an old injury, a car accident, and then he wouldn't stop the pills; I'm sure any addict has a few unlovely secrets. She couldn't shake him, his weird love, she'd resolve to not see him again, they'd break up and get back over and over.

This pattern doesn't seem true of her, but can you ever know anyone or even hope to know your own secrets? It's a world of secrets. Once in a while we are given a glimpse behind the faces held up for us in a room, but such glimpses are rare.

Eve's father used to tell an old family story, they were living near Lincoln, Nebraska and a tornado tore up their house. A heavy oak bureau fell on her little sister, and Eve, a skinny teen, lifted the piece of furniture and rescued the smaller girl. Eve tried later to lift the weight and she could not budge the mass of oak even an inch. And the addict, when she wouldn't see him, dumped a load of manure in her white convertible. Or was it a Jacuzzi on a cedar deck? The private girls' school in the Swiss Alps is a long way from Nebraska and her old lives in Tornado Alley.

Eve worries, worries about the future, worries about her teeth and future dental bills and insomnia. I don't worry—I just want to touch her and I can't. In the hotel I saw her open suitcase, beautiful French bras on top. Eve harbours doubts about the men she chooses, men with manure and front-end loaders. Is it even possible any more, to get along with someone for any length of time, or is that talent lost to most of us? Of late Eve has turned to Jung for answers, but I don't know if that's going to fly. The heart is part diplomat and part vandal.

Inside graveyard walls we move past the maimed cat and shade trees, we are alive and jump on a grimy B-Line train that reminds me of Philly, windows all tagged, but when we climb out above ground the Roman streets are beautiful, new sun on ancient stone arches and classically-proportioned views each way zapping some Luddite pleasure centre in my brain.

Summer washes us in warm water, what is Hecuba to me? Part of me is

winter, always winter. I suppose I must go home sometime, when I am out of money and drinks and sofas to crash upon. On the other side of the gloaming river Eve and I walk hills and piazzas, haughty statues gazing as Mars rises over a gold church and precisely painted house. Rome is piled upon Rome. I follow Eve through demented crowds of hipsters and party girls sampling dispso concoctions that taste of fried bread and marigolds, bands on the party barges playing fuzzed out meteor storms, bands playing bits of accidents muted as cough syrup.

When Eve raced in the mountains she was fearless, on the ski team she loved the speedy Downhill event and I was afraid that I'd die in the Downhill races, head down in a tuck and zooming like hell through the icy gates to the bottom hoping your edges held as you flew up and down and the turns got icier and greasier; she loved it and I hated it. I had no confidence as a downhill racer, preferring the longer curves of Giant Slalom; GS is fast, but forgiving.

Eve stops and kisses me by the subway stairs; I am Canadian so used to being part of someone else's empire. Narrow steps lead us down to a cellar's brick arches and blue electric light where a band stops and a bozo drummer crashes snare and toms and the audience applauds wildly.

"No!" moans my cousin, holding her head. "Never reward a drum solo."

We keep going, fountain to fountain, I'll sleep when I die, I feel wonderful staying up all night in Rome. My mother a night owl watching Merv Griffin, David Frost, me a night owl and Eve a night owl too—is such a thing genetic? A magnetic magic night, lights live like glowing coals in the bottom of the river and in two café chairs my hand on her warm leg seems a very good idea, that shore seems possible. All of my body is keyed up, aware of the next body, the leg, waiting for a dispatch from the border.

"On the corner, those three again."

Who? Oh yes. The medieval young woman begging for coins, the young man and kid; hell, I'm in a decent mood; maybe they'll be all right. Is the sky lighter? For some in Rome the night has too few hours, for other wanderers the night has far too many. Is the gap my fault? *Come and give the fiddler a dram.*

In sunrise's fresh light my tireless cousin and I cross back to our side of the river, cross the river to read graffiti on a wall that states, *You Are Entering Free Prati*. Sprayed in English, not Italian, which puzzles us. A black shamrock is sprayed on the same wall: is this a lost tribe of the Irish?

"*Iltrifoglio*," says my cousin, "the three-part leaf, *Nuovo Politica*, more of a fascist symbol than to do with leprechauns. Fascism still has its appeal here. As does Mr. Mussolini."

Another wall has a tag, *Defindi Roma, Salva Europe*. Defend Rome against outsiders at the borders, at the gates, from those falling from the sky like errant tightrope walkers. Those with money retreat behind walls and gates; what was ancient fortress becomes fortress once more.

"Wall-building must be a profitable profession here. Rome is all walls."

Look this way a wall and look that way a wall and the Vatican walls loom behind us like a brown mountain and down that side street I see spray-painted walls and locked gates linking more walls, more crooked graffiti and no greenery

to soften the sunlit streetscape, few trees to shade the bourdon tone of traffic. But at times I glimpse lush plants and lewd blossoms and massive trees past the walls, private gardens hiding in the block's interiors.

I'll never know interior Italy, the sedate green courtyards, only the chaotic exteriors and the jail of language, of not knowing the lovely language. So many curious tourists and camera eyes in these public spaces, but Italy is private, Italy is walled off.

Eve comes to see my high room and terrace and I am nervous with her in my room. I show her my tiny bathroom with its screened window, the small square mesh like a confessional in the sky. Five storeys high, a fortress tower with an open terrace with vines and flowers and a vast white umbrella to shade us from the drugging sun, the stabbing light: Eve likes all of it.

"You're very tidy." I can tell she is surprised.

When drinking I can be reckless, my life is messy, as if in a car crash that takes many years to unfold, but my room is clean.

Dark-skinned children play inside the next walled garden under fruit trees. Are they apricots or tiny oranges? From five storeys above I can't be sure. She leans forward and her taut calf seems to represent something.

"The orphans," I remark to my cousin Eve.

They might just be daycare kids, but I enjoy thinking of them as my orphans. Nuns in white habits drift out to check on them occasionally.

Curious about these gardens and walls below, we walk the nearest streets until finding a locked gate and a brass sign affixed to the wall beside the locked gate: *Instituto San Giuseppi Della Montagne*, which I believe means St. Joseph of the Mountain. My mysterious neighbour!

Their compound and treed garden have a wary, guarded look, perhaps an old rectory or nunnery (the pure *hortus conclusus*), high walls with broken glass cemented into the top to belay trespassers (*forgive us our trespasses*), and inside the high walls fruit lies on the ground.

Who was it who built the first wall? Was it a wise God expelling a puzzled couple from the garden? Such a loss to Him, and over a fig, *fico*, a trifle.

A view of gardens during the day, but at night my neighbourhood below behaves strangely. At street level are arched gates and palm trees and high walls a dun sand colour, so in evening's diffused light I no longer see Rome's riverine blocks, I gaze over a dim desert crossroads, an Algerian outpost, the sand and palm trees of a Moroccan fortress and Eve in my bed; we wait for a caravan of camels to cross under the next streetlamp, Bedouins whispering past in silk robes. Night alters the urban world under my flowered terrace, night reboots the look. I dream I find gold coins on the ground and I'm picking them up, but no one else seems to see them.

In the morning Eve pulls black tights over her pale legs and takes me to a giant street market, a vast display of vendors and wares under a roof of tin sheeting that stretches for blocks. Is this cornucopia world possible? Can the Pope, with

all his gold, ever say that: *She pulled on her tights and took me to the market.* Why would I want to change anything, be anyone else? I have it far better than Pope Rat, yet I am fascinated that a Pope is right over there with his treasures, perhaps peeking out his window at my flowery terrace, gazing at our gardens.

We walk streets spilling with ripe fruit and herbs and oils, we take from the gnarled trees and vines and mustard valleys, we drop nets into schools of fish the colour of wriggling fire, haul sea bass and sea urchins and Jerusalem artichokes under this tin roof for all to gaze and taste, stall by stall, the way my Irish grandmother shopped every day in her Usher's Island neighbourhood beside the River Liffey.

Plane trees rise in crooked columns, but they disappear beyond the market's tin heavens. Broad tree trunks rise in this interior, but our eyes cannot follow, the tin roof separates, we cannot see the branches and foliage that blossom above the roof—a strangely discombobulating effect, like huge elms growing inside your bedroom, like kindred city blocks cleaved by a stone wall or railroad embankment, the natural lines broken.

I see the young woman in her long dress begging down the street, but today I don't see the unhappy young man with her. I buy two loaves of bread heavy as paving stones. In the market they are all selling; what am I selling? The bone-green air between tree trunks, the green shadows between trunks: Who owns that property? I feel Eve owns that grainy air, right now I feel Eve owns any part of the world where my eye strays.

My cousin's eager, greedy green eyes, her lovely jaw; am I allowed to touch her leg today? I offer one loaf to the young woman begging and she looks at me suspiciously, says no, she refuses my loaf of bread. By the purple Christ what addled engineer designed the divisions in our heads?

A honeymoon couple falls into the hotel's tiny mirrored lobby, a funhouse chamber, but they are not having fun, they are very upset. An unregistered taxi driver swindled them, nabbed them at the airport, forced on them a long tour of Rome that they did not want (*yes you must see the Coliseum, and Garibaldi's statue and the fountains*) and then he demanded a king's ransom before they could get out of his taxi, charged them five times what I paid for my taxi ride with the Quebec stewardess and pilot. The Quebec stewardess saved me from a crooked cabbie.

"We tried to get him to stop the tour. Just take us to the hotel! Please stop."

This is the couple's honeymoon, and so much beauty and romance in Rome, such stunning sights, but their first moments in Italy sullied. And they paid the ridiculous amount just to be free of the driver. They came to this shore and he knew they had money on their bodies. The French woman who runs the hotel desk is jubilantly indignant, calls the local *polizia.*

The policeman says, "What can we do if they are stupid." And it's true, at times we must seem like morons to the Italians.

"What!" the French woman cries. "They are not stupid! They are from somewhere else and don't expect to be treated this way. They were like prisoners. You are the stupid one, you are an imbecile!"

She hangs up and says to me, "That's the problem with Italy. They think it's funny to trick people, they love the *beffa*, their tricks, they think it proves that they are so clever and you are so dumb. They think they are so clever. I hope someone drops a big bomb on that policeman's head and then we'll see who is smart or dumb!"

The French woman at the front desk has lived in Rome for decades, she is married to the hotel owner, but she has not taken to Italians. Their bread, she says. It just does not compare.

Too many people in polluted Rome: I am one of millions and don't enjoy that feeling. I only need a few people, maybe just one, but some lean into doubt the way others lean into faith. My cousin Eve has to go back to Switzerland's fresh air, the honeymoon is over. We will float back to our possessions, their lovely burden. I kiss her at the taxi, but I'm not really allowed, she turns slightly, is no longer comfortable.

In the garden, oranges or apricots lie wasted on the ground; no one touches the fruit. In the garden the Pope's nuns come out to look at the orphans, nuns like Bedouins in their flowing white habits, covered wholly in this heat.

Nuns covered wholly in Rome and on Canada's snowy mountains women ski in bikinis, almost naked; the temperature not yet warm enough, but they want to ski in bikinis, they want to ski naked. The Ray Charles sunglasses borrowed from my sister were so dark, altering the world, the sunglasses made the women's bare skin looked purple, ghoulish, the colour of zinc lotion applied to a nose to prevent sunburn and skin cancer.

In Canada we skied all day in a celestial crater ringed with teeth, up and down we went on the blinding snow in a pleasing rhythm, a whole crowd in sunglasses and zinc noses, and my ski boots so hard they hurt my ankles. It's hard to walk in the new boots, hard to tromp up the chalet stairs, trying to dig for coins for a hot chocolate.

Everyone walking past has money, but no one begs for spare change on a ski hill. There are no walls on a ski hill. Perhaps the troubled trio could make the journey from Rome to Canada's far mountains. All three could fit on a stolen motorcycle speeding north out of Rome past the northern gate and city walls and turn the wheel into glorious foreign valleys and this move may stay his hand from her cheek. But what are the chances? So many travelers and refugees at sea and stowaways falling like snow from the sky, all believing riches are ahead of them if they find the right shore.

No one asks for money while you wear ski boots, an unstated rule. My old boots—I skied on them so long they fell to bits. The new boots are so inflexible, and I like flexibility, but hard boots are needed to hold me tight in the quick turns in the ziggurat mountains.

Is it luck that you find yourself on one side of a wall or the other? People sit outside in goggles and jackets and they spread their lunch at cedar picnic tables, eating and drinking and sharing sandwiches with joyful smiles. This is the way it should be for everyone. The chair-lift moving station to station, the sky so high above the mountains, and wind always touching our faces in the strange hanging valley we dreamed of so long ago.

Nabíl Boschman

SHAME

This poem is ashamed of you.
There's this thing you once did—
maybe you told one friend
and laughed it off,
or confided in the safety of a stranger.
You told yourself it's not that big a deal.
Other people probably do it too.
They don't. Are your palms sweaty?

Then there was that time—
it happened when you were
smaller than you should feel right now.
Probably only the other kid knows,
if the other kid even remembers.
This poem was there too,
sitting on your shoulder.
This poem knows,
and it's disappointed in you.

Michael Prior

LOVE AS AN ORANGE

Well, it's not an orange. No matter how you slice it.
It's not dimpled and fragrant, nor does it suffuse
the air with bright mist. It doesn't compost
easily to nothing, doesn't feed the earth, doesn't
become the walls of a worm's muscled progress.
I haven't seen it in the citrine scraps of sun
adorning the table, nor have I tasted it in
the first moment of sudden waking, tangy
and incomplete. But maybe it's in a pair
of hands, the unravelling of a skin without
a seam. Maybe it's in the motion of reveal,
the offering of a naked globe of light.

Astrid Blodgett

DEVIL'S LAKE

When she turned to see how far she had come, Willow smelled smoke. She knew without looking it was wood smoke. It didn't have that stinky garbage smell that came from the big oil barrel behind the garage where Dad burned tomato soup cans and Styrofoam take-out trays and other crap he didn't want to take to the dump because of the disposal charges. Garbage smoke came out spindly and black like a creature with long skinny arms and poked its way up her nostrils and gave her a throw-up taste in her mouth. Dad told her to go inside when she complained. She liked wood smoke, the velvet, cosy warmth of it. It was nicer even than the dry grass smell from her mother's cigarettes. The wood smoke would come back to her that night in bed when she rolled over, small, invisible gusts, and when she closed her eyes she would be back by the fire, surrounded by Dad and all the kids and watching her marshmallow puff up and turn brown.

Tom, one of the dads, had started the fire. He knelt down in front of the miniature tipi of twigs and blew at the crumpled newspaper. Willow's dad tramped out of the bushes in his old black hockey skates, his arms piled so high with deadfall that she couldn't see his face. He dropped the wood in front of the fire ring and brushed the arms of his thick, green coat.

Go on, Willow, Dad called out. Go with the other kids. It's not time yet. He looked quickly in the direction of the snaky gravel road they had driven on to get to the lake and then over at Willow again.

Willow had forgotten about her feet, but now she felt them again. She'd told Dad at the rental place that the skates were too small, but he didn't listen. She'd told him they were too tight when he tied them for her on the bench back where he'd parked the Ranger, and he didn't listen then, either. He was too excited to hear anything. He was excited like a little kid, but with an edge. He'd grin suddenly, then stop smiling and scrunch his eyebrows together, and then grin again. The edge made her desperate to like skating, to be good at it. It made her afraid for how he'd be later if she didn't like it. This is your first time on skates, he'd said when they arrived. Your first time on Devil's Lake.

He had planned this whole day for her—the skating, the fire, the hot dog roast, the other kids to skate with. The way he talked about Devil's Lake was the way kids at school talked about Disneyland. She'd heard about Devil's Lake other winters. Dad and a couple of his friends would be sitting around the kitchen table and one of them would say: Too bad about Devil's Lake. Or: Too much snow on the lake this year. And someone would say: The ice has to be just right. It has to be cold enough at night for the ice to freeze up thick enough, one good cold snap is what you really need to for it to freeze smooth. And then someone else would say: You want the freezing before any snow comes. They said

these things every winter, but every year they talked like they were saying them for the first time.

The ice is good and thick, Dad said when they arrived at the lake after lunch. Look at it. Smooth as glass. Just a skiff of snow. She could see it in the way his body twitched, the mix of excitement and agitation. Beth called him giddy. You look downright giddy, Paul, she said, her mouth making a wide smile, when she arrived with Tom and their kids.

Willow tried to like being on skates on the bumpy ice. She tried to glide when Dad shouted: Glide! But she didn't glide. Her legs didn't move easily and quickly the way everybody else's did. She tripped on the little bumps no one else noticed; she tripped on her skate tips and fell, hard, on her hands and knees. Her skates squeezed so tightly it felt like the little bones in her feet were splintering into thousands of pieces. Nobody told her how tippy skates were. Nobody told her how much her ankles would hurt. The most she could do was take slow baby steps. While Dad and all the people he had invited had criss-crossed the small lake again and again, she had only managed to wobble from the bench near the cars to the big iron fire ring across the lake.

The girl with the elephant ears on her hat skated up to Willow. Willow tried to remember her name, but she couldn't think past the idea that this girl, who was much younger than Willow, could skate faster than her. Everybody skated faster than Willow. Everybody had their own skates, not rentals like Willow. Dad said it was because Mom never took her skating at the public rinks near her house and the only place to skate near Dad's was Devil's Lake.

It's not your fault, he said, when he told her she was going skating for the first time. Then he said, Your mother doesn't do a damn thing with you all week. It's never too late to learn. It's never too late to do anything, is it. This is your year, Dingaling a ling ding dong!

Willow smiled when Dad called her that. His nickname made her think of bells. Not big heavy church bells, but little tinkly Christmas bells.

C'mon, Willow! The elephant ear girl said. Come with us!

She's a-coming, Hellabaloo! Dad said.

Hellabaloo's mother skated up to Willow. How's it going? she asked.

She's fine, Beth, Dad said. She's just fine. He stepped onto the ice and skated backwards away from them. Come on, Willow, he said. Glide. Just glide. You're not trying.

Hellabaloo's big brother, who had thick, curly hair but no hat, zoomed up to Dad and grabbed his toque and took off. Dad chased after him so fast his skates dug into to the ice and sent little bits flying.

Like this, Beth said kindly. She glided slowly ahead of Willow. Then she skated back and took Willow's hand. Let yourself go, she said. Willow held tightly to Beth's arm but didn't move.

Dad zoomed up to them and stopped hard, like he'd hit the brakes on the truck.

What's up? he said. He pulled his toque snugly on his head.

Her skates are hurting her, Beth said.

She'll be okay.

They're too tight, Willow said.

Skates are supposed to be tight, Dad said.

I'll loosen them, Beth offered. Let's go back to the bench. Then you can skate some more.

Skates are tight, Dad said. You're not used to them.

Beth walked with Willow toward the bench. It was a long way, but Willow looked down at her skates, not across the ice to the bench, so she couldn't see how far it was. Her ankles burned. Dad skated in circles near them.

Have you told her? Beth asked. Willow heard how her voice changed to the way grownups talk to grownups.

What, about Glenda and me? Dad said. Willow listened for his voice to be different, but it was the same as when he spoke to her or anyone else.

Beth nodded.

That's the plan, he said. He looked in the direction of the winding gravel road again. Willow knew he was watching for the little red Mazda. He said, I'll do her skates, and took Willow's hand. Beth slowly skated away, toward the other children. Willow clung to Dad and felt her skate blades begin to glide. But after a few seconds her toes pointed in, her knees bent, and her legs collapsed. Like before. Her knees and shins were on fire. Stand up, Willow! Dad yelled and gave her a sharp pull. And stop bawling! You've been bawling for an hour.

Willow stood and walked slowly across the ice in the direction of the bench. She couldn't help crying, she wanted to say, but she didn't say anything. When she sat, Dad knelt in front of her and took a skate in his hand and pulled at the laces till they made big loops.

Stop crying, he said. You don't have to be such a baby. You haven't skated before. You just have to keep trying.

Dad gently pulled off the skate. Willow knew this must be what a butterfly felt when it came out of its cocoon. Everything unscrunched and opened. The painful splintering feeling went away. Dad loosened the other skate and pulled it off, and Willow felt the same freeing of all her tiny bones. He took her feet in his large hands and held them. Willow wanted Dad to stay like this, holding her feet like they were newborn baby birds.

What about you and Glenda? Willow asked. The first time Willow met her, Glenda said, What a cutie! and gave her a frilly pink dress that was too small and they all went to McDonald's. When Willow offered Glenda some fries, Glenda said, No thank you. She said it so quickly, without even looking, that Willow was left with the feeling Glenda would have said no to whatever Willow might have offered. All Willow could think to tell her mother later was that Glenda didn't like fries.

Instead of answering, Dad stood up and walked over to the Ranger. He tossed her skates behind the seat and came back with her purple boots, then knelt in front of her again. He never helped her with her boots anymore; she was too big for that. She wanted to tell him she was sorry she couldn't skate, but when he held her foot in both hands and warmed it before slipping on her boot, so slowly and carefully, first the right foot and then the left, she knew she didn't need to say anything; he was telling her he was sorry and it was all okay.

Dad went back to the truck and sat in the cab with the door open and stared

straight ahead. Then he picked up a little white paper bag from the seat. He pulled something from the bag, something so small it disappeared into his hand, and after a few seconds pushed the thing back in and shoved the bag into the large outside pocket on his coat.

It was warm, around zero, and Dad's coat hung open. He turned his body so it faced out of the truck and took off his own skates. He held them by the blades for a long time as if he was wondering what to do with them and eventually seemed to remember they belonged behind the seat. He pulled on his big white Sorels and walked back to the bench.

What about you and Glenda? Willow asked again.

Wait till Glenda comes, he said. His eyes sparked, and he looked excited again. She'll want to be here, he added. Let's go to the fire.

Willow looked into his eyes, but he wasn't looking at her. He was looking behind her, at the gravel road. Willow wondered if what was to come was good or bad. She had no way of knowing. She watched Dad trudge across the lake toward the fire, how slowly he moved, how his shoulders slumped a little. It wasn't okay, then, her not learning how to skate. She had known things would turn out like this, back at the skate rental place, when he was so excited.

Willow thought of her mother home by herself all weekend, like always. Just before Dad came to pick her up on Friday after school, Mom had said not to worry about her; she'd be fine, she'd find something to do. Willow had never thought much about what Mom did when she wasn't there; she had put Mom out of her mind on purpose. She didn't want to think of her mother alone. Now, sitting on the bench and watching Dad, she saw how mean she was, in not letting herself think about her mother, not letting herself feel any sadness or guilt or even letting herself wonder. She was mean right to her core. When Dad dropped her off at home Sunday afternoon, she wouldn't say anything to Mom about today, nothing about how much Dad wanted her to like skating, nothing about Dad not knowing her size, nothing about what was to come with Dad and Glenda.

Willow slogged through the shrubbery beside the lake. It was longer than going straight across and there was no path, but Willow didn't want anything to do with the ice. She didn't want anything more to do with Devil's Lake.

When she arrived at the fire, it was a good blaze. Dad was dumping big chunks of wood on it. He'd brought his handsaw and was cutting logs into smaller pieces. Tom and the other dad, Paramel, were standing by the fire, watching it. The other moms, Mika and Beth, were sitting at a picnic table drinking hot chocolate. Willow remembered the names of the kids now. Hellabaloo was Helen. Her brother was Martin. Dad called him Muggles. She'd met them when they'd come over to Dad's. Then there were two big boys, Lance and Josh, twins. They were still out on the far end of the lake, near the spruces, but Helen and Martin were skating in small loops close to the fire.

Slow down there, Paramel said. You're going to burn down the whole forest.

There's lots more where this came from, Dad said.

When's it weenie time? Martin called.

Getting hungry? Tom asked.

Kinda.

Hang tight, Muggles, Dad said. We're working on it. Then he saw Willow. There you are, Dingaling a ling ding dong.

At the sound of her pet name, Willow turned to Dad and slipped on an icy spot in front of the fire ring. The space around the ring was black from the charcoal of old fires and slippery from snow that had been tracked in and melted into the charcoal, then had frozen and was starting to melt again.

Why do you call her that? Helen asked.

What, Dingaling? Dad said. She is a Dingaling! Look at her. Willow, keep out of the muck. Look at the back of your snow pants.

Willow held her wet mittens over the fire and didn't say anything. Her grandmother knitted her a pair every year. This year's were red with white stripes. She loved her grandmother's mitts, but they collected clumps of snow and ice and in no time her fingers froze.

Helen scrunched her nose a bit. How'd you get a name like Willow anyway?

Her mother was on drugs, Dad said and made a sniggering sound.

Paul! said Mika.

It's true. C'mere, Willow, Dad said, and pulled her into him. When Willow looked up at him, she saw him staring toward the twisty road.

Let's just start, Beth said. She'll join us later.

Right. Dad said, and Willow, still pulled against him, felt something heavy slip inside him. Hey, Muggles, can you go find the guys and tell them it's time to roast wieners? Dad moved away from Willow, took out his jack knife, and ripped open a package of hot dogs.

Willow pushed a hot dog onto the metal tines and held the stick over the fire. Before she knew it, all the children were there, jostling for space, holding their hot dog sticks over the coals. There was an ease among them she knew she was not part of; they tumbled together like they'd always known each other, though chances were they hadn't. She focussed on her hot dog instead, watched it blister and spit and crack. Dad helped her pull it off the stick and into a bun. The picnic table was piled with stuff he'd brought: the squirty mustard and a huge bottle of ketchup and relish and even sauerkraut.

Glenda likes sauerkraut, Dad said to Tom. Had to look all over to find the stuff. His cheeks turned red when he said it, and he tried to make it sound like a joke, but nobody laughed. Then he said, Willow, look at your coat! and when Willow looked she saw a huge blob of ketchup on her zipper. You see why I call her Dingaling, Dad said to Helen.

Helen said through a bite of bun, It's not nice to call her that. She's not a Dingaling.

It's because I love her so much. She's my Dingaling, Dad said and pulled Willow into a tight hug again, but Willow didn't turn into him. She was angry with Helen for saying her name wasn't nice. Now she couldn't hear the tinkly bells when Dad said her name. But it was a confusing sort of anger because deep inside she had the feeling Helen was right.

Hey, where are the marshmallows? Tom asked.

There's a coupla bags in the cardboard box, Dad said. He cut branches from

the Saskatoon bushes and handed sticks all around. He wanted the whole day to be great, not just the skating and the hot dogs but even the marshmallows at the end. Willow roasted a marshmallow, golden brown and puffy the way Dad liked it, and held it out to him. The way he said No, not today, reminded her of Glenda saying no thank you to the McDonald's fries.

The parents stopped adding wood to the fire and told the kids not to put any more on. That was the sign they'd be going soon. The sun was almost behind the stand of spruces on the far side of the lake.

When the adults were tossing the hot dog wrappers and dirty napkins into the big metal garbage bin, Beth put her hand on Dad's arm and said quietly in the voice she used with grownups, I'm sorry.

Yeah, well, he said. You win some, you lose some.

Dad tossed the leftover buns and the toppings into the cardboard box he'd brought, and they all walked back to the parking lot. Helen and Martin got in the back of their station wagon, and the big boys piled into their van. Willow stood by the truck passenger door while Dad said goodbye to the dads. There was always a long goodbye with grown-ups. Dad tossed the bag from his pocket onto the truck seat, and he and Tom and Paramel stood beside the truck and stared down at their feet, kicking pebbles with the sides of their boots and sometimes saying a word or two through a chuckle. Beth and Mika stood in front of Dad's truck talking quietly. Willow edged toward them.

I had a feeling she wouldn't show, Mika said. I thought something was up at our girls' night last week.

Oh geez, what? asked Beth.

I'll call you later, Mika said and reached over and gave Willow a quick hug. Willow opened the truck door and climbed in. There was the little white bag Dad had taken with him to the fire. She reached toward it. Somehow she knew whatever was in the bag was out of bounds, but she wanted to see it. When her finger grazed the bag, she pulled back quickly, as if she'd touched fire. She turned away from it and put on her seatbelt.

The driver door opened and Dad jumped in. Buckle up, he said. We're off.

Willow didn't tell him she was already buckled. She wondered why he noticed certain things about her and not others. But she could see he still had the edge he'd had all day, the edge and none of the excitement, so she didn't say anything. Not yet.

Dad backed out and pulled onto the gravel road. In less than a minute he stopped the truck, hard, and she flew forward and the belt tightened against her neck. He put the truck in park and left the motor running. Then he picked up the white bag and pulled a small blue box from it. He opened the door, stepped out, and hurled the box into the clump of poplars across the ditch. Willow turned her head toward her window as he got back into the truck and drove.

She waited till they'd pulled onto the highway and Dad began to speed up. What was in the box? she asked.

Something I wanted to give someone today. But she didn't show, and her actions told me something loud and clear. Dad stared at the road. Loud and clear, he repeated.

Willow looked out the window. She made a fist with her right hand, the hand he couldn't see, and squeezed as hard as she could, till her nails dug into her palm and her wrist screamed in pain. Earlier, she'd thought today was for her; she'd thought it was about Dad taking her skating for the first time and Dad wanting her to like his special lake. Now she saw that today, every last bit of it, had been about waiting for Glenda.

I'm sorry I wrecked your day, Willow said calmly.

What? Dad ran his fingers through his hair. His face looked warm. You didn't wreck my day.

Willow dug her fingernails in farther. You planned the whole day for me. You really wanted me to have fun with those kids and learn to skate like they do.

She spoke slowly and clearly so that he could not miss how she felt. She wanted him to know she knew that it wasn't about her, none of it. That he didn't care whether she liked skating or not. She wanted him to feel it, in every bone in his body, the way she had felt the skates crushing her feet all afternoon.

Amy Wright

SHAKEN BY WANT

—at the Kiwanis Rodeo

The arena, stoked by the announcer, shudders
with anticipation as he introduces us to a boy
named Daniel from Oak Ridge, TN, Ray
from anything-but-Normal, Illinois—representatives
of Kentucky, Texas, our assumptions about Virginia,
who "before God and everybody" are going bareback
on a Brahma until the whistle signals
shift change. At first it seems a wonder
more *women* aren't gripping their thighs
around some animal's hindquarters while it writhes
and bucks the hot coal of her loins off.

But then I look to my left
and see short shorts, tan legs cooling on the metal seats,
boot bottoms slick and ready to be turned up
like a stein of High Life & out
charges the Blonde Bombshell in her blue leotard
with silver sequins, a trick rider circling the ring aflame,
an arrow she points with one toe behind her
at the constellation Perseus, a bow she springs
with her breasts arched, which the galloping steed rocks.
She slides the tasseled target of herself behind its shield
Apache style—a ghost. "Crazy Ass Human,"
the horse thinks, "Slippery Vixen, Thunder-chaser."

The crowd is underwhelmed,
having watched so many women do almost as much,
prefers to see a man flail and be flung
at something hard as heartbreak, living without
one or both parents. A scapegoat for us
in the stands, who is "all over that bull
like a hobo on a hotdog," plain as the mustard
he can or can't cut. Alone out there,
arms thrown up like lawn chairs in a hurricane,
neck tilted back as if in ecstasy, hooves
planted over haunches thick as a stilled wave
in the sawdust.

SONNET LX

I do not love you as the new bride loves her veil,
patted into a vermilion-lined dry cleaner's box & kept,
nor with grit wind tucked into the corners of a sill nor sleep
in its routine attempt to knit attention inward. No, my love
for you will not bed down, accept anything absolutely
as it is now. It insists I see around every habit
of reservation. Notice how I listen on the in-breath
for the out-breath to sound. Your eyes threaten
to wake the beast of my inadequacy, so tolerant and strange
in their celebration of what I am, expecting no more
than this vanishing emanation I cannot allow.
What I am, I am with regard to you but forgive me
darling, also without. Without, without.

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

I LOVE HARD GIRLS

hips like a hummingbird jackhammer
a brick house body a brick city
crumbling
boots that climb to thighs
thick and pebbled
with the big bags of potatoes and rice waiting in the pantry
to survive hard times
those girls who will fuck you up for no good reason

I love girls with whiskey espresso belly
I love the brown girl worry line
perpendicular to the perfect eyebrow
the rosewater olive oil in the food and in the homemade facial toner
the groupon and the gas money.
the twenty bucks tucked away and passed
the penny jar hip bones shaking brass
the emergency stockings
the *you wanna make $300?*

the delicious satisfaction of texting
go fuck yourself
I hate you
fuck you

I love girls who wanna set shit on fire,
whose cut eye can penetrate oil spills
I love girls who want to smash faces, break windows
whose asses swish with the cut of razors

I love every loud mouthed hard assed fuck with you
skin soft like a loquat as they punch your cunt into infinity femme
I love girls who will fuck you up for no
and every good reason

and I love those girls
who look at me hard and whisper *thank god*
who have never once been scared of me

—for amber dawn and july westhale

Kevin Hardcastle

ONE WE COULD STAND TO LOSE

Arthur walked the lobby of the hotel in his suit-trousers and stopped by framed photographs of the place lit in gold and silver light, black limousines waiting the length of that city block. Behind one picture there was a faint stain from a blast of blood and vomit and he knew it because he'd fixed the frame over that ruined patch of wallpaper. He knew the layout of each floor and what rooms were hired and what rooms were condemned and bolted shut. Arthur walked to the office and relieved a young lady with black, black hair and a bullring in her nose. She took her things and left without a word. He sat behind the desk and slid the window open. Sound of thunder from below. Nightclub that ran all hours underneath the hotel. Arthur felt it by the soles of his shoes.

A tall Jamaican man came through the front doors in a tank top. He sidled up to the front desk. Sweaty skin of his arms and neck, eyes red and sunken.

"Arthur, my man," the Jamaican said.

"Hi, Ollie. How many?"

The man dropped a ten-dollar bill on the counter and Arthur took it, ducked low. He spun the dial to a safe built into the floor under the desk. He came back with two mason jars of still whiskey and slid them over to the Jamaican.

"Whoo," the man said.

"That'll put some hair on your chest," Arthur told him.

The man bagged the jars and walked through the lobby, waved as he left by the streetside doubledoors. Panes gone foggy with grit and glass-splattered insects.

In the early morning Arthur heard two drunks screaming at each other through the plaster walls. One woman called another woman a cocksucker. He turned his radio on and sat on his mattress. The bed linens were clean because Arthur bought them long ago and laundered them himself. He had torn up his carpeting near the turn of the century and carted it down to the alleyway dumpster piece by piece. When Arthur got up to piss at night he walked barefoot on creaky hardwood, and he often sat in his chair barefoot and read late with his feet on the cedar planking.

He'd not slept long when someone knocked on his door. By the clock it was 11:00 a.m. Arthur got up and went over to see by the peephole. He opened up on a frantic clerk who worked the morning shift. The man was near dancing on the hallway carpet. Eyes agog and his face gone red.

"What is it, Tim?"

"It's goddamn chaos down there. They come in through the front door and then came some more and they just started goin' at it."

"Who did?"

"Most of 'em ran. But the dude from two-sixteen is facedown in the lobby with all kinds of stuff comin' outta him."

Arthur cleared out a small and stumbling crowd to better look at the downed man. He'd ended up mouth to carpetfabric and blew laboured breaths into a little pool of his own blood and upchuck. Arthur tried to speak to the man but he wasn't conscious. The cops and ambulance had long been called and Arthur set the man into the recovery position and held the man's sweaty head in both hands. The man trembled steady like a current had been run through him.

The paramedics took the man out on a gurney with a tube down his throat. He had his eyes closed and a bubble of mucus and plasma swelling at the corner of his mouth. Arthur stood beside the morning clerk as he tried to spit out his story to the cops. Then Arthur spoke to them awhile and to the smattering of firemen and paramedics that kept on in the lobby.

"You fellas always come in pistols drawn for an injury like that?"

The one cop shrugged.

"We ever answer a disturbance call here we come in pistols up, period."

He tended the whiskey still in an old boiler room below the hotel proper. The elevator and stairwell went down to a sub-basement that only he and the building owner could access by master key. Nobody but Arthur had been down there for years. He spent many of his off hours in that room with its centenary bricks chipped and sweating. He wore his undershirt over his small belly, forearms thick with cordmuscle, old merchant navy tattoos about his shoulders and biceps. No matter the time of day or night he felt basstones through the heavy stone. Liquids rippled where they were flasked and bottled. He'd come to not mind it.

By bulblight he worked and checked his watch. Half-hour until his night shift at the counter. He took up a crate of jars packed in newspaper and cardboard egg-cartons. On his way out he flicked the light switch with his elbowbone, hefted the crate with just his right arm as he closed the boiler-room door.

The black-haired girl spun in her chair when Arthur came in. She had a tiny ceramic bone through the centre-hole in her nose now. Skin around her eyes dark with makeup, drawn to a point toward her ears. She stared at him and he just went about signing in and checking the booth. He'd set a canvas bag on the counter with another half-dozen jars in it.

"Can I have one?" she said.

"If you got five dollars."

She dug in her pocket and held out a crumpled bill. He looked at her then.

"Sweet Jesus," he said.

"Think it's too much?"

"What you mean?"

She flicked the nosebone.

"Oh that," he said. "I din't even notice. I was just overwhelmed a minute by the smell of whatever hippie concoction they sold you for armpit deodorant."

She smiled white, white teeth. Dentist since childhood teeth. He handed her

a jar and pocketed the five. She put the jar in her purse but didn't leave.

"Want to have a drink with me? Gotta pass some time before I meet a friend."

"I'll have a sit with ya. Just keep that low in case somebody comes in."

The girl set up on a low stool in the front corner of the office, just her head showing over the countertop.

"Tim told me you helped save a guy the other day."

"Don't know about that."

"How many people you seen get hurt in here?"

"More'n I'd like to say."

The girl sipped at the jar. Tilted her head back and breathed hot through her mouth. Kept it open.

"Holy shit," she said.

Arthur grinned.

"Are those old black and whites on the wall legit? With all the fancy limos and movie stars and shit?"

"Yep. Was a nice place."

"What happened?"

"I don't know. What ever does happen? It was for a long time and then it wasn't."

The girl's pants-pocket started to sing and she slumped to pinch out her cellphone. She looked at it and stood up. Capped the whiskey jar and put it inside her purse.

"You gonna tell me about what I first asked?" she said.

Arthur had his palm against his cheek and the elbow of that arm on the counter. He used it to turn on the stool.

"I'd already lived in the hotel for three years when I found the first body. Some Indian fella. Pock-scarred face. No shirt on. An' he was slumped over dead in the elevator car. Had a buck-knife buried in his chest to the hilt. That body left in a plastic bag and the carpet it bled all over was torn up and replaced. I figure by 'bout ninety-four I seen five more bodies leave the building on hand-stretchers or gurneys. I didn't find none of those but I knew two of 'em by name."

The girl looked like she might smile but couldn't get her cheeks to do the work. Arthur stared at her plainly. She went into her purse for the jar and took another drink.

"I'd better go," she said. And so she did.

On his night off Arthur went next door to the adjoining blues bar. That place still jumped if they got the right band in there. Arthur drank a ginger ale and watched a triple of young men hammer their way through a blues-rock set. There were neon lights hung around the place on the exposed brick-and-hardwood walls. They'd re-upholstered the booths and benches and had weatherproofing done on the windows and roofshingles. That stage kept on drawing blood and guts players from all over the map. Not a one stayed in the hotel.

The bartender topped up Arthur's drink and wiped down the patch of bartop

that the old man held. He stayed there awhile and let the other servers take customers.

"You hear that the O'Flynn boy is gonna sell?"

"Come again."

"Got papers filed with the city, proposals about knocking your place down and turnin' most of the block into student housing. They says they don't plan to flatten the bar but it'll go too, I'm sure of it."

Arthur scratched at his head and heard but didn't hear the band. He stared long at the barman.

"Arthur," the barman said. "You still with me?"

"Ain't no way," he said.

The barman shrugged, shouldered his towel and rested heavy against the bar. "That true you signed a hundred year lease to rent your spot?" he said.

"Somethin' like that, but it don't matter."

"They gotta honour it."

"Well, the old man is long gone. An' I suppose I can't lease the room if they knock down the buildin'."

"What'll you do?"

"The boy O'Flynn had those tenements up north that turned slum. That's well known. So, I guess I'll just keep goin' to work and hope that the city tells him where to stick his plans."

Near shift's end Arthur started head-nodding at the desk. He was looking at an empty lobby then he was looking at nothing. Then he was looking at the lobby again with a giant drunk called Papamanolis pinwheeling around the place, casting about every which way.

"Good god man," Arthur said. "What are ye doin?"

The man sidestepped twice to his right and then stopped. Looked like he might list that way but he came back straight like a wind-bent pine finally let alone. Papamanolis stood about six foot eight and his head was built right into his shoulders. He'd a barrel chest and beergut but his gorilla-muscle arms had held their ridges and rises, blue weld-burn scars spread out over the skin from wrist to shoulder. The man studied Arthur from across the lobby.

"I gotta find Rosa," he said.

"She ain't here. You can leave a message with me if you want."

"I'm goin' up."

"You're bloody well not."

Papamanolis wobbled once and then he bolted for the stairs. Went up three steps at a time with one huge hand on the banister and the other flat to the wallpaper. Arthur got on the horn with the cops and told them the necessaries. Then he came out from behind the desk, locked the booth and made for the staircase.

The giant had already put his right arm through the door and he was stuck there to the shoulder. Shrieking from inside the room. Sound of metal being rung. Papamanolis managed to pull his arm free and take a step back. An iron skillet flew from the hole and glanced off the huge man's elbow, took another

angle and went down to the hallway carpeting like a shot fowl. Papamanolis had his arm back in the hole again by the time Arthur got to the last turn in the staircase. The door bowed with the man against it and reaching blindly for the deadbolt inside. Arthur sucked wind and hustled up the last few steps, turned and measured the giant up. He swung the shillelagh against the big man's right knee and Papamanolis sagged to that side, arm pinned yet in the door. He'd started to roar when Arthur came back the other way and hit him by the temple. The giant dropped and he was limbstretched and gurgling when he carried over the stairwell lip and thumped down to the uppermost landing.

The paramedics spent about ten minutes trying to figure out how to get the man out of the stairwell. Finally they got him to come around, hair matted with blood and his shirtcloth soaked maroon in places. He ended up being more trouble conscious so they sedated him and ran him down the stairs using the gurney as a sled. It took six of them to get him into the ambulance hold.

"He took quite a wallop 'fore he went down, I imagine," the cop said.

"Couldn't say," Arthur said.

"He was down when you got up there?"

"Figure that skillet did the trick. Thrown with enough mustard on it."

The cop nodded.

"The lady. She won't press charges. Doesn't know she doesn't have to. He'll go away for this, record he has."

Arthur shrugged. The cop left him and started clearing the scene of other officers and firemen. When the cop came past to the streetside doors Arthur was standing there with a bucket of hot bleachwater. He waited a minute and then he started hauling it up the stairs.

The free city paper was sitting on the counter one night when Arthur spelled off the black-haired clerk again. He asked her if she wanted to buy more whiskey.

"Fuck no," she said, and left pretending to gag.

Arthur laughed and watched her go out into the humid dusk, fog of gnats hassling her as she went. Noise of the street and then the doors came back and sealed him in with the quiet. He set up at his post and then he read the paper, came to a page that had been deliberately dog-eared. He unfolded the flap and tried to work the crease with his palmheel. "Hard Luck Hotel" in masthead lettering. A newsprint photo of the very building where he sat reading. It took him a minute to recognize it, so little did he spend his time on the sidewalk looking at the building façade. Plans were meted out by the reporter to level the place and build atop the plot. The article talked about pre-war glories for a paragraph and then told the crimes and murders and oddities for three. The O'Flynn boy was mentioned in there as were his failures and fibs. The historian they had interviewed about the hotel spoke to the little attention the hotel had gotten compared to other heritage buildings in the city, was asked to posit reasons why. "This is probably one we could stand to lose," he'd said.

Arthur leaned back on his stool and studied the lobby through the Plexiglas. Faint sound of doors opening and closing. Great ceiling fans moving re-

circulated air. A young Dutchman came down by the stairs carrying a basket of dirtied workclothes, went toward the laundry room. Tall and sharp-shouldered with hair the colour of straw. When he came back he held one hand up with the littlest finger but a nub. Arthur smiled and the young man walked past the booth and went out the front doors into the black.

Arthur pulled a drawer and found the hotel ledger, opened it and looked to the inside front cover. He dragged the phone across the desk and picked up the receiver. Underscored the number with his forefinger as he dialed. On the eighth ring someone picked up.

"What is it?"

"I didn't wake you did I?"

"Arthur?" said O'Flynn.

"We need to talk, kid."

Contractors visited throughout the fall and winter. If rooms went vacant they were closed for good and their keys were pulled from the office pegboard. By early spring O'Flynn stopped in at least once a week with city officials, tracked slush and roadgrit across the lobby flooring. Fixtures came down. The cherry wood stairwell railing was dismantled and wrapped in cloth. A highhung chandelier built through with spider web cities had to be lowered and stripped and cleaned. The clerks were let go one by one until Arthur and the black-haired girl had to split the day between them in twelve-hour stands. A nearby shelter found low-income housing for the lingering tenants and the black-haired clerk left with the last of them, crate of whiskey under her arm. Arthur missed her something terrible and he hadn't been prepared to feel like that.

O'Flynn had bought out Arthur's lease for six month's rent and whatever he could carry out of the place. Engineers were marking the walls and drilling holes for their charges during the end of his stay. Arthur could not really sleep nights so he rode an abandoned bicycle around the maze of hallways. When he did sleep he slept shallow and had odd dreams. Just a touch off the mark. The city perhaps a decade after the war. Arthur walking the centrevein main street from highway to lakeshore and casting out east and west from there. He wore a greycloth suit and his tiny nest-egg built into the brim of his hat. In the dream he was very tired and trod strangely. Next he was taking whiskey and beer in a dive bar near the university grounds. The real O'Flynn with his huge hands and head. Something wrong with his eyes. Arthur sat with a contract in his pocket and kept trying to call the barman. Above the barback pictures of a woman and small boy in frames. He'd thought them lost and climbed over the bar to take them down.

He woke up slapping at his hindquarters where his back trouser-pocket should be. He turned over and found his wallet on the nightstand. Arthur looked at it for a time and then the cobwebs cleared. The wallet he'd been looking for was lost in a fire near forty years ago and the photographs went with it. He'd no address to send for more and no more letters were sent to him though he waited long for them and knew they'd never come.

Arthur left the hotel for the last time on a Sunday morning. He took nothing but a small case of clothes and his other personals. Most of the rooms were still furnished with the windows curtained and the dusty bedlinens rumpled atop their mattresses. Many of the doors were unlocked or open. O'Flynn was there to seal the building and trade Arthur his settlement for the hotel masterkeys. Arthur shook the man's hand and gave them up. O'Flynn did not check them.

Two days later Arthur came back into the hotel by the alleybound sub-basement entry, travelled a series of broken steps and a long, damp corridor until he found the boiler-room's back door. He'd come with a prybar and had to lever the thing open. All of his weight and gumption against the seized and oxidized hinge-bolts. He made space enough to shimmy through and then hauled the door shut behind him.

In his room he sat barefoot in the chair and listened to records. He'd taken his wristwatch off and laid it face up on the near side table. Three mason jars of whiskey stood aside it. At midnight he took his first drink in thirty-three years. He kept pace by the watch and counted minutes between each tilt of the jar. He sobbed but once and it didn't last. Fire blew in Arthur's nostrils from the second pint of whiskey. Dawn came gradual by the southeastern window, through part-drawn curtaincloth. By his footsoles he felt the first charges go. The empty jars slid across the tabletop. He sat alone and saw the world around him shift like water sloshing in a bucket.

Andrew King

LOVE POEMS DON'T WORK

Look, I need advice: love poems don't work
—at least not the one that lives at my house:
slouches around in greasy pants and shirt
smelling of unwashed socks and stale cologne;
leaves crumbled bits of couplet on the couch,
dried-up twists of rhyme littering the rug,
forgotten iamb sandwich near a comb.
My hints about employment get a shrug.
"I'd love to work again," it says. "Fresh start.
But my bruised legs, these swollen feet..." (sad eyes
so accusing, like it's my fault).
All since
it showed late for the anniversary.
Took that two-by-four from my sweetheart
(a couple of times) across its shins...

Jody Smiling

THROUGH THE ROCKIES

Last night I dreamt I was in the heart of the Rockies, on the Canadian side. I was naked but not cold, which is surprising given the glacial nature of the setting. I like my Rockies rugged, with a low treeline and mantled skree; south of the border they begin to dawdle in the sun, become softer, rounder, more like morass, far less exciting.

In the dream I strain to hear an echo, words come back muddled over top of each other. What is it we dream about? To make love and babies? We've done that. To put thousands of miles of ribbons in our hair and dance in the rain? We've done that. What is it we do not know? Misery. Despair. Laughter. Grace. Maybe our Grace is that we know nothing over and over again.

I write this on the eve of my thirtieth wedding anniversary. I am getting presbyopia, old eyes, if I want to see the wrinkles on my face I need glasses; soon there will be too many to bother. My body shifts with each passing year. I wear high heels less and walk more. My husband insists I am still sexy and somehow that reassures.

Perhaps I am Baudelaire's middle-aged woman, the woman he made up out of practically nothing at all, and turned into a legend for his own amusement. *Are you sure that your story is the real one? But what does it matter what reality is outside myself, so long as it has helped me to live, to feel that I am, and what I am?*

Here's the thing: the people of my family come from the prairies and the coast, farmers and fishers; we are not mountain people. When prairie people fall for coastal people there is only one way to consummate such disparate love, it involves going through the Rockies and learning how to use an emergency brake (something completely unnecessary on flat land). Most importantly it is knowing the art of the traverse. Generation after generation the lovers of my historical bloodline have gone over, across, and right through the Rockies to be together. A mountain range as omnipotent as the Rockies makes for a grand symbol of ardour and a test of love's true character. Mountains, say romantics, are made to be seen over.

Hanging over the TransCanada highway in Alberta's Kananaskis Country is a barren monolithic rock peak called the Fable-Gap Traverse. A geological traverse is a recess formed over time, time measured by years in the billions. It starts as a gentle cascading waterfall weeping its way down a rock face eventually freezing into a solid veil of ice expanding just enough to crack her open, first a little wrinkle, a skree, then another, and another and soon her face is a solid glacier so burrowed it splits her into a two-faced billion-year-old crone, admired by mountaineers for her venerable beauty and respected for her utility.

The summit of the Fable-Gap high-level traverse, viewed easily from the mouth of Heart Creek, is so dangerously steep no form of life, human, plant, or animal is able to take root. Jagged daggers of black ice at the top of the rock face look ready

to dislodge at the slightest provocation—a giant Popsicle speckled with freezer burn a Brobdingnagian tongue could painfully lick.

The fable that gives Fable-Gap its name is feeble. It's about nineteenth century men and their fear of bush. It goes like this: One guy told the other guys she was impossible to summit because there was too much bush at the base. The other guys saw a challenge and set out to prove their virility. They whacked through the bush to climb the summit and then swaggered back to the pub, drank beer in stoneware steins with pewter thumb levers, and laughed and laughed about how easy she was and how none of them harboured even the slightest fear of bush. They named her Fable-Gap, a great name yes, but an embarrassing let down of a fable. Fables should have mythical anthropomorphized creatures, or at the very least, end with a moral in a pithy maxim.

Like this:

Summer at the tail end of the sixties and she looks like a movie star in her Valentino-inspired scarf bought at The Hudson's Bay on Portage and Main and hand-sewn pedal pushers like Liz on the cover of Photoplay. He is devastatingly handsome at the wheel, needs but one hand to drive and in the other, held taut between his index and middle finger, a filtered duMaurier, its familiar red and silver package on the dash. These movie stars are my parents and we are a perfect family in a pristine two-toned blue Chevy that belonged to my grandfather until he died on a golf course in Winnipeg and willed it to my mother. I am in the back seat, on the lookout for a sign, my brother and sister are curled up on the warm belly of our black lab, dozing in and out of sleep, lulled by the motion of the motorcar.

At a bend in the highway I spot the sign—"Entering Kananaskis Country." I am spilling over with anticipation, I catch sight of the sign and my siblings are violently woken up, shaken into consciousness.

"You guys... wake up wake up... I see it—I can see the sign."

I lead the three of us together in perfect harmony to slowly, phonetically, sound out the sign—

Kan
An
As
Kis

I lean forward to the front seat, and ask the question: Can An Ass Kiss?

Mother, luminous Hollywood actress she is, never disappoints. A slight glance in the rearview mirror at her adoring fans and she coos, "I don't know" in a plummy tone, distinctly un-motherlike. "Let's find out."

She shimmies across the front seat closer than close to Dad, reaches over and lifts his cigarette, puts it in her mouth and takes a deep lascivious drag, holds onto it for eternity and finally exhales, blowing smoke rings over his head.

Dad is a rogue. He takes his bottomless brown eyes off the road and gives her the longest, most dangerous kiss the TransCanada has ever known—smack on her lips. When he is done with her, he takes the cigarette with its glistening wet ring of her ruby red lipstick on its tip, rests it in the corner of his mouth, and leaves it there, smoldering.

We could almost die.

An Ass *Can* Kiss! An Ass *Can* Kiss! Our refrain is transcendent and we collapse, a puddle of glee on the floorboards of Granddad's Chevy.

I see the turn toward Banff and know when we no longer see the Kananaskis Country sign Fable-Gap will fade to mirage, the game will end and with it the freedom to say the word ass and feel the frisson of kissing and driving. *Not by wrath but by laughter do we kill. Come, let us kill the spirit of gravity!*

The Rockies are not a metaphor for my life; if I tried such literary foolhardiness I would be buried alive like those people in the Hope landslide I still worry about. This puzzles me, I know nothing about those people, nothing about their lives. I only know how they died and their death riveted me. Imagine the side of a mountain suddenly coming down on top of you. My father says they were warned—the slightest sound, a car radio with the bass turned up, a cigarette lighter tapping, a child's laughter in the back seat, all these seemingly innocuous sounds evidently have enough vibrato to topple a whole fucking mountain over. These people, a mom and dad and a child or two, ignored the warnings and ended up a sign on the highway adorned with wilted flowers.

If I try to tell it true it sounds a lot like fiction. I have never been buried alive by a mountain, yet I know the unbearable horror that grips a ten year old standing on the knife edge of time overlooking a fallen mountainside wondering which rock the dead people are under and how long they were alive.

The image haunted me during my childhood, but I put it out of my mind. Or so I thought. Throughout my life the Hope Landslide and its buried strangers would reappear—curling into whatever I was thinking. As I got older, I realized it was an echo of something other than what the words on the highway sign actually described—it was an echo of some existential fear of being buried alive in a world that warned me to pay heed.

A month before my twenty-first birthday, I will drive through the Rockies with a nameless RCMP officer and prepare to identify the body of my husband. We will speculate, based on the tire tracks left behind, it was a swerve to miss wildlife, probably a bewildered fawn, followed by lost control of a wheel and ending in a fatal dive over a cliff. Over the police radio I will hear—he was Bambied—and the officer's deft response—I'm with widow. "Bambied," I say out loud and it sounds sweet, like an allegro. "Bambi is an ambitransitive ergative verb," I tell the officer. Widow is an abstract noun.

Only days earlier I was a newly wedded wife, desperately in love and driving on the long and winding TransCanada in the same purple MGB Roadster now at the bottom of a rocky cliff. When we spotted a herd of deer, we parked on the shoulder off the highway to photograph the youngest of the fawns, two baby bucks with doe-spittled fine-haired antlers seeking their wobbly independence across the field; and we swooned.

I have never forgiven the Rockies for this transgression.

Time will heal, that's what the benevolent people say to young widows. And for a time, in case they were right, I fought like hell to prove them wrong. Shivering last words spoken to me from a pay phone moments before death became my mantra, repeated over and over in my dreams. Today the words, like the faded tire

tracks, are gone, not even an echo remains. The benevolent were right: First the Rockies took him, then Time.

Are mountains made to be seen over? Make tangled love all afternoon in a canoe and in denouement comes this kind of rhetorical profundity. It will float alongside a stern facing spine, a leg dangling off the bow, toes au courant, and the absolute certainty of shrouded giants in the mist. Skinny dip under the northern lights swaddled in a fetid tent on a bed of pine cones, beside a pronged poplar root and sleeping baby, smelling of grilled trout and camp soot and folded moonlight. When a man whispers you are as radiant as the iridescent glacier on the mountaintop outside there is no choice but to confess everything.

Traversing the truth is how to stay alive. The truth is nobody knows why the mountain came down. Some say it was an earthquake, but no earthquake is recorded. The truth is my father wanted a mile or two of peace and quiet, no children squirming, arguing or kicking each other in the backseat. He made it up and it became legend. He said the slightest noise, especially noise like children misbehaving in the back seat could cause a mountain to crash down and bury them alive. We didn't believe him so he gave us proof—we only had to look out the window, up at the sprawling rock face of the mountain precariously above our heads, down at the bottomless cliff on the other side of the concrete safety blocks, put our fingertips on our throats go ahhhh. Feel that vibration? One misbehaving child's voice could indeed dislodge the single rock that happens to be holding the whole damn mountain up. Even now, this very moment, as I tell you this story, I do not laugh boisterously lest I fall a mountain. *One might invent such a fable and still not have illustrated sufficiently how wretched, how shadowy and flighty, how aimless and arbitrary, the human intellect appears in nature.*

The last time my mother drove through the Rockies she was seventy-four. We drove together in the heat of the summer in a rental car with broken air conditioning, all four windows wound down so she could smoke. She spent her last two decades alone, claiming she loved solitude and did not miss being married. (Dad remarried.) At Fable-Gap we laugh at the memory of the kissing game. She tells me it was lust. She married him because she confused love with lust. She takes a long drag of her generic brand cigarette from a package covered in warnings of death and photos of hideous teeth and holes in throats, and she exhales. The smoke twists and curls its way up the side of the door to escape through the windows at the top. I owe my existence to lust. *Love forgives the lover even his lust.*

When mother turned seventy-eight I drove all night through the Rockies to surprise her with a visit. We hugged and laughed and ate food that was not appropriate for diabetes. She was proud, after smoking several packs a day for sixty years, she kicked the habit. A month later she caught the flu. An ambulance took her to Edmonton General where after saying goodbye to her friends, holding a bedside peace summit with family, and a long discussion of opera with her cardiologist, she died. During the week before, knowing she was about to die, she asked me to keep it light. We listened to Brigadoon and "Why Must I Die" from Jesus Christ Superstar. I read Earle Birney aloud in the evening lingering over the erotic passages of mountains with sprawling shoulders, men with coltish muscles and pungent moss smells mixed with gentian and saxifrage. Her last advice to me

was, "Don't be sorry."

In the spring, after months and months of snow, cascading wildflowers transform the mountains—scarlet fairy trumpets, mouse-ear chickweed, evening primrose, fireweed, shooting stars—I close my eyes and they come in the darkness, wafting, capriccio, blisses. When I married the second time I was prepared. Life and happiness I knew to be impermanent, so every day had to be savoured, I devoured his love, his body, his gaze, him. The sound of a siren no matter how distant—somebody somewhere losing someone—tightened my grip. When love is vulnerable it asserts nakedness as armour.

My last drive through the Rockies was at the wheel of a precocious curve-hugging rear-wheel-driving middle-age-crisis Lexus effortlessly traversing the switchbacks. Moving from Vancouver to San Francisco necessitated taking a detour through the Rockies. Mother's ashes long forgotten in a box on a bookshelf needed to stay in Canada. I could not bear the thought of crossing the border to have Homeland Security open her up for examination or worse, pat her down, nor did I see myself as the kind of dotty middle-aged woman who carries her dead mother around in her pocketbook—so through the Rockies it was, to scatter mother at the mouth of Heart Creek under the Fable-Gap Traverse where she mistook love and lust and kissed an ass.

In San Francisco I go to Grace Cathedral to hear virtuoso saxophonist Branford Marsalis playing solo. Grace Cathedral sits atop Nob Hill in San Francisco, grand and Episcopal, an urban traverse with a seven-second echo. It is a helluva performance. I feel light, unaware of myself sitting in the pews as his saxophone climbs higher and higher, high enough to stroll along the cathedral catwalk and dream. Each note makes its entrance bouncing off the stone walls leading the stained-glass saints by the hand to dance up the mahogany pulpit and back down again; Marsalis at once solo and an entire orchestra of his own making, a cascade, no, a torrent, of notes fill the air. He is beating. Kneeling. Echoing. Coiling. Curling. Smouldering. It is a conspiracy, us breathing together; he is Pan, and his wailing lament takes me up and down hills, through crooked streets, right to the steely edge of Golden Gate.

Jazz music, like a mountain echo, calls and responds. Mid-performance an ambulance siren wails outside the doors of the cathedral and Marsalis responds, mimicking its tone, its cadence, its pitch. As he rides alongside he lifts the sound up and twists it into whimsy, inhaling suffering and exhaling music.

Walking home after the performance a siren wails in the distance—a sound that gripped me for years turns in a single moment from apprehension to awe. Such is the art of traverse, what we take with us, what we leave behind, the point of departure as fragile as a dissonant note of music or a child's laugh and can bring a whole lifetime down.

A Note on the Quotations

Through most of the '60s and well into the '70s, my father was enamoured with Nietzsche. On family road trips he carried a tattered paperback full of pencil marks and underlines and red stars (highlighters and post-its had yet to be invented). When the scenery overcame him he would drag us out of the car and dramatically read a quote, something apropos. Writing "Through the Rockies," I drew on my memory of these quotes and then used *The Portable Nietzsche* (Penguin Books, 1st ed., 1977, translated by Walter Kaufmann) to ensure my memory was a close approximation to actual Nietzsche (it was).

The woman Charles Baudelaire made up from nothing at all is found in the poem "Windows" from *Paris Spleen* (originally published in 1869, New Directions Paperback Edition, 1970, translated by Louise Varese).

Jessica Rae Bergamino

HOOK & EYE

Stretched vulnerable by the fragility of road trips at dusk,
Helen looks from the road to say she has spent her thirties

wearing her mother's bras. They were new when the doctors
shrugged her into a gown held closed by thin strings

across bare shoulders. Now, they are evaporating in fits
of stretch marks, the elastic bands splintered from washing.

She should go to the mall to buy new ones, to ask a stranger
to measure her breasts and determine a value for support,

but the hook and eye closing across her back invokes a ghost
she isn't ready to lose to the inevitability of gravity.

And though I had forgotten years before, I remember running late
for school and opening my mother's dresser to borrow a pair of socks

and finding a red lace bra cut out where her nipples would fall,
rosettes patterned on the surrounding cup, and knowing

it was something I was grossly moving towards.
I hadn't yet learned we are always moving towards something

and have nothing better to do than hold ourselves gently.
When Helen stops talking and turns on the radio,

her small revelations starting to buckle with the weight of forty,
I don't ask what she is thinking because I assume I already know.

Miki Fukuda

PUELLA

Double consonants: ss, tt, ll, etc.,

Puella means *a* girl or *the* girl;
there's no difference in Latin
which doesn't care to have articles.

As if no girl was
any more lovely to a Roman—
Jupiter's wandering eye.

are sounded twice the length of time

Double L
was a different matter.
How every Roman took

time in *puella* to pronounce each L,
in the second syllable,
then in the third.

given to the single consonant.

Even if he didn't know her,
even when he was in a hurry,
Pu-el-la,

he
said.

(Note: Italicized lines are from Norma Goldman and Jacob E. Nyenhuis's *Latin Via Ovid.*)

Laura Legge

SYZYGY

DECEMBER 23

My fault the first try didn't work. Have you seen the lighting inside a heavy-lift rocket? The fluorescence is so mean; it shows every peak and crater of a woman's body. I went as far as unzipping the blue flight suit while Mac watched, but when I noticed a liver spot on my collarbone I had to stop. I told him I was sorry. He said he wasn't disappointed but reminded me there were expectations riding on this.

His eyes are unbroken brown. When he said that to me, even in that ruthless light, they were the same plain eyes of the same plain boy I met in the NASA swimming pool, doing three lengths of breaststroke with his tennis shoes on.

It was quiet in the cabin. I wondered if he could tell I was sad. He put on a pair of oversized aviators and wriggled his mustache from side to side, playing trickster until the laughter came. I thought about the time we drove through New Mexico on our decade-late honeymoon and I watched the dirt road unwind in those aviators all day. He said, Corellia, this is what the surface of Mars is going to look like, before he pulled onto the shoulder and briskly unbuttoned his jeans.

I remember the grade of light that afternoon, like the road it was red and generous. We loved and it felt good, and after we drank cola from glass bottles. He aired a statement hanging on the word *splendor*, and at another time that might have made me cynical, but at that moment it felt like he alone was beauty's authority. In the desert he worked me into a rambling cliché, had me delirious and spilling callow sentiment, Darling, it's just you and me in the universe.

We talked about children that day, and he entered uncovered. We waxed about tire swings, farmers' porches where our family could share the bird on Christmas, shorn lawns with obstacle courses of Slip 'N Slides and oscillating sprinklers. He had always wanted a girl. He told me when we had one we would name her Nashira—*she who brings good news*—after the star in Capricorn.

Good lord, the digital is reading midnight. I should do my entry in the official log, before ground control realizes something's wrong.

12-23-13

Began by undressing.
Were interrupted by a malfunctioning of lights in the cabin.
Research was postponed in service of safety.
Established basic foundation. Confidence, trust.
Next attempt tomorrow at 12h00, after a series of routine maintenance tasks.
No setbacks anticipated.

DECEMBER 24

After we dusted the air filters, Mac followed me to our sleeping quarters. There was something pleasant about hovering a few strides ahead of him, where I've always felt most comfortable. From over my shoulder, I watched the way he divided the air with his space-debris arms, as if at any moment he could strike my orbiter body and small pieces of us could free-float away.

He suggested I hold the bunk strap that keeps my body from drifting while I sleep. Using both hands I submitted, and without a romantic interval he hauled off my flight suit. Coming from Mac, the unexpected roughness would normally have thrilled me, but today the sound of the suit dragging down my legs deflected off the sterile, polished surfaces around us with the speed of impulsive violence.

I let him touch me, but I mostly avoided his eyes. Earth Me might have stopped him and explained.

After a while, Mac withdrew his hands. We don't have to do this right now, Cee, he said, sincere behind the unbroken brown. He pulled a bag of Coke from his bedside cooler, a comfort he had requested when preparing for our mission. His grip was stable when he offered me the soda.

Catch the wave, he said.

It was almost time for lunch, so I swam to the locker trays and pulled out the most exciting freeze-dried packets I could find, creamed spinach and Mardi Gras jambalaya. I put them in the convection oven, and waited for them to resemble food. My husband Velcroed himself to the wall while I arranged the plastic platters in my makeshift kitchen, tubers of green beside polyps of taupe, alien incarnations of the plainest groceries. He started to sing an old Hendrix song while he waited, a song we'd played until the grooves had softened from the vinyl. I knew the words same as my name—*I'm looking out my belly button window, and I swear I see nothing but a lot of frowns*—but suddenly they were as extraterrestrial as the nodes of creamed spinach.

Don't you know what you're singing about? I wanted to yell.

We ate politely, like nervous children. Mac thanked me for making lunch.

Dessert was rice pudding, which electrified the WASP in him. He licked his sometimes-anemic lips. Even coming from the aluminum container, with its sanitary lid and generic pull-tab, the pudding was sweet and white and predictable. My taste is consistent in many things.

We ate slowly. With five hundred days on board the rocket, time was a bauble for us to play with.

Eventually, I found my mind turning the mush into baby food. I pressed a tongueful into the roof of my mouth, feeling the tiny grains nesting into my palate, the milk cooling my cheeks, but I couldn't swallow. Sometimes my stomach seems to still be in mourning.

12-24-13

Second attempt.
Countered effects of weightlessness using standard bed straps.
This innovation demanded some fine-tuning.

Participants ran out of time and had to stop for lunch.
Tomorrow there will be no entry.
Tomorrow is Christmas.

DECEMBER 25

We had no presents to exchange since we hadn't been allowed extra cargo, but today after we updated the computer systems, mission control made official that the afternoon was ours for "*fête* and revelry." We *fêted* and reveled quite beautifully, considering. Mac had brought a toy piano on board, a pink upright with keys covering three octaves, and suspended with the instrument in microgravity he serenaded me with "Mama Liked the Roses."

When it came to the spoken part, Mama concealing a pressed rose in the Presley family bible, Mac slid into a deep Memphis drawl that surprised a giggle from me. He sounded like he had chugged the tin of honey glaze that was destined for our vacuum-sealed Christmas ham. Of all the crooners, my lover chose Fat Elvis.

We kissed in our on-board wilderness. Our intimacy was not being monitored this time, so I took liberties with my hands. The stir brought me to every place Mac and I had dreamily been together, the wave organ at the Exploratorium where listening tubes filtered ocean currents into chromatic scales of ripples and hums, the hidden bend behind Joan Crawford's old-timey swimsuit at the wax museum in Niagara Falls where my beau exposed his gorgeous brain through a torrent of film noir dialogue. It isn't that my attraction to him has diminished since then. It's just that in youth, you only have one life to think about.

After the ham and festive red-packaged shortbread, we used the softphone to call my parents' cluttered townhouse in Corpus Christi. Mom and Dad put me on speaker and in the background I could hear my younger brothers and their new children embroiled in a gripping game of whisper down the lane. My parents said they hadn't been reading my research log online because, you know, it was kind of awkward, but that they were proud of their Little Girl The Space Explorer. Dad said they couldn't believe I would be away for another year, and this was worse than the time I went to aviation school in Singapore, because that at least was six months as opposed to five hundred days, and Singapore was somewhere you could fly if you really missed someone, but outer space was about as far away as you could get, and then Mom went into hush mode, which is what Dad used to call it when she was wounded but refused to cry out.

They asked how Mac was and I said kindhearted and Mom told me the score of the Astros game to pass along. Dad said he had clipped an excerpt about Mac from the newspaper that he would give to him when he saw us, if the paper wasn't too browned by then. We all said I love you and goodbye and then Mom put on one of the new babies, Elim, who gurgled *buhbuh* and we all laughed until my parents hung up the phone.

I was dazed by the sudden quiet. I could see Elim with his little fingers like broken holiday wishbones.

Before too long, Mac mercifully bumbled into the silence, plunking out the first chords of "Have A Happy," from an Elvis movie about three nuns in the

inner city and a religion-questioningly handsome doctor.

Mac looked at me with his mouth ajar, his face arranged into simple, relaxed oblivion. We had travelled rearward in time from Fat Elvis to debonair, nun-panty-twisting Elvis and for that I felt a strange gratitude. Some women would never experience the torsion of time, less often from a loved one who had chanced on the moment at which it was most needed.

In his glazed voice Mac said, Merry Christmas, beautiful young darlin'.

So it had been Fat Elvis in hiding after all, double chin waggling over a kitschy Vegas jumpsuit, southern fried thighs threatening the integrity of snakeskin boots. But as long as he was calling me young, I would keep on revelin'.

December 26

There was no tinge of sarcasm when Mac asked me the next morning to prepare for him to *circle the red planet.*

My irritation blared like gas through a propulsion nozzle. I asked if he really had to call it that.

Still his lack of pretense loosened me enough to pull him by the collar of his blue space suit. His words were unembellished in a way that was only possible of the ignorant and the brave.

I felt the bow of his lips on my neck. The electric razor had evened his beard into a discreet haze, and its sweep across my voice box was slight and tender. He started to move his stomach into mine, milling our ilia, finding the tight places where our bones fit. I noticed after a few electric minutes that I couldn't feel any charge from him below. The mission specialists had warned us about the problem of decreased blood flow in microgravity, had called it an ordinary act of nature, but still I felt myself to blame.

Shame dragged its cold torrid fingers all the way down my face. Mac was kissing me persistently despite his body's lack of interest and it made me want to cry.

Through the sleeping-quarters window, white stars lingered like the trigger spray from an exhausted bottle of glass cleaner. I focussed on finding the smallest mark in the pattern while against me my steadfast Mac kept squirming. This time he was the one who finally yielded, and I puffed my bare chest at having done my noble cosmonaut duty, despite the cracking of my brittle passion.

Pulling away he said, Corellia, you're magnificent, and flashed me his cared-for teeth. It had been so long since I'd heard him say my full name—it felt like the last time was in the days of Nashira, but maybe that's just how it felt—that suddenly I was high, I was smiling right back into his smooth image.

As we dressed, I said something gauche about the rocket crashing before it reached the red planet. On the inside I flinched as I heard my joke but Mac beamed amenably.

I wanted an excuse to touch him, so I gave his chest a one-two. He came back with a frisky right hook, and I tightened into my signature peek-a-boo defense, tucking the wrists into my face close to nose-level and weaving from his fists with oblique bends. When we shadowbox at home, in the studio where he keeps jars of sea salt as a convoluted metaphor for hard work, by our mantelpiece

where fifteen years of jetsetter Polaroids sit with faces unblinking, I let him tag me now and again. Mom used to call me her playful little mouser. Growing up I was always sprinting and hunting and wrestling. Out here where the air is so impenetrable, Mac's cuffs took too long to land.

I told him he needed to work on his timing, and he looked downwards and nodded his head.

The distance between two moving planets is shorter at some times than others.

12-26-13

There was an undesirable anatomical response to the effects of decreased blood pressure.
Participants will be vigilant about change.
First, an increase in physical activity.
The intake of niacin and other B vitamins.
The introduction of massage into the morning routine.
Next attempt will be tomorrow at 16h00, following a long ride on the cycle ergometer, when blood will be flowing most freely.

December 27

Mac and I were dead beat after an hour on the ergometer. Breath coursed from our mouths in contented endorphin waves. Working to catch his, Mac asked me what I wanted to do next, and I said I'd like to pull out my leg muscles and fold them into level shapes, like laundry, until they were fresh and I could wear them again. He twinkled into a corn-fed wink and started setting up a movie.

I could have said anything, and he would still have moved to the television. I could have actually drawn my muscles from my body, the ribbons forming a floating border around him unwittingly pressing Power.

Rules are you save recreation for after supper, but since years of commitment to space exploration have earned him some clout, Mac wasn't concerned. He did say that tomorrow we needed to do the research, out of obligation to the public and to science. The talk of obligation didn't do anything for my senescent self-esteem. But the silver-blonde twinkle was a nice touch.

Corellia, this is what the surface of Mars is going to look like. The Jornada del Muerto in spring, the mineral colour of heat.

There are probably fifteen hundred movies on the onboard hard drive, but Mac immediately settled on *Three Men and a Baby*, not surprising either one of us. The first time I went to his bachelor apartment and saw the soft-lit Ted Danson poster in his mudroom, I wanted to lace my boots again. But you find faith, you go to space, you date the dependable man with the poster of the 1980s icon, and the universe rewards you with small moments of assurance. Danson crooning "Goodnight Sweetheart" with Tom Selleck and Steve Guttenberg to the little mewling baby-blob was suddenly profound through the glass of my exhaustion, and not in the way a tragedy can be, but in the way an anecdote told enough times can suddenly be tinged with a new and pure logic.

Mac drummed along as the men sang on screen. In this scenario, they were all dear friends gathered around the glowing campfire of the child.

Catch the wave, he grinned.

He moved his bongo hands to my knees, and I pushed through the air to drum with them, surrender to the comforts of their sincere and invented company. The next thing I knew I was cheek-to-moustache with Tom Selleck, prickled gently every time new lyrics came from his lips. Mac kept steady rhythm on my leg, generously ironing out the work I had done on the ergometer, and we unwound together in the blue-screen glory where for the first time impulse had replaced expectation.

12-27-13

Blood circulation was improved by today's increase in exercise.
Participants were relaxed and able to perform.
The actual act has not yet been completed.
The logistics of achieving penetration will soon be agreed.
Next attempt will be tomorrow at 13h30.
Anticipating unqualified success by the New Year.

December 28

I don't remember the lead-up to wanting to vomit. With illness there are stomach cramps, breakers in the throat. The long strands of mental tickertape will abruptly blast red text. But this time the nausea dazed me just after Mac first "fell into the wormhole"—his expression, can you tell?—and clung to every dark part inside.

At first I kept going. This was the farthest we had gotten with our research, and until I actually began to gag the taste of that afternoon's rehydrated cobbler, I tried not to inhibit this triumph.

Dreamboat, I told him with the breath of fermenting peaches, I'm starting to feel the zero gravity.

He stopped and touched my bobbed hair. He asked if there was anything he could do.

It sounded suggestive, or maybe it was the noncommittal wink he tossed in, like a well-loved toy with an eye falling off. I thanked him but said I just needed to float to the shower stall, where there was heavy suction.

Mom used to grate ginger for me on the days I spent with my head in the porcelain. The threads floated in hot water and I would feel them scuff my throat on the way down, but I drank them anyway because that was how you got better. One time I looked after Mac's niece when she had salmonella and nursed her with ginger tea before the sickness had peaked. It made her little stomach tumble over and I felt like the devil. I didn't have the instinct to know where the kid was in her recovery.

After a half-hour of heaving, I heard a shy knock on the stall door. It was Mac, with a bag of cola and a first edition of *The Land of the Midnight Sun*, which he had chosen as his one book to bring on board, the piece he would return to over and over with Maclike determination until he drew arcana from

its basic prose. Though he wouldn't use those particular words.

When I was nauseous with the promise of Nashira, Mac used to stand on the other side of our hemlock bathroom door and read to me. It started with mundane household pages—telephone installation manuals, errand lists, energy bills—and moved slowly to scripture, to fiction.

He closed himself out of the shower stall to deliver a passage... *thinking all the while of that strange girl, so wonderfully lovely in face and form, so graceful and proud of bearing*... and after he waited in silence. Eventually I heard, Booger Bear, that was fun before you got sick, right?

I told him, Yes, my soul, I loved both minutes. From the other side of the door I could hear his easy laugh, and I'm not sure if the luster I felt was gratification or envy.

12-28-13

Sustained two minutes of penetration before experiencing the effects of nausea.
Several tactics for curbing sickness are suggested in the mission manual.
First, the monitored use of acupressure wristbands.
The ingestion of a ginger pill prior to physical contact.
These methods will be employed as early as tomorrow at 14h00.
The length of today's session, however, should by all accounts be considered a success.

December 29

The gorgeous thing today was the spray of sweat around us; immaculate globes hanging weightless, careening in all directions with every precipitous movement of limbs or hair. The heat of the cabin had initially swamped us—*Let's stop and breathe, Cee, my heart's exploding*—but when we calmed into the motion the heat became a new force entirely, something invigorating and yet familiar, which eased the once-complicated motions of our research into an instinctual, vanilla rhythm.

Before he finished, Mac told me the temperature was too intense, and fanned his pink neck like his relatives on their cotton and alfalfa farms. I nodded as if to agree. He said that everyone would be happy with our progress and that by tomorrow, a full thirty hours shy of the New Year, we will have succeeded completely.

We were in no rush to rivet back into our flight suits, so I said, Watch this, and did a front aerial that I imagined must have looked majestic. Mac clapped and indicated a ten-point score with his hands, at which I paraded hips-first from one end of the sleeping chamber to the other. By the time I reached the strapped beds on the far wall, my inhibitions were slowly starting to remind me of my nakedness, but before they did I heard myself speaking to Mac.

When we get home, we should try again, I tossed out into the heat.

He scrunched his nose into an unripe cotton boll. Like, to get busy?

You should see Mac's thesis on atomic line spectra. You should see him doodle the domains of geometric scattering and solutions to the equation of

radiative transfer.

In a way, I said.

He gave me a spirited high-five. My own thesis had been about escape velocity.

Of course we should, he boomed.

Our hands stayed pressed together until at my request he helped me zip into my suit. Even once I was dressed he lingered bare, wriggling into the grapevine and thunderclap and running man dance moves of our younger selves. The expression on his face was one of unqualified pleasure, of being nowhere other than in his freckled linebacker body, dancing.

I was going to say, Mac, you're the most foolish man in the Milky Way, but I wasn't sure what sort of dysphemism he might make of that. Instead I said, Mac, I'm glad to know you, which was true.

12-29-13

There was great success in the mission today.
Participants decided to conclude before male could finish.
Given the unknown effects of microgravity on a prospective pregnancy.
The success of today's research has massive implications for the future of space travel, especially for lengthy, manned expeditions.
Will outline some of these implications in the next entry.
Then, on New Year's Eve, we will rest.

December 30

Mac had been in the middle of a sentence. And I remember the sentence being something consequential, a line from *The Land of the Midnight Sun* weighed with well-spaced pauses or an observation about the blurred blue elsewhere of our native Earth. I think he was holding my hand, although I might be imagining that detail.

There had been nothing on our radar to herald the hit. We weren't ready even to peek-a-boo the front end of the rocket, and so it was that as Mac said something momentous, maybe *Midnight—and the unwearied sun stood, yet visible in the heavens, like a victorious king throned...* that our graceful ship, the understudy to our home, clipped a small meteoroid and for the span of several minutes lost its course.

Meteor, from the Greek meaning "suspended in the air."

I assumed the worst after hearing the bite of impact. Mac touched my face and said, As long as there's no injury to the ship.

He moved to call ground control and together they assessed the harm while I tried not to let tears float around me. I didn't listen to the whole conversation, but I caught some technical keywords, *inlet plenum* and *turbine* and *payload system*, like it wasn't two humans with human vulnerabilities they were discussing.

Mac came back from the softphone elated. The damage had only been nervous and cosmetic. He swung me by my wrists in celebration, the air buoyant enough to cushion all fear of him letting go.

He stopped and trained his brown eyes on mine. I thought we were scuppered, he said.

That's when I did it. The next time the world almost ended I would feel no anguish. I clamped my hands to his shoulders' acromion bones and without a word to offset my passion, made science happen.

12-30-13

The future implications of the participants' successes in their research are multifold.
Most importantly, this greatly increases the psychological and physical comfort of extended missions to distant destinations.
The neurochemical effects of physical intimacy, coupled with the habitude of the act of sex, encourage the astronauts to conceive of their daily life aboard the mission as they conceive of their lives on Earth.
And at the same time, to maintain healthy relationships to one another.
What has been revealed in the early stages of this research project is the capacity for humans to sustain intimacy in even the most adverse of conditions.
The already bright future of space travel has been made considerably brighter by these discoveries.

December 31

Before we agreed to take part in the mission, the control team sat us in a particleboard office for four hours and outlined its potential health hazards. The unmanned missions that had been sent to Mars had detected high levels of energetic particle radiation. Despite an astronaut's devotion to safety and routine, there is no way to know how those levels of radiation will affect a person after they land.

I don't know what will happen to us on Earth. I don't know how our home will look, its atlas of white rooms, the skyward ladder leaned against our bedroom window, and I don't know how our health will bend our decisions about filling it.

Mac and I have a year before the long examinations and the Geiger counter and the rounds of drawn blood. Never in our life of flights and passages have I been so exhilarated by the thought of the two of us, alone.

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Laura Legge lives and writes in Toronto. To borrow from Nietzsche: "The wreckage of stars—I built a world from this wreckage."

Billeh Nickerson is a Vancouver-based author of four books, including his most recent collection *Impact: The Titanic Poems*. A new collection, *Artificial Cherry*, will be published with Arsenal Pulp Press in Spring 2014. His first ever journal publication was *PRISM* 36:1 and he had the great pleasure of being *PRISM*'s editor in 2002/2003. He is also a silver medalist at the Canadian Gay Curling Championships and Chair of the Creative Writing department at Kwantlen Polytechnic University.

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha is a queer disabled Sri Lankan cis femme writer, performer, organizer, and badass visionary healer. The author of the Lambda Award-winning *Love Cake* and co-editor of *The Revolution Starts At Home: Confronting Intimate Violence in Activist Communities,* her work has appeared in the anthologies *Undoing Border Imperialism, Stay Solid, Persistence: Still Butch and Femme, Yes Means Yes, Visible: A Femmethology, Homelands, Colonize This, We Don't Need Another Wave, Bitchfest, Without a Net, Dangerous Families, Brazen Femme, Femme* and *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over The World.*

Michael Prior currently lives in Toronto and attends the University of Toronto's MA in Creative Writing Program. He won *Vallum*'s 2013 Poetry Prize and was a finalist for *The Malahat Review*'s 2013 Long Poem Prize. His poems have appeared, or are forthcoming, in *The Antigonish Review, Branch Magazine, CV2, Geist, Grain*, and *Qwerty*.

Jessica Saunders is a law student at UBC, an activist, and a writer. Her work has been published in several journals. This is her first publication in *PRISM*.

Jody Smiling is a writer of personal essay. Her interviews and poetry reviews can be found on *The Rumpus* online. Her memoir can be found in *Toronto Life* and the *Penticton Herald*. Born in Alberta, raised in British Columbia, she currently divides her time between Toronto and San Francisco.

Amy Wright is the Nonfiction Editor of *Zone 3 Press* and the author of three chapbooks, with her fourth forthcoming in spring 2014. Her work appears in a number of journals including *Drunken Boat, American Letters & Commentary,*

Quarterly West, *Bellingham Review*, *Brevity*, *Western Humanities Review*, and *Denver Quarterly*. She was awarded a 2012 Peter Taylor Fellowship for the Kenyon Review Writers' Workshop and the Hodges Award for excellence in teaching.

Ezequiel Zaidenwerg was born in Buenos Aires in 1981. He has published two books of poetry in Spanish, *Doxa* (Vox, 2007) and *La lírica está muerta* (Vox, 2011). His book of Spanish limericks, with illustrations by Raquel Cané, is forthcoming. Since 2005, he edits the blog zaidenwerg.com, devoted to poetry translation.

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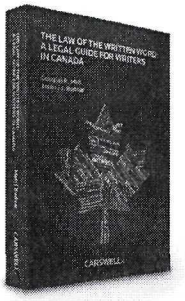

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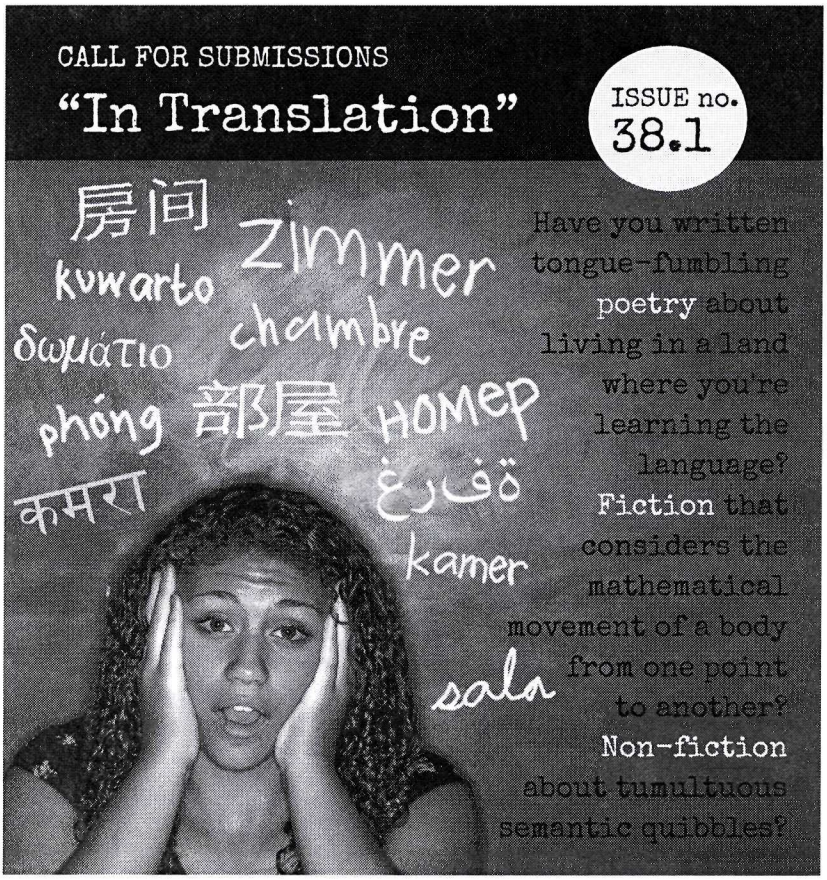

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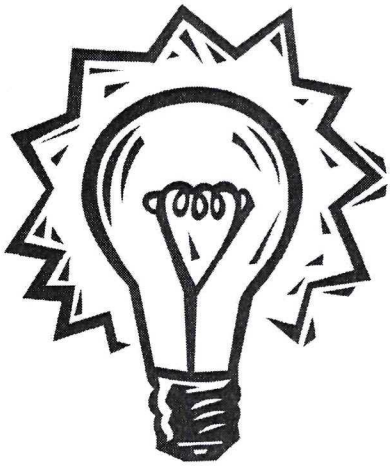

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