PRISM international

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Contemporary Writing from Canada and Around the World

PRISM international

PRISM Short Fiction Contest

Grand Prize – $2,000

"Mavis Brown"
Gord Grisenthwaite

Runners-up – $200 each

"Caesar"
Ian Cockfield

"From, Nica Lorber"
Kathleen Hale

"I Don't Know Anything About This And By The Time I Tell You It Will All Be Forgotten"
Emma Wunsch

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Nancy Lee

Judge's Essay

Having judged a good many fiction contests, I can attest to the sublime feeling that accompanies the indisputable selection of a clear winner. It's as if forces in the universe have contrived to bring you and this particular piece of art together in a perfect match of tastes and aesthetics, and you share, for a moment, a giddy and intimate connection with the yet unaware and still anonymous author.

What torture it is then, when two thoughtful, compelling, wholly ambitious and equally successful stories battle for your consideration. Add to this a familiarity with one of the stories that renders it less than anonymous and the need for a lightning-round substitute judge, and you have just some of the drama that has characterized this year's PRISM *international* Short Fiction Contest.

"Mavis Brown" by Gord Grisenthwaite and "Caesar" by Ian Cockfield are both laudable and exciting works of fiction. Each boasts a distinct and vigorous narrative voice, presents a consuming imaginary world, and reveals a writer whose loyalties run equally between the beauty of language and the emotional complexity that story demands. And yet, these two stories couldn't be more different.

Set against a violent, alcoholic, and impoverished aboriginal community, "Mavis Brown" is the story of a boy's devotion to a girl who is habitually victimized and eventually murdered. The author manages with great skill and sensitivity to evoke tenderness in a nightmarish world. Wrought with sensual, telling detail, each scene lives vividly off the page, and draws the reader down a dark, winding path of socialized racism and abuse. Stories of this type are difficult to tell responsibly. Here, the author avoids the obvious traps of sentimentality, melodrama, and earnestness, and relies upon a simple and authentic narrative voice to convey through keen observation the emotional weight of the situation. This story shocks with its sweetness.

Wildly imaginative and thoroughly inventive, "Caesar" is an experimental charmer. Replete with thrilling prose, this fictional biography of an armless, legless, sexual wonder and icon of Jazz Age society stands (excuse the pun) as a stylistic marvel. Told as a boudoir confessional, a gossip column, doctor's notes and several descriptions of elaborate prostheses, "Caesar" impresses with its breadth and mastery of voice

and diction. Though structurally refreshing, this story does not rely upon gimmicks or tricks for its effect, but builds solidly on genuine emotion and delivers at its end a spectacularly visual and heart-breaking punch.

Selecting "Caesar" and "Mavis Brown" from the two-hundred and fifty-eight stories submitted to this year's contest proved a simple task; the craft and insight of each of these pieces stretched far beyond that of any other submission. To choose between these two remarkable stories, however, seemed quite impossible.

Another matter added further complication: this was not the first time I'd read "Caesar." I'd come across an earlier draft of the story nine years ago, when its author, Ian Cockfield and I were both students in a fiction workshop. And though I trusted my own ability to objectively judge between these final two stories, I became very aware that any appearance of impropriety, especially where prize money was concerned might damage reputations all around.

So, we called in the cavalry.

Rhea Tregabov, faculty advisor for PRISM, stepped in as a blind judge, carefully considered both pieces, and chose "Mavis Brown" as the winner.

I'm delighted for Gord Grisenthwaite and saddened for Ian Cockfield. In my humble opinion, both stories remain equally deserving. I invite you to read them and judge for yourself.

Gord Grisenthwaite

Mavis Brown

When they found Mavis Brown she had been dead awhile. Her clothes were off and there was a Fanta bottle shoved up inside her and then smashed. They say she had lived awhile, and that she probably bled to death. Mavis Brown had that kind of luck. Finding her without her clothes, and sometimes with things up inside her, was pretty normal. Once, I found some Polaroids of Mavis Brown in my father's sock drawer. She had some carrots from my grandmother's garden up inside her in those pictures. Mostly older guys talked about putting stuff up inside of her, like it was a game, like it was their right. Now, when Mavis Brown was talked about, there was no laughing.

Arnold John's barn was in the Holler, the big hole at the west end of town. Mice lived in his hay. Zillions of mice. Me and Skinny and JimJim and Bimbo liked to drink there before dances. It was quiet and didn't smell like pee. We kept a big jar of Squirrel Peanut Butter on a shelf by the door and we'd go down there with our .22 pellet guns, spread some of the Squirrel on the hay shed floor like it was a giant sandwich and scramble up the bails, load our pellet guns and wait. It was always a short wait. The mice would flood the floor, and that's when we would start to shoot them. It was maybe thirty feet or forty feet from where I sat to pick off the mice that they found Mavis Brown.

I was maybe two years younger than Mavis Brown, but we were in the same grade. She walked around in big clothes, layers of T-shirts and sweaters. She walked with her eyes down and she said almost nothing to anyone. She had a quiet voice. She had big eyes. She had the smile from a toothpaste ad. She had skin like Dairyland chocolate ice cream. From the first time she walked into our classroom, new, in the fourth grade, until I saw her just before her last dance, one look at her and I had an instant hard on.

Sometimes, instead of doing homework, I would write her name in the margins, draw her name in the margins. My father used his fists on me after he found some of the Mavis Brown papers—he'd called her that dirty slut—and told me never to have anything to do with her never, ever again. After that, I tore up the papers when I was done with them.

One of the names whispered as Mavis Brown's killer was Constable Howe. His was a name that was whispered a lot. If you were an Indian

when he was on shift, and you were anywhere but in your house, you either got beaten, or beaten and thrown in jail. It was a sad time when Constable Howe worked on dance night, but the jail couldn't hold all of us, and the cops never came inside the native hall. But Constable Howe was just another whispered name. Even my father's was whispered, but not for very long. Mostly, when bad stuff happened people yakked for weeks, sometimes months about who and what and when and why. And sometimes the stuff was so bad that *The Hope Standard* sent someone to write a story. Mavis Brown's death was different.

Everyone in town, except the cops and my father, was at Mavis Brown's funeral. Even school was closed for a half-day. Chief and Council sponsored a wake at the native hall. Mavis Brown's family didn't show. Almost as soon as Father Jones finished blessing Mavis Brown's dirt, they were gone, loaded into their old Mercury pick up truck like The Beverly Hillbillies and gone—some said to stay with relations in Chilliwack, some said to live in the city. The Brown house stood mostly empty. The walls were covered with dark squares where there once hung hundreds of pictures. Three rows down, ten pictures from the front door was the square that had owned my favourite picture of Mavis Brown. It was taken at Woolco in Kamloops. She was in grade six and she looked happy and her hair was off her face and you could see how beautiful she was. When I thought about Mavis Brown, I thought of her in that picture.

Sometimes, instead of going to either my father's or my grandmother's, I would crawl through the Brown's bathroom window and lay on the floor where Mavis Brown's bed had been. And I would talk to her until the lemon gin let me sleep.

On dance night it was all business. Me, Bimbo, JimJim and Skinny met in the hay shed's loft after supper. It was already dark. We shared a mickey of Smirnoff's and then one of Wood's Navy Rum. JimJim and Skinny stuffed the Colin's lemon gin into their boots for later. Bimbo was saying how he was going to get his dinky stinky when the cop car pulled to a stop at Arnold John's gate. Every month it was the same: Bimbo said tonight he was getting his dinky stinky, usually with Georgina Paul, but he always sat with the boys all night and never got anything stinky, except the floor he puked on. The guy in the car was Constable Howe. I couldn't see him clearly but the air changed when he was near. He didn't get out. He just sat in the car for maybe twenty minutes and for maybe twenty minutes I didn't breathe. The passenger door opened and the inside light shined for a moment. A girlish groan broke the quiet, and then Howe leaned across the front and slammed the passenger door shut. He backed the car around and drove up the hill with his headlights off.

A mound of girl was crying on her hands and knees by the gate. She gagged and spat, and fought us when we tried to put our hands on her to lift her to her feet. She was one of the little Pauls, maybe in grade five, but probably in grade four. Her clothes were ripped and I couldn't keep my eyes off her not quite boobies. The marks on them looked like Howe had tried to make them into real boobies so he could have himself a woman. She cried. And she wouldn't talk. Bimbo wrapped his jacket around her. She tossed it off and wailed, "Leave me alone."

Bimbo dusted his jacket and said, "Suit yourself. Let's just go."

"We can't just leave her here. Can we?" I said.

"You heard her. She wants to be alone, so let's leave her alone," JimJim said.

"All alone? With the bats and mice?" I said.

"And the cougar, too."

We walked away from her, and after a few steps, Skinny waved his hands over his head like a crazy man and shouted, "A bat. Get away from me. Get away."

Behind us there was a soft sniffle. Little Paul was there, her arms hugged her chest and what was left of her top flapped in the breeze. She shivered. Again, Bimbo offered his jacket and she jumped at his touch, but she kept it on. We took the alleyway and cut up Sixth because that streetlight was always shot out, and ducked into the Pink Elephant Laundry. It stunk of pee and bleach, but it was always warm and always empty.

"Georgina was in the coffee shop when I came down. Maybe she's still there," Bimbo said. "I'll check. You guys wait here."

He walked out with his chest puffed out and his step was like a cowboy who'd just been thrown from a bull. Little Paul was like the ghost of a kid. You could see her but she wasn't really there.

"Hey," I said, "What kind of mistakes do ghosts make?" I waited a painful moment and then I said, "Boo boos."

Nothing. Not even a groan from her, but JimJim punched my shoulder and made like he was going to slap me upside the head.

"JimJim, gimme a dime," Skinny said. JimJim smiled. Skinny climbed into the middle dryer, turned around and pressed his hands and face against the glass. JimJim, holding the dryer door closed, put in the dime, turned the knob and stepped to the side. Skinny spun around like one of the chickens roasting in Overwaitea, face blown up like a puffer fish. And Little Paul laughed and laughed and laughed. Then JimJim let go of the door and Skinny tumbled out, somersaulted to the floor and lay flat on his back. We laughed until Bimbo and Georgina came in. Without a word the two girls left, and without a word, we passed around the first mickey of Colin's lemon gin.

On the way to the dance I saw Mavis Brown. She was walking the

other way. She was across the street. She was alone.

"You're the only guy this side of Kamloops that hasn't had her. Makes you the biggest loser," Bimbo laughed.

"And what's that make you, Bimbo?" JimJim said.

"The second biggest loser," Skinny said.

"I had her, but she was too sloppy," Bimbo said.

"Even in your dreams you wouldn't know what to do with Mavis Brown," I said.

"Sure, I would," Bimbo said. His voice had a threat on it. "I strap a two-by-four across my skinny, white ass, so I don't get sucked up inside her cu—" The next sound out of his dirty mouth was the low groan it leaked after my fist whacked it.

I stood ready, shaking my fist. Blood oozed from the pinky knuckle. Bimbo looked mad and scared, rubbing his mouth.

"I didn't know you had it in you, asshole," he said through his fingers.

"Wanna go?" I said. I didn't want to go. I felt like puking, but I couldn't back down and I couldn't let Mavis Brown down, even if she never knew. Skinny was between us, at an angle, one hand on my shoulder.

"Easy, Darryll. It's just Bimbo," he said.

"Yeah," Bimbo said, "I didn't mean nothing. Just a joke."

"It wasn't funny," I said. Skinny handed me the lemon gin, I took a hit and passed it to Bimbo.

I watched for Mavis Brown all night, but she didn't show up at the dance.

Arnold John found Mavis Brown outside the gate to his pasture early the next morning. When the cops finally showed up, they arrested Arnold John and sent him straight to Kamloops. The cops said that Arnold did it and that was that. Case closed.

Constable Howe wasn't around for awhile, maybe three months. When he came back he was as mean as ever, but there were fewer stories about what he did. And he even started playing cards with some of the older guys, at Pearl Buttons' place, by the Roman Catholic graveyard. Pearl's place was where the CN gangs spent their time when they were in town. Pearl's place was where a lot of the older guys went when the bar and Legion were closed. The house was surrounded by a high fence and had two of the meanest dogs ever born living in the yard. If you went to Pearl's without an invitation, those dogs made you their supper. Cops, in or out of uniform, never went near the place until Constable Howe started.

In the mornings, when I delivered yesterday's *Sun* with today's *Province*, I would see Howe slumped over the steering wheel of his car when I walked by Pearl's place, or I would see his truck and not him. Once I even saw the other cops lift him off the sidewalk and into the back of his

truck, and then one of them drove the truck away. I didn't tell anyone, not even my grandmother.

Sometimes, I saw Georgina Paul walking down Back Street, away from Pearl's when I was delivering my papers. It was ugly for me 'cause I didn't want any girl knowing I delivered papers, not in the tenth grade. But Georgina Paul would walk by me like I wasn't there. It was like we were invisible, like we weren't there at all. At school, at other times, Georgina Paul had a smile that started at her eyes, and she said "Hi" like she meant it. It wasn't like a crush or anything, like Bimbo thought, she was just nice. In the mornings on Back Street, she was a different girl, a girl wrapped in secrets.

In the canyon, in autumn, at night, sound carried like it was wired right to the ears. One year to the day after Mavis Brown was killed, there was a dull thunk just before the whistle from the CN's 2:15 eastbound. The thunk didn't startle me. It made me smile like Grandmother's whispered prayer. I rolled over and hugged and kissed Mavis Brown goodbye and the next thing I knew, I was counting papers into the bags—the *Province* into the *Sun* bag and the *Sun* into the *Province* bag. The air tasted like snow and the only sounds were leaves crunching under my steps, the faint howl of the wind pushing through the canyon and the muted roar of the Fraser. It was still dark. Howe's truck wasn't in front of Pearl's. His cop car wasn't, either. He wasn't asleep on the sidewalk. Pearl's dogs weren't trying to eat through the fence to get to me.

On every front step of every house on the res there was an empty Squirrel Peanut Butter jar, even Grandmother's. When I got to the house, my grandmother was up, sipping tea.

"Stay away from the Holler, Grandson." Her face was hard and her words were final.

"Yes, Grandmother."

No one knew anything until *The Hope Standard* made it a front page story. One year to the day of Mavis Brown's death, Constable Howe crashed his truck into Arnold John's gate and passed out on the floor of Arnold John's hayloft. While he was passed out, the mice ate his lips, fingertips and cock and balls. That might have been enough to kill him, all by itself, but he was asleep in his puke, too.

Cops from everywhere swarmed Pearl Button's place, and took her and some of her tables away. *The Hope Standard* said Pearl's was a notorious gambling and bootlegging house, and that it was owned by criminals. The cops asked a million questions and sent a lot of the old guys to jail for a few months, or like Patrick Johnny, a few years.

Pearl's place had a For Sale sign on it for a long time, and every now and then, the sign grew its own empty jar of Squirrel Peanut Butter.

Ian Cockfield

Caesar

Confession of a Sculptress

It was a giddy time all right, a *roaring* time as they say, a hurly-burly of pleasures which—looking back through the decades from the cloister of my single bed—seems to be nothing more, or less, than one of those outlandish dreams that naughty Freud character was so keen on.

And now that the world has woken up, I find myself returning to that one carnal curio of my youth that won't be forgotten: my dear Caesar.

Though considered monstrous by most (an oddity of nature through no fault of his own, I must stress), I, as many others did, found Caesar to be more than a mere bedroom plaything; we revelled in the hours of sweet escape his ministrations yielded. I cherished him in my own way, of course, and he in turn assured me of his fondness—yet to this day, I can't fathom how I came to be the custodian of his memory.

I am nothing if not singleminded in my pursuits, and though I never finished his likeness in stone, I offer the following miscellany in its stead. Some pieces herein fell into my lap; others I went to great lengths to secure. Of those picaresque recollections of my own chiselling—my animated *tableaux vivants*—I do beg forgiveness; but surely, an old woman can be allowed a few indulgences, can she not?

His Reputation Preceeded Him

"Somebody, buy me a *real* drink," demands Gloria Swanson to the flagging crowd. Disgusted by the lack of response, she stands there watching the majordomo pour an elongated stream of Ovaltine into tiny china cups.

Lech, having wrestled Caesar from the dumbwaiter and placed him on the faux-Louis XIV table, slinks away to lose himself amongst the rococo splendor of the hotel suite.

At the far end of the room, Douglas Fairbanks, still in his Thief-of-Baghdad outfit, turns to Baron Van der Kloonklein—a severely-monocled man with a strong odour of jasmine—and proclaims, "She's the dearest thing that ever lived in this world." Mary Pickford, relieved that the men have finally stopped their talk of tiger-hunting expeditions in

the Hindu Kush, gushes, "Oh, I'm awfully happy with you too, darling." She gives Douglas' hand a squeeze before cranking up Gershwin on the phonograph.

Meanwhile, Caesar's scrotum—hidden by a loin cloth Douglas filched from a Tarzan shoot—is contracting from contact with the cold, varnished hardwood. Carved cherubic heads face outward from each corner of the elaborate table. When Little Mary's back is turned, the women, urged on by Gloria, pluck conspiratorially at Caesar's testicles as if they were a cluster of exquisite, ripe grapes. Caesar yawns broadly. "Oh, don't be such a death's head," chides Gloria.

Alone in a white, tight-fitting organdie gown, I step into the fray. Gloria rolls her eyes and tries to ward me off with a quick shake of her feather fan. I ignore the brandished accessory and tuck my calling card into the top of Caesar's loin cloth. "Katherine Flynnfarnsworth at your service. I couldn't help but notice you have such fine features. Why, that nose, it's aquiline to a T," I say. I let my gaze drop before adding raucously, "My friends do say I have a knack for sculpting the unusual."

Gershwin ends with a flourish. A dapper young man with wetted hair and fur-trimmed coat bursts into the room to address Caesar: "I beg your pardon, sir. I came about that Marvel Growth Tonic stock. I can buy it for eighty." Caesar nods and summarily dismisses the man with a flick of his head. Lech, keeping tab from behind a potted palm, crosses himself, then writes the tip down in a notebook as Little Mary's pet racoon, Darkie, waddles over and urinates on the leg of his peg trousers.

The baron, missing nothing, turns back to his hosts. "All zis zexual repression! It really iz zo perfectly dizgraceful."

"Applesauce, old sport," Mary responds, "it's the public's need for distraction we're all stuck on. Why, now we even have those ghastly talkies."

Douglas drops to the floor and begins a brisk set of pushups. "Personally," he says from between clenched teeth, "I find a bit of dynamic tension the best alternative to the sea of sensuousness." Finished, he throws his head back and yelps like a dog. He crawls straight for the table over the thick and costly carpets, biting the ankles of any guest within easy reach. Mary watches her beloved Douglas, and puts a hand to her mouth in mock horror.

A Confidential Annotated Patient History from the Desk of Dr. A.C. Grimmberg, Prosthetist:

The subject's sorrowful situation was brought to my attention soon after his 21st birthday. A kindly disposed brother, upon whom the subject was wholly dependent, accompanied the latter to my office, where I was

told that various other specialists had been consulted with unsatisfactory results.

A congenital deformation of the most deplorable severity, had resulted in the subject being born deprived of nature's extremities, leaving him little more[1] than just a trunk and head (38 inches in length; 66 pounds—average build). The subject's arms had developed to an insignificant degree at the pectoral girdle, leaving only the scantiest of protrusions with little muscle mass. Similarly, the legs had not developed further than the hip articulation; tests indicated that the ends were load bearing and free from nervous complications—the subject confirmed he routinely "stood" for hours on end without discomfort.

The subject appeared quite healthy despite his unfortunate state, with one notable exception: he complained of periodic phantom pains[2] in all four missing limbs.

As may be surmised, the problems encountered in this case are profoundly difficult, and immediately presented the strongest appeal. I instinctively felt the greatest humane impulse to ameliorate the subject's pitiable condition, and thus rescue him from a life of absolute idleness.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of muscle stumps of sufficient strength, the range of utility of any artificial limb will be correspondingly limited. Though I expect only the most basic control of prosthetic devices, their

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[1]The subject did display an abnormally well-developed sex organ; the *corpi cavernosum* and *spongiosum* were of a size I could previously only have imagined, were I prone to such improper and unwholesome musings.

[2]Such a condition is commonly associated with amputees; however, except for one remarkable case detailed in Von Gleist's seminal volume, *Beinamputationen und Prothesenversorgung*, it is unknown amongst those lacking limbs due to congenital misfortune.

In the aforementioned case, a girl from Frankfurt-am-Main, born with no arms, suddenly began to experience horrific delusions soon after reaching puberty. She succumbed to altered psychic states in which she claimed not only to see a pair of *arms* issuing from her deformed shoulders, but to be entirely helpless to stop these arms from reaching out and *strangling* those devoted to her care; this state was preceded by an unbearable itchiness in her *hands* and *fingers*, and was followed by, the girl claimed, a sense of overwhelming guilt. Though the *victims* were unharmed by these phantom attacks, they were quite frightened by the wild look of intense loathing that overtook the girl's countenance during them.

In order to restore the poor girl's sanity, she was forced to undergo a ritual *amputation* by a trained surgical doctor who, quite convincingly, cut off the two offensive *limbs*. Following the operation, the girl was fitted, in short order, with a pair of the finest arms of flesh-coloured porcelain and a set of white silk gloves.

A recent testimonial by the girl states: *My condition at present is quite unnoticable. I am today a competent amanuensis and able to perform all my own housework. I have even recently become engaged to be married—a circumstance I had not even considered possible before the ornament of artificial arms remedied my deficiency. I do not know what I should do without them. They are godsends.*

cosmetic use—restoring symmetry to the body—may be the greatest extent to which they could mitigate the subject's affliction to a compensatory degree.

Much to my shock, the subject however exhibited a marked aversion to my careful, and might I add, laudable, prescription of available prostheses.[3] The subject became, in fact, irate and ordered the long-suffering helpmate—who seemed to be well used to such boorish tirades—to bear him out of my offices.[4]

My only hope is that the subject will soon regain his senses, and that one day he may be enabled to get about freely, walk gracefully, prepare his food at the table, write a legible hand, open and close a door, attend to the adjustment of his own attire, and engage in such labour as his calling in life requires; in short, to be transformed from a helpless burden to all about him, into a useful member of society.

Dorothy Dix Reporting:

> Well sob sisters, if brevity is the soul of décolletage, then there has never been a soirée so full of spirit as the one I attended last night. And who should be there but the talk of the town, that *de rigeur* attraction for any party worthy of the title: our own little, immobile C. I watched as tuxedoed men took turns playing Brutus, lunging at C. with champagne glass in one hand, fois gras knife in the other, the women tittering off to the side behind raised palms, guarding their reputations, while secretly snapping their fingers in the face of propriety.
>
> It is said people who have lost a sense often develop heightened awareness and dexterity in another to compensate. So what do you suppose K.F. was planing to do when

---

[3]Legs, style E17 (pair); arms, styles T2-a (right) and T1 (left); refer to *A.A. Marks' Manual of Artificial Limbs: An Exhaustive Exposition of Prothesis. Copiously Illustrated. Artificial Toes, Feet, Legs, Fingers, Hands, Arms, for Amputations and Deformities, Appliances for Excisions, Fractures, and other Disabilities of Lower and Upper Extremities, Suggestions on Amputations, Treatment of Stumps, History, etc., etc., etc.* (701 Broadway, New York City); the resulting assemblage and its extensive network of connections—waist belt, shoulder straps, control cables, suspenders, spring pistons, elastic flexion and extension straps, etc., etc.—may appear inordinately cumbersome, and present a formidable challenge to the prosthetist; however, the restoration of the subject to a more natural appearance and capacity would well be worth the noble effort.

[4]The subject's irrational, and indeed socially irresponsible, response forced me to shout after his receding form my advice that he seek the help of a competent psychoanalyst.

I have not heard from the miscreant since!

she scooped C. off his pedestal and fled down Folly Lane? Why it would surely burn the ears of any Miss Manners just to think of it.

In closing, my dear readers, I'd simply like to add that if, by the end of the year, all the women present at the party were to be laid end to end under C., I for one would not be surprised.

—*Clipped from the Society Page,* New York Times, *September 23, 1927*

From an Unauthorized Biography*:

Caesar was his stage name.

Born Leopold Wojciech Varuzelski on October 24, 1904, in the West Prussian port of Gdansk (now Poland), he was an otherwise healthy child, save for his lack of arms and legs. To his mother, Irena, a woman whose life had proved to be little more than a minefield of quiet tragedies, the "deformity"—a medical term she abhorred—was only too appropriate: Following her husband Aleksander's abrupt disappearance in the chaotic afterhours of the birth, she reportedly explained, "His father was never anything but half a man."

Irena was a deeply religious and guilt-ridden woman, and quickly developed a strong affinity for the boy, bestowing upon him a thin gold medal of St. Giles†, and charged Leopold's lanky older brother, Lech—a kind, though some said dimwitted, soul—to devote his life to the care and protection of her poor Leopold.

Shortly after Leopold turned three, Aleksander, a pipefitter by trade, died unexpectedly in a freak boiler explosion in Warsaw. Deprived of his financial support, there was nothing left but adversity for the trio. Six months later, Irena—with Lech in one hand and her husband's accordion case containing Leopold in the other—left Gdansk for the promise of New York City.

Irena was reputedly a pretty woman, full of bust and wide of hip, and had managed to secure for them—through serendipity and the kindly attention of the town's harbourmaster—passage on an Estonian steamer

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*Appearing in: Dearborn, S.J. (1956). Vamps, Tramps and Burlesque Dolls: Deviant Tales from the Jazz Age. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc.

†St. Giles, patron of cripples and infirmarians, spur makers, knife grinders, fish dealers, artillery men, smelters, repentent women, and coffeehouse keepers, is invoked against lumbago, sterility, terrors of the night, indiscretions, madness, cattle diseases, and sudden death by lightning; and for the finding of lost objects.

which had stopped in port to add to its cargo of saltpeter a sizeable amount of anthracite to fuel the factories of America.

The voyage was a terrible hardship. The young mother and her two sons ate little other than thin soup and stale bread—not a *pierog* or *golabek* throughout the ten days sailing—and were forced to share the lower berths with the foul-mouthed sailors (exposure to the saltpeter dust had thankfully crippled their libidos). The sailors quickly made Leopold the mascot of the ship, and even went so far as to tie him to the bow with lengths of hemp cord, in imitation of the carved figureheads of the past.

Once in New York, Irena supported her sons by cleaning the mansions of the wealthy on Fifth Avenue six days a week. On Sundays they would picnic in Central Park or stroll down Broadway, where the shocking sight of Leopold being carried around by Lech consistently drew gawking crowds. Though fighting a losing battle against poverty, Irena steadfastly refused the many offers of touring freak-show owners, fearing her dear son would be little more than an object of ridicule. Thus passed many a year.

Then one day in 1925, when Leopold was twenty one years of age, Mr. Gerald Chase, an agent for the Ziegfeld Follies, spotted the two brothers as they waited for a tram outside a doctor's office. Chase was immediately taken by Leopold's statuesque, almost regal, form propped up on the bench, and, divining the young man's artistic potential, approached him. That night, accompanied by Chase and Lech, and with the blessing of Irena, Leopold was brought to an extravagant socialite gathering held in the type of grand mansion that his mother would normally clean.

The story of that first night, though likely apocryphal in part, soon circulated widely: before the guests arrived, while Lech waited below in the servants' quarters, Leopold, his torso and face powdered a marble white, a wreath of laurel gracing his head (the spitting image of the tyrant whose name he would soon adopt), was placed on a pedestal in a corner of the ballroom and instructed by Chase to remain absolutely still. Sometime during the night's festivities, Constance Delmont—a wealthy blue-blood well-known for her unnatural desire—thinking the statue to be just that, flipped up the large fig leaf Chase had covered Leopold's midsection with, and gasped at the sight. The rest is history.

Fanned by the era's lavish proclivities, word of Leopold spread like wild fire through the city's social elite. He became part of the logic of the era, like yoga, Couéism, flagpole-sitting, and the Charleston—a *modern* escape for the restless masses. A spectacular. A debutante's dream. Within the next two years, Leopold, now known as Caesar, was keeping the company of dozens, if not hundreds, of prosperous and demanding women (and more than a few men). However, none of these indulgent relationships showed any signs of substance until

the sculptress Katherine Flynnfarnsworth—heiress to the Emerald Foot Powder fortune—met Caesar at the start of 1927. Though Caesar continued to circulate among the upper class (as did Katherine), the pair soon became the tabloid ballyhoo of press boys and gossip columnists. The public's infatuation continued until the Crash of October 24, 1929, which brought the Twenties to a calamitous end and with it the fortunes of those (including Katherine) who had relished and abetted Caesar.

Within months, Caesar—abandoned by both Lech and then Katherine, who had gone overseas[‡]—succumbed to despair and was rarely seen again in public. By 1931, he had faded into the depths of obscurity, and it is unclear what happened to him in the following years. There is no record of his death.

Everybody Who Was Anybody

"Somebody buy me a drink—I'm coming down," shouts Shipwreck Kelly from his tiny platform high above the feckless crowds on 40th Street. He buttons up his trousers and watches the elongated stream of urine strike the row of limousines lined up below.

Texas Guinan's on the sidewalk outside the Club El Fey. She raucously twirls her lariat and lets it fly at the group pouring out of a still-braking canary-yellow Pierce Arrow. "Hello, suckers!" Lech, last out, wrestles the oversized bass case from the trunk.

Once inside and safely installed at a booth, Lech hoists the heavy case onto the table and clicks open the latches. A steely-eyed torpedo in the next booth stands up. Beside him, "Greasy Fingers" Ferruchio is oblivious to any danger as he spreads caviar on the thighs of his chesty blond moll in a Joan Crawford wrap. The hired gun pulls a revolver from his pinstriped suit, "Don't worry boss, I'll ventilate him."

Lech ignores the brandished weapon—if only he could be so lucky as to go out in a hail of bullets!—and opens the case. He reaches in to hoist Caesar out from where he's been stuffed, placing him on the table. The band strikes up the Charleston. A sea of flappers in silk skirts and cloche hats floods the joint.

Caesar calls over a nervous, moon-faced youth in a club uniform, ordering a $25 bottle of champagne for the table and a watered-down Scotch for Lech.

[‡]Unknown to many at the time, Katherine had been suffering from drug addiction disease for a number of years due to her predilection for narcotic-based patent medicines. Miss Flynnfarnsworth confined herself to the Tranquille Sanitarium of the Sisters of St. Benedict in Pontresina, Switzerland, for detoxification treatment for the better part of 1930-1933.

Meanwhile, I'm doing the Shimmy with a bespectacled man in shiny alpaca. He guides me over the dance floor until we bump into the back of Lech's chair. "Psst," my dance partner whispers to Caesar conspiratorially. "About that Fizzy Diz Seltzer stock—I can buy it on credit for one-hundred and five."

"Ignore him, he can be such a flat tire sometimes," I butt in, and slide out from the broker's grasp to land in an empty stretch of the booth.

The band ends with a flourish. Exhausted hoofers and baby vamps return to their tables to snack on clusters of exquisite, ripe grapes. The house lights dim. On stage, Josephine Baker—that glistening chocolate arabesque—steps up to the microphone, black breasts shining under the spot, and launches into a lurid rendition of *Yes, We Have No Bananas.*

"Oh," I say, my eyes riveted on Caesar, "I simply must have you over to my studio for a sitting."

"A sitting! That's rich," barks Hildegarde Dare, the widow-adventuress, suddenly appearing by his side. Her cigarette holder quivers in the smoke-filled air. "He's mine."

"Well, we'll just see about that." The Palsey Sisters step forward to clink glasses and wink to one another before running their hands along Caesar's custom-made tuxedo (the El Fey's $3 cover ensures a strict dress code). Lech watches the scene, disgusted, and mutters something about a pack of hyenas taking down prey.

Caesar smiles and accepts the cigar thrust into his mouth. The moon-faced youth is back with another bottle of bubbly. He touches a flaming $10 bill to the end of Caesar's stogey.

Hours later, I imagine the youth recounting the events of yet another scandalous evening at work to the men of his Bowery flophouse. "I've seen it all, boys, believe me, and I tell you it's all 'cause of our constant state of sexual repression."

"Bullshit, son," the proprieter responds, hurling his shoe at a fleeing cockroach. "It's money that's got us by the short hairs."

Irena Remembers (transcribed from a 1928 interview for *Smart Set* [never published]):

At hospital in Gdansk, it was easiest birth a mother could hoping for, not like that hell with my big lout Lech—all arm and leg—but doctor said *Boze swiety! Jezus, Maria!* He didn't want to show me my baby, but I made him, and all I can thinking is *Sam Pan Bog wie*: He giveth and He taketh away. He was so beautiful, so smooth, so graceful. I thought maybe I'm dead, maybe I'm in heaven and here is my little angel at last. Like cherub from church painting, I could hold him and my hands would be his wings and I could make him fly. Then I seeing his *pracie*, like a pale

eel, even then hanging down, and I knew he was real. I also knew then he would be a man some day, and no more my sweet angel.

Well his father—*baba z wozu!* A good riddance. New York it was very difficult, but we trying our best. Always food. Always roof over head. I'm working very hard. Then Leo he meets that man from Ziegfeld and everything change. At first I was happy for him, a new life, and he buy for me many expensive things, but then he get too important-busy for me, no time to see his own mama. Lech it was not so difficult, but Leo it broked my heart even though I understood. *Jego los jest przesadzony.* His doom is sealed: An eel must go to the sea.

Extracts from a Case of Sex Perversion as a Result of Physical Defect:

> *[Pilfered from the files of renowned German psychopharmacologist, Dr. Wolfgang Hitschmann, following a spat. Why he was so interested in what Caesar and I did in private, I'll never know. Really, the gall of the man!]*

Preamble.—The patient was a young man lacking both arms and legs at birth. He sought relief from feelings of incompleteness (understandable and expected with such physical deficiency) which manifested in phantastical creations—what I termed "Wunderprosthesen"—with which his imagination was quite obsessed.

Further investigation revealed an overdeveloped sex appetite and lack of any decent self-restraint; in addition, he confessed to having an astonishing number of sexual admirers with which to satisfy his compulsions. (Indeed, his manhood—upon verification—was by no means wanting; on the contrary, it was the basis of his social standing and, in its way, quite life-affirming.)

Free Association by Patient with Keyword "Home" *as Stimulus.*—"A womb like any other. Some bastard's accordion case. Various steamer trunks & rawhide suitcases. Mama's skirts. A New Jersey tire swing. Laundry basket. Ice box. Cotton bloomers. Dog house. Poolside on a late green afternoon. Gin mills & champagne dregs. A picnic basket. Passwords. The Yes of a Ouija board. The scented bosom of a Chicago pork-princess. Pirated edition of *Lady Chatterly's Lover.* A Macy's summer hat box. Velvet Santa sack. Extravagance. Silver punch bowl. Any tabloid social page. Trunk of a Studebaker President Straight Eight. A Le Corbusier chrome-plated recliner. Duke Ellington on the Victrola. Amongst the ropes and pulleys and counterweights. The powdered knees of Clara Bow. The sparkle of a tear-drop diamond. Any Cecil B. De Mille bath scene. Caruso hitting a high note. Between the sheets. The skyline of Lower Manhattan. A backroom of the Hoity-Toity Club.

Braegdort's delicatessen on Sixth Avenue. Cigarettes and white table cloths. Pola Negri's bee-stung lips singing *My Little Bimbo Down on the Bamboo Isle.* Ritz-Carleton suite 519. The cool enamel of a claw-foot bathtub. Down on Folly Lane. The morning after. A crackling Dempsey knockout on WEAF. Notebooks maintained by members of the underworld. Any number of syphilitic bistros. Several worn benches in Central Park. Broadway nickelodeons & dime museums. Unconsciousness. Pipe-dreams of hunting with the Wild Men of Borneo. The syncopated jazz of a Thompson submachine gun."

Analysis.—It is no easy matter to give a complete diagnosis with such limited observation; yet the patient's defect is surely of great pathological significance.

Though some of the above associations appear to be characteristic of unconscious ideation, thereby facilitating psychoanalysis and dreamwork (the extremities—a hand or foot—are generally symbolic of the male organ; cf. Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica*, Book II, Chapter X) and may be oedipal in nature (thus his need for constant female "interaction"), many are obvious and unambiguous and should not be over-interpreted as they surely have biographical explanations.

The patient's neurosis can be attributed to an inferiority complex caused by his reliance on others for daily care; his subconscious desire to be whole, nay, super-human, results in his preoccupation with these ridiculous contraptions. His licentiousness and moral turpitude—besides being the source of his livelihood and identity—are expressions of wish fulfillment tempered by his limited available means (though it must be said his physical condition renders him as much victim as perpetrator).

For his bouts of melancholy, I prescribe a nostrum of coca leaves, amphetamine salts, and/or other safe exhilarants. To curb his abnormal sex impulses, the only medical option may be castration. (A moderate amount of masturbation would probably do him good, were he able.)

In the end, I fear his therapeutic prospects are not favourable.

Modern Is as Modern Does

The Victrola's playing, *Your lips may say no, no, but there's yes, yes in your eyes.* Zelda Fitzgerald, skirt held high to show the rolled-down tops of her stockings, dances on the table. She ends with a flourish and jumps off to land in an empty chaise longue. An elongated stream of ash from her ciggy trails behind. "Can someone buy me drink?" she slurs into the smoke-filled air.

Butterfield, the moon-faced butler, walks up with a bottle of Chianti fresh off a ship anchored beyond the twelve-mile limit.

"Hooch!" she yells, excitedly eyeing the bottle. "The real McCoy."

Lech stomps through the doorway, wheeling Caesar in on a tea cart. I saunter in behind wearing a scandalous silk evening dress with jewelled throat.

Lech parks the cart next to Gertrude Stein, engaged in a heated game of mah-jongg—her lecture circuit in New York just a flimsy pretense for unloading several trunks of abstracts from her less-gifted Neo-Impressionist friends in Paris. Beside her, that ol' Sapphist, Alice Toklas, pinched-faced and slightly moustached, maintains her steely-eyed vigil over her companion's tiles.

"Baaaatter up," the hirsute Briton Hadder raucously yells in his affected Brooklyn accent. He holds up a cracker spread with caviar. Caesar ignores the brandished hors d'oeuvre, but then is forced to jerk his head to one side; the cracker narrowly misses and comes to rest on Lech's Fair Isle sweater. Caesar smiles and accepts the next one thrust into his mouth. Butterfield leans over with a napkin: "Sir, about your Cotton Club Skinlightener stock, I might know someone who'll buy it for seventy."

Briton stands up, and with a grand gesture, grinds his cigarette into the elbow of his asbestos-fibre suit. But his theatrics impress no one, least of all Bambina Delmar, his demimondaine date and *stripteaseuse extraordinaire*, who's seen it all before. Slightly deflated, Briton pulls a revolver from his suit and swaggers off to fire a few rounds in the shooting range set up in the study.

Gertrude, having lost her mah-jongg partner, begins thumbing through the photographic plates in Fitzgerald's copy of *Coming of Age in Samoa*, extolling the virtues of free-love as she surveys the black breasts shining on the glossy pages. Alice reluctantly agrees from between clenched teeth.

"Butterfield, where the devil is Scott?" barks Zelda, twirling an empty glass.

"I believe he's engaged in a bull session," Butterfield replies as he opens yet another green bottle. He points to a door decorated with a Dutch still life showing a cluster of exquisite, ripe grapes.

Zelda, tight-lipped, surges over to the door and yanks it open. There, in the darkened space of the closet, illuminated by the single match held in Hemingway's fingers, stand the two men, trousers draped about their ankles, comparing organs.

Gertrude walks over, Alice in tow, to join Butterfield and Zelda; the four stand gazing at the two speechless men. Shots begin to ring out from the study. In the din Butterfield whispers something conspiratorially into Zelda's ear as he tops up her glass. Just as suddenly the shots cease.

"Sexual repression! Oh, you parlour snake." Zelda rolls her eyes, finally understanding what Butterfield was trying to say. "I thought you

were talking about *self-expression.*" Zelda turns to the closet. Now armed with a full wine glass, she is devastatingly frank, "You're all wet, boys. Neither one of you can hold a candle to Caesar."

Everyone turns back to the mah-jongg table, catching Lech stuffing a bottle of Chianti down his trousers. But it's too late: I'm already at the helm of the tea cart with Caesar, halfway out the door.

Wunderprosthese #6: "The Valentino," a.k.a., "The Smouldering Shiek of Arabique"

Internal moving-picture projector & mirror system for casting image of seductively pomaded, nostril-flaring, eye-scorching Latin lover onto silkateen face screen; multiple-geared mahogany hands complete with locking mechanisms to facilitate various petting formalities (the unwrapping of the breasts, the rolling-down of the stockings, the paying of the tab, etc.); an array of button-on outfits, suitable for champagne baths, Montparnasse cafés, Algerian harems & the glittering casinos of Biskra; elaborate network of ergonomically-designed, piston-driven dildos of various shapes, sizes, materials & frictional qualities (ebony, ivory, embossed silver, Mikado porcelain & Indian gutta-percha); spring-actuated phonograph crooning continuous renditions of *Let's Misbehave* & *In a Mist*; fold-out tent deploys from disguised cranial cavity—brocaded Moroccan-leather divan optional.

Lech's Barstool Testimonial:

Oh, I know, I can hear it already: "Don't carry on like this, old sport" or "See here now! How can you be so ghastly to your own brother? By Jove, he's an invalid. Have some dignity, will you." But you have to understand: *he* was the evil one.

And Mama fell for it. Oh, he milked her for all she was worth. She worked her fingers to the bone for that one, and how did he pay her back? Swanky furs. Ritzy jewellery. Musk from the shores of the Bosphorus. Stuff she didn't want. She'd just put them away in a drawer, said they made her feel uncomfortable, and in the end the loan sharks took it all anyway. She only wanted him. But he couldn't wait to get out from her "doting grip"—that's what he called it, and worse. Yes, you should have heard what he called Mama behind her back. Why he even said *he* was embarrassed to be seen with *her*! After all she'd done for him...

[interrupted by wracking sobs]

"Caesar!" I mean what kind of name is that for a low-born Slav? The only reason I took care of him was because I promised Mama. Whenever I took him to doctors to see if they could help, so he could look after

himself, so I could leave and have *my own life*, he'd just say, "Why would I want to be like everyone else?"

I'm not ashamed to tell you that if he were a dog, I would have kicked him under the wheels of an omnibus a long time ago. But blood is thick, and what did I get out of it? He got all the attention. And the women—like you. I was the one no one noticed. He took to taunting me, calling *me* ugly and deformed, saying *my* arms were gawky and *my* legs were graceless, until all I saw in mirrors was some big lumbering ape staring back. *He* made *me* the freak!

Yeah, I know, sure, he was my meal ticket. But he was also my albatross. My millstone. The only reason I started skimming money off the top was because he wouldn't give me any. Treated me worse than a slave. And besides, what does a man with no limbs need money for?

He had me.

Wunderprostese #11: "The 'Dutch' Schultz"

Armour-plated, black Cadillac frame attached to spine by pneumatic cylinders & ermine-lined pressure relief pads; spill-proof crystal glass & Scotch whiskey tap with direct line to Canada; bronze, spring-loaded stogie holder with proximity switch set to ash any Justice Department officials, Internal Revenue agents & Women's Christian Temperence Unionists in nondescript tweeds; twin tommy guns with mother-of-pearl inlay, activated via sharkskin control harness by pelvic thrust; perpetual-motion generators with independent terminal devices for adding zeros to hieroglyphically-coded ledgers, stroking well-gammed chain gangs of bottle-blonde good-time girls, & padding the pockets of crooked politicians & marked high-court judges; advanced buncombe & banana-oil warning system; Mama's homemade schnitzel dispenser; all topped off by pearl-grey felt hat, three-piece lime-green suit with matching silk tie & diamond stick pin the size of Newark (boutonniere included).

The Last Nights of Bohemia

Lech prowls past the row of waiting cabs and dilapidated Model Ts lined up along the feckless streets of Greenwich Village—their windshields kicked out by raccoon-coated youths in checked plus-eights. He stops in front of a set of flagging tenement flats; the air is thick with the stench of fermenting mash.

By chance, I've just exited the pharmacist's after procuring a healthy supply of Dr. Drake's Catarrh Remedy & Lung Restorer. I catch Lech pulling a hip flask from his canary-yellow silk suit. He takes a swig and hoists a heavy burlap sack higher onto his shoulders before climbing the

set of grimy stairs. From within the sack comes an elongated stream of muffled invective.

"Joe sent me," Lech whispers into the peephole; the door opens. Before it closes, I rush in behind him. The joint is awash in petty mobsters, whoremongers, Dadaists, Negroes, drunk-rollers, Bolsheviks, and devastated brokers quivering in the smoke-filled air. Not a Bluenose in sight. "Hello suckers," Lech yells.

The steely-eyed doorman puts down a copy of *Whiz Bang*, bolts the door, and slaps Lech on the back. "Somebody, buy this man a drink!"

When he sees me, Lech moves deeper into the fray. Off to one side some boys from Harlem are playing their own brassy-jazz rendition of *What you gonna do when the rent comes 'round?*

Meanwhile, shingle-haired débutantes sip nerve tonic from tiny china cups being wheeled through on tea carts by moon-faced escapees from Bellevue. In the darkened corners, street urchins chanting "Free-love-free-love" raucously unwrap the bandaged breasts of fallen flappers while zozzled B-girls powder their knees nearby. A man with the latest in Dutch diaphragms dangling from between clenched teeth, pulls from his suit a selection of French *cartes postales* showing naked women surrounded by clusters of exquisite, ripe grapes.

"Zo perfectly dizgraceful," mutters a man in a tattered tuxedo. It's the baron!—his odour of jasmine long since faded. He lifts a shattered monocle to his eye before being overcome by a violent paroxysm of vomiting.

Lech pushes on to the den of La Petite Chinoise. On finding the emaciated opium-charmer installed in her lurid, faux-Shanghai quarters, he heaves the burlap sack from his shoulders, twirls it like a lariat, and lets it fly.

The bag lands heavily on the hardwood floor. La Petite Chinoise grins, exposing a band of black gums under the light of a single red bulb, and pulls her soiled kimono close about her. She opens the sack and wrestles Caesar out, propping his head up on her lap. Caesar smiles sheepishly and accepts the smoking pipe thrust conspiratorially into his mouth.

Lech watches Caesar finish the bowl and begin another in quick succession. "How you making out, old boy?"

Caesar chokes on the thick, sweet vapour.

"Oh, don't be such an oil can," Lech says, trying not to smirk. He tosses a dollar bill on the floor before moving off. Once Lech's back is turned, the Chinawoman plucks the bill up and thrusts it between the folds of her kimono.

It's been some time since I've seen Caesar, and I sense his mind contracting from contact with the cold, unvarnished shackles of opiate-detachment. His world hangs on tenterhooks. "I didn't expect to find you

here," I say, stepping forward.

He turns his head toward my voice, but can't seem to see me.

"Oh, my poor, dear Caesar. What is to become of you?" I fish the gold medallion from my handbag—I'd found it in the folds of my bed sheets after his last visit weeks before—and put it around his neck. Then I smooth the hair down on his forehead. The Chinawoman places the pipe in his mouth again. As I leave, I hear her whisper in his ear, "By the way, that Turtle-brand Pot Cleaner stock—get rid of it while you can."

Back in the main room, the frenzied, strident jazz ends with a flourish. The saxophone player wipes the sweat off his brow and catches at Lech's sleeve. "Lawdy, man, dis here's sho nuff all cuz uh our constunt state uh sexule represh'n. Yassuh!" he exclaims, rolling his eyes. He passes over a jar of bathtub gin. Lech ignores the brandished libation.

A lounge lizard leans in, his hair formed into an impenetrable shell with Slikum: "Baloney, boy, are you potted?" He takes a drag of marijuana between heebie-jeebie fits. "Our ball and chain are the senses."

Lech can't hold it in any longer: "I thought it was the essential emptiness of the human condition." The men look at him as if he'd just dropped his trousers.

I step in to explain: "He means we're all just dreadfully alone at heart."

"Amen to dat," the sax player agrees. "It sho is a pickle."

A Final Keepsake:

In those days I had an atelier on the corner of Broadway and Franklin in Lower Manhattan—I found great inspiration amongst the common masses. Though small, it had large plate glass windows which let in the sun, and I had Venetian mirrors installed on the ceiling above the teak Balinese daybed Daddy had given me.

Under the pretense of having him model for me, Caesar—accompanied by that lurking shadow of a brother ("Wet Lech" we used to call him behind his back)—paid me a visit. Of course, I sent Lech away as soon as I could. I just couldn't stand the man; he was such a monstrosity of form, all meaty appendages—a Cubist nightmare. And that asinine diamond he had set in his tooth, as if he were "Jelly Roll" Morton himself! Caesar confessed it was like seeing oneself in a circus mirror.

Once we were alone and had dispensed with the formalities, Caesar and I quickly disrobed and headed for that daybed. Lying down side by side, we looked up at our reflection, and then Caesar got this wonderfully clever idea of superimposing our bodies. He had me place him on top of myself so that our trunks were lined up. I'm rather large boned, so the effect was quite perfect, he assured me. When he looked up at the mir-

rors, there was his trunk and face with my arms and legs. To complete the picture, he tucked his penis—and he had the most remarkable specimen—down between my legs, rendering him oddly sexless. He told me it was a beautiful sight, to see himself like that, so totally transformed, and he stayed like that for the longest time.

After he rolled back off, Caesar told me the most extraordinary thing. He said that as he'd stared at that collage of limbs and body, imagining for the time that he was, in fact, that emasculated being, his phantom pains completely subsided. It was the first time he could remember feeling so utterly free. Needless to say, we continued to meet quite regularly, always finishing off our spectacular lovemaking with this manoeuvre.

Of course Caesar ended up losing everything in the Crash, as so many did. He was never the same after that, and we soon lost touch in all the hullabaloo. When I tried looking for him, he was nowhere to be found. There was plenty of speculation—some said he was at a Salvation Army Rest Camp in the South; others that he'd boxcarred it to Canada; or left in the dead of night on a tramp steamer to the Orient; or even that Ferruchio's boys had caught up with him and he now graced the bottom of the Hudson River—but no one seemed to know for sure. It was as if he'd dropped off the edge of the world.

Well, the party was over. Lech moved back to live with his mother and sold boater hats door-to-door. And I left for Europe, where the years I spent recuperating in Switzerland were the bleakest of my life.

I still find myself thinking of Caesar from time to time, and hope he remembers our afternoons together under the mirrors as fondly as I do. Why, even now in my twilight years, the mere thought brings a flutter to my heart and a blush to this old woman's cheeks.

Truly,
Katherine Flynnfarnsworth
Aubagne, France
February 2, 1967

John Pass

Sparrows

On the lower concourse at YVR the lighting hangs
in swept-back wings of fluorescence above us, and sparrows

have got in somewhere through the glass expanses.
Trapped, they loop and weave their ways among the fixtures

in a magnified grace, with aerodynamic verve
and slide unseen in sparrows outside.

How they mock the stasis of our style, the stuckness
of the made thing, however edgy, and then prefer

the lit to light upon, as our light mocks
their dowdy, perching, ruffled dun—like little lumps

of clumsy animation in a hologram, blots on an HD screen.
And what is this, that one, with its thread of pink wool, wriggling

under the ill-fitted panel labelled CIRCUIT 6? An optimist?
A realist in our midst? Busy denizen, at home in our dark

densities, our nesting power, while we lean
back and crane our necks to gawk

awkwardly upward at the glare awaiting
the return of loved ones from the air, or flight ourselves.

Paul Tyler

House Sparrows

Thin chippers, white bread doodlers,
little humdingers, froth-whipped mobs
of bugged-up feather, wire-creep
for evening shots at eave lips.
Roof litter, hived in heaps of tossed
together rubbish tangles, house clackers,
vent jammers. Quick eye-bits spot
loose nibbles, crumb leeches craving
a crud-fix. Wind thrips bully
at the seed-grab, four season bird box
stuffers, bashing bluebirds. City smudges
with snail-slicked beaks, junk-snapping
wrapper addicts, street grubs preening
grit, all pebble-footed and smokey.
Crock full of croak, one-note wonders,
sidewalk gravel peddlers bland survivors.

Stephanie Yorke

The Oracle at Truro

Near express checkout four,
a bin of MULTICAT kitten-farm-caliber
cat litter

rose,
levitated,
like a pelvically-nested swami
ascending on the steady elevator of his proverbs.

A discreet miracle.
So I poked the woman ahead of me,
who carried a baby with muffin cap ears.
The lady flinched, turned away,
and smashed the Interac keypad
as if she were phoning a prized and furious lover,
to sing him the worst of Andrew Lloyd Webber
in apology.

I hope their quarrel ended in french toast.

Still the litter rose, like the soul of a dead balloon.
Bashfully slow.

The other checkout standers
smelt of chloroform. We
were dilapidated teens and amnesia-stricken men and
unimaginative mothers with misaligned hips.

Why all this litter?
Some for cats, cat families.
Some for icy driveways.
Some for sopping must-smell in wet basements.

Oh! The saturated human eyes!
Liquid paper faces. We sweat.
Can none of us open our jackets?

And on each arm, MULTICAT litter,
and in each cart, MULTICAT litter,
a special-purchase-maximum of five pails,
though one had transcended.

Telephone Lover turned to the cashier,
pummelling my face with her baby.
But the blow was eased by the coiled pastry of his ears.
No tears. And the child's brain was forked.

He pulled a coiled scroll from the ass of his snugglebyes,
steered the paper to my hand.
I unscrolled:
In the year that the Elm trees died,

I would have read on,
but the checkout girl was asking for my cards.

I fumbled them like amateur tarot.

Pompeii

You wake thirsty.
Your parents have left
and taken the beach umbrella.
They have sectioned off your television room
with a velvet rope.

Your housesitter cuts the rope
with a paring knife.
The velour is easy to snip, but
she grits and oaths over the hidden chain,
a spine beneath the skin of an eel

or trout, the first food you notice.
The TV trays are laden, readied.
Pull-aparts, almond compote
(nuts like drugged eyes)
and shrimp with pricked capillaries,
white and pink as a child's purse.
Emmm.
Leg of muscular duck.

Tipping sauces on the carpet,
you binge with the housesitter.
Then divine the feast back out
with a feather
jollied through the first valve of your throat.
Ralph. Make way make way

for the second course: You swallow swallows,
their tomboy eyes unlit.
Perhaps you eat a wild cherry
between peppery birds.
Seeds and twits.

The volcano spits like a roast pig,
initial ash on your window.

P.R. Barr

Little Sally Stand-up

Malignant cells swim in D's lung fluid and cancerous
nodules have attached themselves to her
abdominal lining. Beyond this, she doesn't know.

My life, she says, and throws up her hands.
Next Friday an oncologist will explain
type and stage and plan of attack. These are the facts:

I have known and loved D for twenty-eight years
and the pregnant waitress rattling off lunch
specials doesn't look a day over thirteen. I order

pumpkin soup and spinach salad. D orders thin crust
pizza with olives and slices of marinated pear.
Water or wine? She wonders if she made the right

choice, a life full of choices, would she rather have
the pizza with figs and brie cheese. All things considered,
she's behaving heroically which makes me think of

my mother, how in times of crises she'd say,
Whatever happened to Little Sally Stand-up?
My cue to suck back the tears. Normally, D and I

would be discussing plans—summer, next year,
the year after that, but today we're trapped in the present,
hot seats behind glass: the place everyone ends up.

People walk past the window in frothy
spring colours. By the looks on their faces it's clear
some understand this and some do not.

First Trimester

Driving through town, half listening to the voice on the radio,
you glance at *Cosmo Girl* on the passenger's seat—
Luscious sex for a luscious body!—thinking
drug store pregnancy kit, how reliable,
and do you have the right change?
You turn up the volume

and it's an astronomer
describing a new high resolution
stereoscopic camera. How even as a child
he was entranced by Mars, red planet, seventh largest,
fourth from the sun, and you wonder:
What did you feel when Miss Parkinson
pulled down the solar system?
Awe? Boredom? Hunger
for the saltine crackers

you'd unwrap at recess? At a red light,
you imagine the astronomer
a small boy with dark curls, a boy
baffled by other boys, their baseball cards
and pop guns, his own night time fantasy,
the centrefold removed from *National Geographic*
and pinned beside his bed—nine multi-coloured
globes set in black space, each one hard
and pure as a marble. And now
he's remembering

his twelfth birthday, the book from his grandfather—
Mars: Fact and Fiction. How desperately
he wanted to believe the canali—
those thin dark lines the Italians saw
through their telescopes—
meant little green men living underground.
Which is where you are now,
in a parking lot beneath a medical clinic,
the interviewer asking
and the astronomer answering—

All I want to know, all I've ever wanted to know—
was Mars warm and wet like earth?
Billions of years ago was it hospitable to life?

Nikki Reimer

from speech act

1.

time	person
year	way
day	thing
man	world
life	hand
part	child
eye	woman
place	work
week	case
point	government
company	number
group	problem
fact[1]	

2.

thyme purse on you ear wade or thin game an whorl deal I fan deep art chill die womb an play sewer kiwi eke cause paint go veer name net calm pan any number grow up probe lamb face it

3.

basil tote one she heard swim nor slender hockey the tendril agreement we love large date ice expire uterus one hit drains tropical fruit strive create colour run swerve accuse profit sedate disapprove some twelve improve happy sodomize virgin accept genderless

4.

herb carry individual lady knew drift not skinny sport a lock contract us adore giant prune frozen spoil baby bump this toke empties mangoes try make taint operate avoid charge money quiet disagree disciples heal stupid anal sex inexperienced take hermaphrodite

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[1] 25 most commonly used nouns in the English language

Katherine Cameron

Spirit Houses

On New Year's Day, I meet an old friend at the Muttart Conservatory. It's minus twenty-five outside, but inside the air sweetens with perfume from the table of pink and purple hyacinths for sale.

At Maureen's side, her three-year-old daughter, Emily, dances in perpetual motion. Her pink sweater with an appliquéd daisy shimmers with colour, as bright as the hyacinths. Her Hilary Duff jeans have silver and pink sequined butterflies at the cuffs. I feel drab and oversized beside this pint-sized fashion plate.

Maureen has brought another woman with her, Jasmine's mother, whose name I can never remember. While they are hanging up their heavy winter coats, I smile and nod, hoping that Maureen will introduce her name in conversation.

The lobby branches upwards into four corner ramps. Below four glass pyramids, different climate zones flourish: temperate, tropical, desert, a show pavilion. As we walk up towards the desert pavilion, heavy doors swing open. Emily darts ahead.

"Careful," Maureen calls.

The pavilion glows beneath the bright blue sky. Dry desert air. I inhale deeply, smell sage and jade plants. Prickly pear blooming with red bumps of fruit fill the middle bed, limbs coiling like octopi. A massive saguaro stretches up to the glass. Emily reaches out to grab a fistful of cacti.

"Sweetie, that's sharp," Maureen says, pulling back Emily's hand. Emily pouts for a second, reaches out again. Maureen patiently pulls back the tiny hand. I'd let Emily touch it for herself. Once pricked, twice shy. Perhaps Sleeping Beauty was an overindulged child, unafraid of evil witches and spindles.

Jasmine runs ahead on the path. Her mother is encumbered with stroller, diaper bag, sweater, purse. Jumping up onto the concrete retaining wall, Jasmine begins throwing fistfuls of gravel onto the path.

"Don't do that," I say, bending down. "The plants need the gravel to live."

Her mother glares at me. I feel like pointing out the signs. Stay on the path. Don't pick the flowers. Why does everyone feel exempt from these

rules? The mother is too passive to complain openly—instead, she stuffs Jasmine into the stroller. Jasmine begins a high-pitched whining, like a dentist's drill.

The trees in the temperate pavilion are dormant, brown leaves scattered in a creek below the trees. Only the ivy that covers the low stone walls shows a hint of green. I sit on a bench under a bare oak tree, covering my mouth to hide the yawn.

Jasmine's mother turns to Maureen. "Someone was up late partying. Remember those days?" Her tone is mildly patronizing, as if she's speaking of a teenager rather than a woman her own age. "We were in bed last night at nine. We saw the early fireworks and that was it."

I smile, say nothing. I was up late marking, but if she wishes to envy me, she can. It's better than the mild contempt I so often feel from mothers my age. When did the single life become a slightly ludicrous joke? I don't know what Maureen has told her about me. Maybe I'm a cautionary tale, the kind told in whispers.

We wander under the bare trees, then park the strollers in the cafeteria, buy coffee and date squares. Once the two little girls are settled at a small table, with paper and crayons, Maureen mentions the tsunami that hit Asia on Boxing Day.

"I keep thinking about this one mother. Have you seen her, Andrea?" Maureen turns, seeking confirmation. "The Australian woman and her two boys? She couldn't swim with both children and so she had to choose to hold on to one. Imagine."

"Sophie's choice," I interject. They stare at me blankly. "Remember, Sophie had to choose one of her children or the concentration camp guard threatened to take both."

"Oh, the movie," Andrea says slowly. "But this is real life."

What does she think the book was based on? Andrea is the type of woman who proudly claims to read only nonfiction. I can't understand why Maureen spends so much time with her.

Maureen returns to the Australian woman from the news. "I don't know how she could make that choice."

"Would it be better if she had left both to die?" I ask. Even though both children lived, thousands of nameless children died, both locals and tourists. Does the media focus on this story to take our minds off the other mothers, the ones whose children didn't survive? Discussing this topic in a safe environment feels as if we're placating disaster, warding it off from our own safe little world. Not here. Not us.

"Remember our trip to Phuket?" I say to Maureen, changing the topic. "The Friendly Garden B&B? Remember the two fat German guys in their fifties who were sharing the Thai prostitute?" Every morning, over tea and toast, we'd see the Germans at the table next to ours, their thick

voices rattling like gunshot. Two sunburned beefy faces glowing on either side of that sulky silent teenager.

"I don't remember them," Maureen says. Willful amnesia. Or maybe pregnancy does destroy brain cells.

"Oh, come on. You were the one who started calling them the Tom Thumb Twins. The prostitute was a head taller than either of them."

"There are children present," Andrea says in a prissy voice. It's lucky I didn't mention the Australian surfboarder Maureen picked up the second day there. I'd gone for a walk, came back to our tiny villa draped with pink bougainvillea, caught Maureen and the tanned beach boy doing it doggy style on the sagging double bed. I backed out the door fast. The secrets I could tell. The secrets she could tell. What old friendship consists of, secrets you could tell but won't, not even when the friendship is dying, pulled apart by too many changes.

I drink my coffee, and listen to Maureen and Andrea discuss day care options. Looking at Maureen, I can see traces of the backpacker who trekked through Thailand with me. In her twenties, Maureen wore her black hair in a pixie cut that feathered her high cheekbones. Since Emily's birth she's been growing it out and there are streaks of grey at the temples. With her shoulder-length bob, her black Gap sweater and tan pants, she looks like the mothers she used to mock, the ones who thought little Ashley was a genius even though she couldn't spell 'genius' in grade seven. She has achieved that adult look, that adult life: house, husband, child. One version of an adult life.

The first year of our MA program, Maureen broke up with her boyfriend, a pony-tailed jerk who slept with another woman in the program. The night it ended, we started drinking Cabernet Sauvignon in our apartment, then hit the local pub when the wine ran out. By two, she was flashing her breasts at the guys in the bar. I dragged her out.

On the way home, she started screaming at the moon like a madwoman. "Fucking men. Assholes. No more fucking men for me." She wouldn't shut up. I walked her around the downtown area for an hour, afraid to take her home, worried that our neighbours would call the cops. Now she acts like butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. It's all worked out for her.

In Thailand, we saw a woman carving flowers out of vegetables—daikon transformed into white leaves, turnips into tulips. I bought an elaborate red rose carved from a beet, and placed it ceremoniously on the verandah of the next spirit house we saw. The spirit house was an elaborately carved, miniature teak dwelling, its swooping roof draped with garlands of marigolds. Every Thai house has a spirit house, a *sarn phra phun*, built on the northeast corner of the property to placate the spirit of the land, the *chao tee*, displaced by the building. Rules structure the place-

ment—the shadows from the main house cannot fall on the spirit house or bad luck will follow. Each day the householder places offerings of tea, rice, and flower garlands at the door of the spirit house to propitiate the gods.

Shut out of the conversation, I finish my coffee, take the tray to the counter, then announce, "I'm heading up into the show pavilion."

"Me go too," Emily says.

Maureen looks at me doubtfully.

"Sure, come on," I say, annoyed that Maureen doubts my ability to watch her child for ten minutes.

Emily dashes ahead, her shoes clattering on the tiles. The doors swing open to a garish display of red, a womb of poinsettias, with one giant Christmas cracker spilling paper mâché candy over the central bed.

I sit on a bench, watch as Emily runs round and round the central bed, a top spinning out of control. She doesn't scream it out, but her motive is clear. Look at me! Look at me! She takes after her mother. Fortunately, there's no one else in the room with us and I indulge her until she staggers, dizzy with motion, and plops down hard on the floor.

"Let's look at the flowers," I say, before she can start to cry.

We bend over the mass of potted plants. The poinsettias glow like jewels, like hard candy. Their colour entices Emily, and she reaches for the petals. I remember they're poisonous.

"No, we don't pick the flowers. Leave them for other people to enjoy." That lecturing tone. I'm withering into a pursed-mouth schoolteacher. A caricature. I despise this role, which is forced upon me more and more often. In any case, it does no good. Emily doesn't listen. She grabs, pulling petals.

"Emily, I said no." I attempt to pry open her fingers, extract the treasure. She holds on, clenching chubby fingers tighter around petals that ooze like blood. But I'm stronger and I win. I force her hand open, and brush the petals back onto the black dirt. I fight the temptation to give her a sharp smack on the hands. Instead, I say, "They're poisonous. Don't pick poinsettias."

Emily throws herself on the tiled floor, stretched full length in a display of grief at my callous selfishness. "No, no, no." A word she knows well.

"Emily, the floor is dirty. Get up."

She ignores me.

"Fine." I'm not about to reach down, haul her up by the arm. It's an action I've seen many exasperated parents perform, the grab and yank, the suppressed exclamations to stop crying, act your age. I walk over to the bench, sit down.

Emily continues her prima donna act, fake sobs and all. I wonder if it

works at home. Would it work if I was more emotionally attached?

Last year, Emily fell off a slide at the playground and cut her chin.

"When I saw her," Maureen said, after the trip to Emergency, after the tears and comforting, when the only remaining evidence was two tiny stitches, barely visible, "when I saw Emily with blood pouring down her face, I realized that a piece of my heart is outside my body."

A ludicrous statement. I would never have expected Maureen to say something like that. It's as if giving birth has destroyed her sense of humour. Yet I could understand. The power of a metaphor—your heart outside your body. A piece of you, gone.

Are there spirit houses for lost children, the ones who haunt your house? She was so small, my lost child. Born two months early. I was so sure, even after three miscarriages. Sure that this time everything would work out.

We named her Spirit. The grief counsellor at the hospital told us to pick an unfamiliar name. Ryan wanted something else, but I insisted. I insisted on the picture too, her small form swaddled in blankets, her face blue, like the statues I saw in Bangkok. Every week I place flowers before my makeshift shrine.

I've stopped watching Emily for a moment, absorbed in the past. When I look over, she is just disappearing, a blur of pink running down the broad ramp. The hydraulic doors swing open wheezily and she's gone.

Maureen is at the table. Jasmine sits placidly in her stroller, clutching her panda with the ripped ear.

"Where's Emily?" I ask. "Did she run down here?"

"She's missing?" Maureen jumps up, grabs her black sweater at the throat. The gesture is so histrionic that I want to laugh. But I don't.

"Where is she? Why did you let her out of your sight?"

"I told her not to pick the flowers and she took off. The doors open automatically."

Maureen is already gone, running towards the entrance. I hear her cry breathlessly, "Did a little girl in a pink sweater run by?" but I don't hear the reply. I walk up the ramp to the temperate Pavilion, calling, "Emily." I won't run in a gesture of panic. Unless she managed to open the double glass doors leading outside, she's still in the building, probably hiding in one of the other pavilions. I often play hide-and-seek at her house, counting to ten while she hides behind bathroom doors and under beds. "Where's Emily?" I'll call before she pops out of her hiding place, screaming, "Here I am." For her, this is a game.

I try to believe this. There's no sign of her as the door swings open. Images flash through my mind—Emily hit by a car out in the parking lot, Emily kidnapped, Emily face down in the pool of water below the bare

elm trees. All it takes is one instant of inattention. All my fault. Like the wicked fairy at the christening, I trail bad luck behind me.

"Emily," I yell. No answer. She's hiding. I know she's hiding. But my heart pounds in my ears so that I can barely hear. I can't catch my breath. "Emily."

Beneath a bare magnolia tree, an elderly couple sits on a bench. Both white-haired, shrunk into themselves.

"Is Emily about this high?" the man asks, holding the flat of his palm at the level of the bench's back. I nod. "She ran up that way."

I hurry around the curving path, past the goldfish pond, the oak tree with a few clinging dead leaves, the rhododendron bushes. At the little bridge, Emily swings from the top log.

"Emily, why did you run away?" I grab her arm as she attempts to sprint by me. She pulls. I swing her up on my hip. "You scared me." She hides her face in my shoulder.

"I'm sorry," she whispers. How quickly we learn that word and its power. I hug her, feeling that fragile vulnerability of small limbs.

I walk slowly down the ramp. "She's here," I call at the bottom. "She's fine." Maureen rushes over, grabs Emily from my arms. A sudden emptiness. I'm reminded once again of my insignificance to their lives. I should feel relief. Instead, thick anger surges through me, so strong I cannot speak.

I walk away. Maureen calls my name, but I ignore her. Pulling on my coat, I push open the outside door, which would have been too heavy for a small child to open. I know Maureen believes that somehow I broke the rules, didn't placate the spirits, left some rite undone. She has backed away, afraid that my bad-luck shadow will fall upon her house.

Gillian Wigmore

spring breakup

he wants to catch the fish, he's so patient, a purist—he ties his own flies, then tries them even when spoons are working. he helps me. he makes me a fish bonker out of a root. he scoops my fish out of the water, lays it down flapping, then smashes its head in.

I always catch the fish because I try so hard not to. he sets it all up—pulls the boat down the rocks, fills the gas tank, runs the motor, brings the smokes. he ties the lure on and throws it out of the boat. I read and catch fish that knock my book off my lap and put my cigarette out in the bloody slosh round my feet when I stand up to reel them in.

onshore he nails the burbot through the skull to a board in order to peel it, but when he peels it, it wiggles. we both jump back. when I start to cry he gives up, loosens the needle-nosed pliers from the skin and we go down to the boat. marriage should always be like this—a motoring away together from horror to open water.

fishing after breakup, after that second false start into spring, the sun soaks into the backs of our arms, the parts in our hair and burns our noses. we hunker down, sheltered from the wind by the lifejackets we bought ourselves last christmas. we stare and reel, stare and reel. is this what you'd call a mackerel sky? yep. love, I've got one on.

Luisa A. Igloria

Confessions of a Would-be Yogi

Tonight I'm chewing crackers made of lentils and rice
flour, chilies, ginger, shavings of coriander.

With her thumb my roommate Lakshmi pressed them
all day into rounds between Mylar and sheets

of the *Chicago Tribune.* My gums tingle from the effort
not to sneeze, and a hot wind snakes through my gut.

But they're actually delicious. They make Pringles
look like wimps and Cheez Curls like tired

Ananda Marga monks doubled over in turmeric robes,
shaking copper cymbals. At fourteen I watched

as a girl in my class folded her legs into a perfect lotus,
flattening her palms against the floor as she swung

her petal-weight body between her arms.
She traded her name for *Shantih*, but answered

when the teachers called "Joy." She ate beans
and tofu, fruit, yogurt, unpolished rice. Some days

she wore white to purify her aura. Her sister
had been to India; from her boyfriend she knew

about incense sticks, *chakras*, and the *kundalini*—
which I thought at first was another kind of curry,

too hot to take into the mouth. Behind the carpentry shop
they read Kahlil Gibran and quoted from *Desiderata*,

intoning words like *lingam* and *yoni* as they slid
fervent hands under each other's clothes.

I wanted to be like them, to float through corridors
as if on an invisible carpet, to curl my fingers

imperceptibly into the shape of buds. I wanted
to breathe *Om* into someone's whorled navel or hairy ear

(daubed with cheap musk body oil), to wear a green and purple
tie-dyed tunic with little cut-glass mirrors sewn into the embroidery,

the kind that were on sale among the Japanese kites
and Taiwanese slippers, at D & S Fine Foods and Goods.

Rhonda Batchelor

Dry

Pods have burst, bleached grasses
surrender. A stiff wind off the water
carries autumn in its teeth.

You are round and brown
as a nut; the parts not soft
hard and shiny, the patina
of an acorn picked up and polished
in a pocket for months.

Young boys playing on the rocks
further down the slope call and wave
to a boat full of people in orange life jackets
bouncing through the strait.

Fresh from whale watching they
skim the riptide's whitecaps. Gripping
the gunnels, they don't wave back; they're
bound for shore, and the nearest bar.

You're smug and brown on the hill.
Those kids down there aren't yours
to worry about, though habit makes you check
their giddy game involving rocks and
big sticks on the ledge.

Their cries echo the gulls
riding invisible currents
in the mackerel sky.

Deep in the pocket's lining, finger what you thought
lost. Still round, and shinier still, it rattles a secret
in its brittle shell; no need
to expose it yet.

Dmitro Kremin
translated from the Ukrainian by Svetlana Ischenko & Russell Thornton

Don Quixote of the Estuary

To look at everything in Ukraine
and wave one's hand at it and dismiss it—
to try to get onto the Obukhiv highway
in the noisy old car...
If I had a horse, as I would have had in times past,
I would gallop through the lost years—
the years that are our history and that, they say, weren't legendary,
the years when our geography, they say, wasn't right.
They who brought us their animosity—
too many of them climbed into the soul!
And in the fertile black ground—iron and blood.
But now, not much iron...
and the cells of the blood
white because of powdered poison and chlorine—
and no one recognizable enough anymore
to be called by name.
To earn bread, the workers of my country
now go to the country of Cervantes and Lorca.
On Khreschatic Street in Kyiv, "ladies" and "madams"
share the riches of the land with themselves.
And there was a man in Spain—
who threw himself into a windmill with a spear...

Kanina Dawson

Man from Uruzgan

A man may or may not
be believed, his one
glass eye fastened
to my hand, a bird
out of bread

My brother is dead.

In a room of old
ass, couch smelling of sweat,
his cigarette is the burning
branch, flange of a hundred year
game called *give*

He wiggles a tooth, *The Taliban tried*
to take me too

but then
they let me live

Disconnected

Bomber with a bloody ruff, mutt
shaking out the mane. Where was I

(married, steeped, hip deep in the green)

when I saw the hole
his face should be

A mouth space sounding out the open
bone endings, careful
as a tongue running tooth

the air hits
and makes pain

This man is built the same
as any man

(I might fish from some place among the ferns)

Spiracle, spine hanging down
he was getting letters ready to burn
the day before I drove by. The arabic

instruction for love. Let it be lexical

*(daughters in their bare feet, redeeming
eggshells and ash from the compost heap)*

or a paper feather fire

where they keep
finding teeth

Jeramy Dodds

Bugle Ballad of a Home-Schooled Child

The crabapple seeds
eventually grew through
the tongue and groove pine
breaking the news to father,
of the spoon-dug tunnel
I hollowed below.
My conductor's wand
was the bough where owls sat
with their jowls packed with hoot.
Barrelfire eyes burning the brush-offs
I gave public school girls. Father's
pipe-bomb science could not explain
the landfill of clouds in the birdbath.
This land, a crime scene of weather clues.
This bugle, hack-sawed from a copper still.
This is no patter of rain painting the window wet.
This is father revving his black Corvette and driving
the oak-boughed roads to the place we will winter.
And I will practice beneath the buried pets.
My fingers on their haunches, hunching
on the three brass pistons that raise the gates
for Joshuas to flee.

Sunrise with Seamonster

after the painting by John Mallord William Turner

With a tall Tanqueray I watch the tornado footage:
aerials bent to mantis elbows while the cornrows rose—
each stock and cob a rocket that shot to clog
God's fore-finger as it gutted the lowlands.

Five-o-four a.m. and the telephone bring
brings the hues of Caleb's inhale:
a flashlight's tusk through the tobacco kiln's dark:
"Jeramy, something's landed out back."

By fulldawn I'm at the reveal:
an automobile in a field.
An F-150 King Cab covered with kelp.
That chassis is all we know about
the Kraken. In the right light—
the invisible ink of Andromeda's palm
on the passenger's side pane.

Matt Santateresa

Tempur-Pedic Mattress

It bears my heft, in fact (if you
believe the infomercial, and why not)
it memorizes each sleep-induced
residual twist, and bony turn
of a dream's phrasing in and out
of body experience.

All in the ample moulding foam
subsumes a somniac becoming
sheer memory in the polycollidial
polysyllabic molecules
under interlocking spaces.

Something imagined takes place
in angstroms, keeps charts (if
you really believe) to recall each
loving position, each ache and moan
deeply piled, archived
so the body laying down to rest utters
a prayer in compound conditional sentences
and the mattress sighs wherever the unlasting
shapes about to become god's sleeping host go.

Leonard Cohen Concert, Douglas Mental Hospital, Montreal, 1970

When the patients enter the stark hall in single file
they are in rumpled soiled cream uniforms.
Some dance nervously, others babble like saviours
with bruised temples, mussed hair, some
alight on tattered leatherette folding chairs, or stand
picking their nose, others smell metallic, urinous.

They were maybe once the best minds, definite articles
in symptomatic times somehow become
lost in the howl, and ardour banging and bellowing
alone in love, as we, who paid in normal paying ways
sit in our discomfort, until.

Lenny enters, diminutive, hunched, in white shirt and jeans;
ceiling fans thrum at low speed, a summer hot night,
he approaches the mike. "This is for Suzanne"
and someone tourettes, "Delirious schmuck, delirious schmuck!"

There is no telling in the dark which one of us blurted it out.
Lenny is calm and delivers the song
as we are remotely engaged in his sorrowful melody,
again distracted as some dementia banshee wails.

Yet, we have come through crazy chaotic traffic in our providential
machines to listen, to be in his minor key, in his evening hymns.

J.R. Myers

Entropy

I was back in town for a couple of weeks, passing time at my mother's house while I tried to figure out which bridges I had burned and which ones I was going to wish I had. My mother and I were at opposite ends of the couch in the living room. The curtains were closed and the television was on like it usually was at her place. She was wearing big hoop earrings and a white housecoat as if half-prepared for a man to suddenly appear in her life, half-prepared for another night at home watching game shows. There was a plastic bowl of buttered popcorn in her lap.

My mother was more or less content to be idle, but just sitting there made the world move too slowly for me, made me feel like I was waiting for something only I didn't know what. "If you have to fidget," she finally said, "go outside. It's like you're ten years old again."

I got up and wandered into the kitchen where I had a look in the fridge, just out of habit, then plucked the handset from the cordless phone. "You ordering takeout?" my mother called.

"Wasn't planning on it," I hollered back.

"Well if you are, I wouldn't mind Chinese. But don't order it just on my account. And none of that tofu stuff."

I let myself out the kitchen door and sat on the back steps. It was a warm evening, the air humid and close. From somewhere in the neighbourhood came the raucous sounds of kids splashing in a plastic wading pool. I set the phone down, lit a cigarette and had a look around. The lawn was badly in need of cutting and the gangly cedar hedge had not been trimmed. The door of the storage shed was jammed open with rust. I knew that up and down the street, the yards would be pretty much the same. It was a post-war, blue-collar neighbourhood, steadily working its way downhill. And it made me think: things don't stay the same if you neglect them, they keep on getting worse. It's called entropy. I remembered that from high school science class. I picked the phone up and punched the numbers I had memorized.

Gordon answered. I guess the odds were fifty-fifty. "Shee-at," he said when he recognized my voice. Then, with his hand carelessly muffling the handset, "Honey, guess who it is. Jack."

A faint and irritated voice replied. I couldn't make out the words.

"Cindy says hello," Gordon said, speaking into the phone again. "How the hell are you, anyway?"

"I'm fine," I told him. I pictured Cindy somewhere in the house with Gordon and thought how wrong that image seemed.

"You know," Gordon broke into my reverie before I could drift too far, "I was thinking about your sorry ass the other day. I saw a motorcycle parked over on Maplethorpe. Looked just like that old Jawa you used to drive. I thought it might be the same one. How many could there have been?"

"Wasn't mine," I said. "I totalled it."

"Damn it. When was that?"

"A few years back. After I moved away."

"Too bad. It'd be worth something if you still had it."

"I suppose."

"Hey, let me guess what happened. You spun out at a corner or something. You always drove that thing like your pants were on fire and you had to find a hydrant."

I told Gordon he was right, more or less. I guessed I had been going kind of fast. It had happened during that too brief period when I thought I was invincible. But I didn't really want to go into all that, didn't feel like going over old times at all. Discussing them was like reliving them, which was more than I had the stomach for right then.

When the silence had stretched to several seconds, Gordon, in a suddenly quiet voice, said, "You know, it's customary when you call someone after a half-dozen years of acting like you never want to see his ugly face again, to help the conversation along a little bit. Maybe mention why you're calling."

I took one last drag on my cigarette and flicked it away. "I guess I just phoned to say hello," I said.

"I think we've taken care of that."

In the next street over, a car in need of a muffler started up. The driver revved the engine. What could I say to Gordon? That I was at loose ends? That I was curious? Hopeful? Dreaming in Technicolor?

"Well," Gordon tried again. "How about this? What have you been up to? And where the hell are you? Still living in Toronto?"

"I'm at my mother's for a few days."

"You're in town? Your significant other, what's her name, she must be a doctor now, Louise, she with you?"

I thought of explaining. Decided against it. "No."

"That's okay," Gordon said. "She's probably busy saving lives. Listen. How about a beer?"

I thought about the alternative: unbroken hours in front of the

television with my mother. "All right." I tried to sound pleased with the idea. "When?"

"How about right fucking now? It's Monday night. What the hell else is there to do?"

I thought of Cindy listening in on Gordon's side of the conversation, wondered how she would feel about him and me picking up threads.

I answered the door when Gordon rang the bell. He shook my hand with a brotherhood sort of grip, arms at a forty-five degree angle, the way we used to do when we were in high school. "How's it hanging?" he said.

"Good to see you," I said. He smiled when he saw that I at least halfway meant it.

"And how are you doing, Mrs. D," he called into the house. He winked at me. Gordon had always liked my mother. "Okay, she's lazy," he'd agree when I complained to him about the way she sat around the house. "But is that a crime? And she wants a special someone in her life. Who the hell doesn't? Just take it easy it easy on her once in a while, will you. At least she's not a lush like half the parents in the neighbourhood."

My mother didn't stir from her place on the couch when she heard Gordon's voice, but she sounded pleased to hear it. "Come and visit for a spell," she answered. We heard her slap the cushion beside her in invitation.

"Can't, Mrs. D," Gordon responded. "We're running late. We've got tickets for the opera." He winked at me again.

My mother loved the way Gordon teased. It was my private thought that if he had been twenty years older Gordon might have been that elusive perfect man she was always hoping for. "You're a shameless liar," she chided him. I wished my relations with her were half as good.

Gordon had arrived in a monster pickup truck. It was so big, I had to climb up into it. When we were both inside and buckled up Gordon noticed me looking around. "It's a hosermobile, right?" he said.

"I wasn't thinking that."

"It's true. Cindy hates the thing. But I tell you what. It's shit on gas and a pain to park, but driving around in this thing, I always feel like a major stud."

I looked over at him leaning forward to put the key in the ignition. He was big, but still boyish-looking, his wavy brown hair in need of a trim, his cheeks even pudgier than they used to be. The truck suited him. He paused before inserting the key and turned toward me, the same goofy smile I remembered from high school erupting on his face. "Seriously," he said.

Lennie's, the bar Gordon took me to, was small and almost empty. The

last I remembered of the place it was a coffee house with folk music on Friday nights and candles in Chianti bottles on the tables. Now it was more of a mini-tavern: small, round tables with wooden chairs. The lights down low to hide the grime. A television was hanging in a corner with a baseball game on. We sat at the bar and Gordon held up two fingers to the bartender.

"Cheers," Gordon said before downing half his mug. It was the way he always drank. Big gulps until he got the first couple settled inside him.

I took a sip from my own beer and looked in the mirror that hung behind the bar. There we were. Gordon had put on weight, but looked content with his lot in life. He was never one for introspection. Me, I had lost weight if anything and my hair was thinning. Nonetheless, the two of us sitting side-by-side, drinks in hand, was a scene right out of the dreary past. We were just a wee bit older, that's all. A little worn around the edges. I turned my eyes down from the view in the mirror, stared into my beer instead.

We drank in silence for a while. After he had finished his first beer and started on his second, Gordon nudged me and nodded toward the TV. "You following baseball?"

I glanced up at the screen. I had no idea who was playing. I confessed I wasn't.

"Football. Hockey?"

I shook my head. "Not in a while," I said.

"Soccer, bowling, tiddlywinks? Anything?"

All I could do was shrug.

Gordon took a drink and paused to think things over. "You used to be a lot easier to talk to," he said. "Speak to me, Jackie boy. I feel like you're holding back."

I had been living a life I didn't think Gordon could relate to, but I tried to come up with something. "Well," I said. "Louise and I joined this film club. Once a month we go see a movie from Poland or some other place. Sometimes they're pretty good. Funny once in a while."

Gordon stuck out his lower lip. "Sounds interesting." He said it in a monotone then ordered another draft.

"Horseshit," I said.

Gordon turned and grinned at me. "Yeah, horseshit. I was trying to be polite. It sounds bloody awful. So what else can I pry out of you? What've you been doing to pay the bills?"

"Different stuff. Currently between gigs. I was a driving instructor for a while."

"You? Jack Pants-on-fire?"

"Yeah. It didn't last long."

"I wouldn't think so."

It felt good to laugh. When that died down, I said: "And what about you?"

"Smooth deflection. Well, I'm still working for Parks and Rec, managing an arena now. The money's okay. I'm doing all right, I guess."

"That's great." A little piece of me envied the stability he seemed to have; a bigger piece wanted to run the other way.

There was another of the pauses that seemed to keep cropping up. Then Gordon said, "You haven't asked about Cindy." The subject I had been avoiding.

"Yeah, sorry," I said. "How is she?"

"She's good. She finished her diploma. Works in a cancer lab now. Not something that's going to appeal to everybody, but she likes it."

"She's got the head for that sort of thing."

"Whatever the hell that means." Gordon paused to check the score on the TV then said, without looking back at me, "I expect you're wondering if she hates your guts."

Good old Gordon. I *was* wondering, but didn't want to admit it.

"Hate is a strong word," he went on. "She was kind of pissed there for a while after you left. Still won't tell me exactly what happened. You ran off with this med student, this Louise. I gather you popped it on her rather suddenly."

"You gather right. I didn't handle it very well."

Gordon nodded then sipped his beer. "Well stuff happens," he said. He wasn't making eye contact, but he kept on talking. "You wouldn't want to tell me about it, would you? I mean, I'm kind of curious, seeing how it affects me in the end. Everyone thought you two were a permanent item then all of sudden it was over and no one knew why. I kind of feel like Cindy and I have been living in a sort of limbo because of it."

I was surprised to see him looking kind of sad, or maybe bothered is a better word, but I figured it was better than him looking angry. "Sure," I said. "But it's not much of a story. And it doesn't make me look so good."

"That's okay, you never looked that good in the first place."

I was about to start explaining when he held up his hand to stop me. He was looking a little drunk already. For some reason I thought he was going to give me some sort of warning, but all he wanted was to order more beer. "Proceed," he said when we had fresh mugs. I could see that he was nervous.

"Well," I began, "I met Louise. At the park on our lunch hours. We sat on the same bench with our brown bags. I wasn't looking for anything to happen. Neither of us was. We didn't flirt, we just started talking. I can't explain it any better than that. She was bright and fun and saw things in me

I didn't even know were there. Good things. She thought I was smart."

"Whoa."

"Yeah, I know. But being with her I felt like Superman. Like the sky was the limit. I could do anything, be anything. I didn't feel trapped in my life here anymore." I stopped to see how Gordon was taking it. He didn't seem to be reacting. "I don't know what else to say," I went on. "Things got crazy fast. Two weeks after we met I was knocking on the door of Cindy's apartment telling her there was someone waiting for me in a car downstairs and that I was moving to Toronto with her."

I gave Gordon time to think about it. "Sort of romantic, I guess," he finally said. "Unless you're Cindy. Did she throw things or anything, march downstairs and kick in headlights?"

"Cindy? Come on. I don't remember her saying anything. She just looked at me and listened while I spouted apologies. And even when I finished and waited for her to say something, she didn't. She just stared at me. With those eyes, you know."

Gordon nodded. He knew the eyes as well as I did. Big, brown, impossible to lie to.

"She gave me a chance to reconsider. She didn't say it, but I knew she was thinking that if I changed my mind right then and there, if I woke up to what a stupid thing I was doing, she'd let it pass. She wouldn't throw it in my face during some later argument. It wouldn't be forgotten exactly, but it would be locked away someplace where it wouldn't bother us." I let my voice trail off.

Gordon's head was still nodding. After a few moments he said, "I figured it must have been something like that."

"I guess I feel kind of badly not telling you about it. After I moved I heard through my mother that you and Cindy had gotten together. It made sense to me. Maybe relieved my guilt a little."

He grunted, lost in thought.

"I should have called," I went on. "I should have kept in touch."

"No big deal. You had your new life to live."

I took a drink, felt relieved to have gotten as much as I had off my chest.

"Of course," Gordon started up again, "the next question is, how come you're here now having a beer with me?"

"Because you suggested it."

He didn't bother to reply. He was brooding and seemed in no mood for games.

"Well," I said, "since I'm spilling my guts, I may as well empty them completely. Louise and I have gone our separate ways."

Gordon cocked an eyebrow. "Your idea?"

"Not really. No. Hers, actually."

"She dump you for someone?"

"As a matter of fact, yes."

His head was nodding again. "So what? You supported her through med school and when the money finally starts rolling in, she dumps you?"

"More or less."

"Let me guess, another doctor."

"A lawyer."

"Same diff. You going to sue her ass?"

"I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. It doesn't seem right somehow."

"You're feeling like you deserved what happened?"

"Maybe. I don't know."

"You dumped and then you got dumped. Some sort of cosmic justice."

"Something like that."

Gordon was on his third or fourth beer. I'd lost count. I could tell he wasn't finished talking. I waited for him to continue, which he did after crunching through a fistful of the pretzels the bartender had set out in a bowl.

"Since we're being so honest and discussing our feelings like a couple of wankers," he finally said, "I've got to tell you that things with Cindy and me aren't so shit hot right now either."

"Why? What's going on?"

"Nothing really. No big fights or anything. We just seem out of synch, you know?"

"No, I don't know."

"Yes you do. She's smart and I'm an asshole. It's a bad combination. We can't seem to agree on anything."

"Hey, come on. I bet you're great for each other. You're both good people. If there are problems, I'm sure you can work them out." Even as I spoke, part of me was hoping that what I was saying wasn't true. He seemed to sense this.

There was a surly tone to his voice when he spoke. "Everyone knows you and Cindy were a better fit."

"Obviously not."

"Obvious nothing."

He had raised his voice. There was tension between us. I'd known getting into all this relationship stuff was a mistake. Calling Gordon and Cindy's number had been a bad idea. I wanted us to finish our drinks and get out of there. But Gordon wasn't ready to leave. He wasn't ready to let things alone.

"If this thing with the doctor is over maybe you and Cindy ought to get back together," he said.

"Don't even go there, Gordon."

He brooded some more. I was ready for a drunken tirade. It wouldn't have been the first time Gordon blew a fuse after having a few. But then I noticed his head sag over his drink and I realized he wasn't in the mood for a fight. "Hey," he finally said, trying to brighten up. "This is bullshit."

"Yeah it is."

"I'd say we shouldn't be arguing over broads, but that would be crude."

"Yeah it would."

After a couple more swigs of his beer, Gordon said, "I've got an idea. Help us forget our problems."

"An idea like what?"

"You remember Tom Silver?"

"From school? Yeah, sure."

"Class A slime ball. Always patting the girls' asses, making fun of those of us who couldn't get a date? You know what he's doing now?"

I shook my head.

"He's got a strip club. Over on Leeder. Called Stacy's."

"Figures, I guess."

"Actually, it's not that bad a place. You'd be surprised who goes there. Judges, lawyers."

I didn't believe it, but I didn't argue. "Let's head over there," Gordon said. "Take our minds off things."

Going to some worse place than we were already in was not what I felt like doing. "I don't know, Gordon. Maybe we ought to call it a night."

"Come on. You're a single guy. It's our first night getting reacquainted. Let's have some fun."

He put a hand on my shoulder. Bygones seemed to be bygones.

I drove because Gordon was in no condition to. The truck handled surprisingly well. Still, I was glad there was a decent-sized and almost empty parking lot at the club so I didn't have to manoeuvre much.

Stacy's was in a semi-industrial area in the east end of town. There was a bingo hall across the street and a used office furniture place next door. The club itself looked like a fortified bunker: tiny barred and blacked out windows, steel door, everything painted blacks and greys except the neon sign with the first two letters burned out. "acy's"

Gordon insisted on paying the cover charge for both of us. We were shown to a tiny table near the front. There was a pretty wide choice

available. I didn't look to see who the other patrons were, but I'd bet money there weren't any judges and lawyers in a hole like that. The club didn't have any of the class that Gordon had tried to make it out as having. It was dark and dingy and throbbing with generic dance music. A skinny woman with short blonde hair was on the stage performing.

We ordered beers. After a bit, Tom Silver showed up at our table. He was pear-shaped now, dressed in a suit, his hair slicked back with gel. I was embarrassed to have him see me in his place. He treated Gordon like a regular and was polite to me, even friendly. He said he'd heard I was living in Toronto with some doctor, was a little surprised to see me back in town. "Just visiting," I said. He smiled, smirked would be more like it, as if he knew better than I did just how long my visit was going to end up being.

"Still a slime ball," I said to Gordon when Silver had oozed off somewhere.

Gordon and the dancer were making eye contact. He was distracted when he answered me. "Yeah, but he's all right," he said.

The dancer turned her back. She bent down to look at us through her legs and flick her tongue. It was not the least bit appealing, but Gordon seemed to find it fascinating.

"Does Cindy mind you coming here?" I surprised myself by blurting out.

He took his eyes off the stage. "What the hell kind of question is that?"

I didn't have an answer.

He turned to watch the woman dancing again, but I could see he wasn't engrossed the way he had been. Then he seemed to make some kind of decision because he shuffled around in his chair to face me. He grasped his beer in both hands. "I've got to ask you something," he said, raising his voice just enough to be heard over the music.

"Shoot," I told him.

"When you called today, were you hoping to get Cindy, or me?"

"Hey, I wanted to talk to you, of course."

He was unsteady from the drink, but he looked at me severely. "You're a lousy fucking liar."

I was relieved when the lights came on and the music stopped. Evidently, we'd caught the last act. The few customers in the place, except us, were hustled out the door. I presumed our special status was Silver's doing. In any event, Gordon didn't seem surprised by it. I assumed he had enjoyed the privilege before.

With the lights up, the room was even more depressing than it had been in the dark. Everything was painted a flat black, but was scuffed

and worn. A couple of staff members, big men in sweat-wrinkled white shirts began to tidy up, turning chairs upside down on tables and wiping down the bar. The dancer who had been up on stage, still naked, wandered toward to the bar to get a drink. She was pale and underweight. I wondered if she ever saw the sun.

Gordon watched the woman walk across the room. There was no attempt at seductiveness in the way she moved. She looked tired more than anything. And the staff weren't interested. They had seen it all before. Gordon, though, kept his eyes on her. As she made it to the bar, he slowly rose from our table as if drawn by an invisible power. "I've got to go talk to her," he said.

"Hey," I protested, but he was already making his way across the room. The woman saw him coming and smiled wearily.

Not knowing what else to do, I sipped at the dregs of my beer and waited. After a couple of minutes Gordon and the dancer took a stroll together and disappeared behind a door. The staff must have been busy elsewhere by then because when I looked around the room I saw I was by myself. All the other tables were covered in upside down chairs. Everything was quiet.

It was a lousy place to be alone.

Elizabeth Bachinsky

from Critical Incidents

for B.S. and R.W.

1

When we got there, it was clear
the old folks were dead. The whole
damn top of their Caddie cut clean
off by the two-ton truck that flew
straight overhead, tipped, and filled
the vehicle with gravel. Sometimes
it takes a minute to figure a scene.
The trucks blaze their lights, scream
Jesus murder. Always someone
to save. But this one struck me strange.
I remember I looked away up Signal
Hill, in the direction where the gravel
truck lost its brakes. Gulls circled. It
was Sunday. My Captain said, "You
dig out the bodies. I'll go find the heads."

2

You learn to laugh. I mean, you've got to learn to laugh
when a guy shows up, the job gone wrong, and he's tied

into a noose he can't unloose so he's strangling slow,
the stupid schmuck, so you cut his rope with one hard nip by

the same stretched neck he'd hoped to hang from
his automatic garage door opener. What did that look like?

You've got to wonder. Maybe spend a night trying to see
him in your mind: that sad skinny guy lifted bit by bit

til he's on his tiptoes as the door rattles down on its castors,
then (snap!) the wheels roll back and cut the rope and he's down

and gasping. Well...good for him. We all need time. I'd call that
a gesture. What a day. I lost it, sat him down on a bench, gave him

a glass of water he couldn't swallow.

3

Lightning doesn't strike the house. It strikes
the fence posts around the property. Seven hits, minimum.

But there's also a gas line out in the yard. It's buried
in the lawn, and when that lightning hits, it takes a charge

due to someone's shoddy installation. Electricity zips
through the house and back out along the line. Blows

a good-sized hole in the side of the house where the gas meter
ignites, explodes, and shoots off through the trees. A second

explosion erupts underground. Tears a mouth in the line
itself and gas hisses into a drain below the house. That's how

the gas seeps in. How Mrs. Miller lights a smoke, there's a flash,
the house is a shadow in ash.

Heather Cadsby

One of us is in a Mohawk cemetery

It was another pleasant
afternoon near the river.
There was supper in the slow cooker
and no one was curled in the storm sewer.
A dog barked Blue Sky two times.
It was a semiotic moment you said. Then you said
actually more 'pataphysical.
And to let myself in I said Meta Meta
Met a man with seven wives. But you
were daydreaming about some girl. I knew
you didn't hear me. Ears are too close to brain.
One newly buried mother leads to another
and ours are eternally elsewhere. Have you ever
loved anything more? Didn't you?
I will warn you: I don't know these mushrooms
and you could wait all summer for someone
to lean into your life.
Or just say Me Me.
I stand corrected: You You.

Liz Dolan

The Fall

When Morgan, twenty months, plants
her tiny feet like opal stones between the posts
of the porch rail and heaves herself with such force
that I, a sky away, watching, suck air,
stretch my arms to cradle her
right foot already skimming grass
left foot heavy with dread,
am too late to keep her
from flipping over like a bisquick flapjack.
She drops six feet and lands safely on her back.
For one second the surprise on her sun-lit face,
as though she suddenly knows what loss is,
predicts the surprise on her brother's face,
who will decades later
after a bachelor bash for his sister's
intended at the Taj Mahal,
he, the best man, will dump his buddies,
misplace his room, snooze
on the hood of his car
in the rooftop garage and at four a.m.
slide off like hot butter descending
six flights to hollow earth below. Caught
on security tape he'll beam
as if he were jack-knifing,
slicing air. At the last
he'll throw back his head, his mouth
a split persimmon, reach out
to catch his sister's scopic, ringless hand.

Michael Eden Reynolds

A-frame

Hello, I announce, though this isn't quite right and I know it.
I'm in someone's backyard and don't wish to be taken
to say they're in mine: mortgaged and pinned at this ecotone's edge
a mere ten-minute walk by the course of a trail. The word

is just the frame of language I enter the scene through. Upstrung
ridgepole: hinge to a mud-worn tarpaulin pinned open at sixty
degrees to the earth. Spruceboughs leant and packed with moss
against the blue plastic tent to make it not one. The ground

is frozen now. A split white bale of fibreglass
beside the shelter drew me from the path:
a spot of snow inside the leafless trees
before the snow's arrival—a plan abandoned,

left for squirrels to make
a fitful winter of, they can't resist. *Hello,*
I say again. The moss-lined bed, dull
shimmer of the zippered nylon bag a snarl

of coming from and going to. The forest
deepens, leans upon itself so every
branch and trunk becomes a doorway.

I hand myself through passages
unstopping 'til the evening
air gives way to snow.

Once more,
Hello.

Window Polishing

A tonic, sharp, four-cornered autumn afternoon—
and through, a shadow in the lit though slightly gritty kitchen
polishes the countertop to no effect.
A dickeybird, advocate of evergreen

and depth, just as far from here and perched upon
a limb in both directions, protests rebounding cubist chirps
against the pane. The shadow falters, swoons
the perpendicular and leaps up plaid and

fleshy on the glass. The hinge of ladder stepped
beneath the window kilters on the grass, and flies the woozy
shadow from the kitchen trying to stop it—

Atop the shadow, chlorophyll, ammonia and toothy

lip—preponderance of surfaces—I lift
my head obliquely from the nostrilling grass
and set it giddy, sidelong adrift the sunsponged earth.
The bird now bobbing in the surf of blades
is drawing seeds out of the turf.

Contributors

Elizabeth Bachinsky is the author of *Curio* and *Home Of Sudden Service.* Her poetry has been nominated for the Bronwen Wallace Award and The Governor General's Award and has been translated into French and Chinese. The poems in this issue are based on interviews she held with volunteer firefighters from Mission, BC, and St John's, Newfoundland.

P.R. Barr is working on a manuscript of poetry and one of short fiction.

Rhonda Batchelor is the author of three poetry books, *Bearings* (Brick Books, 1985), *Interpreting Silence,* and *Weather Report* (Beach Holme Publishers, 1994, 2000). A chapbook from Leaf Press, *And roll from me like water: the erotic tanka suite,* was published in the fall of 2006. She is currently the Assistant Editor of *The Malahat Review.*

Katherine Cameron received an MA in Creative Writing from the University of New Brunswick. Her fiction and poetry have been published in *CV2, Descant, The Fiddlehead, Lichen, The New Quarterly, Prairie Fire, subTERRAIN,* and *The South Dakota Review.* She is an instructor at Concordia University College.

Heather Cadsby is the author of three books of poetry. The most recent, *A Tantrum of Synonyms* (Wolsak and Wynn, 1997), was a finalist for the Pat Lowther Award.

Ian Cockfield's fiction, nonfiction, and poetry have appeared in various Canadian journals, including *Prairie Fire, Event, Rampike,* and the *Carleton Arts Review,* and in the anthology *Exact Fare Only II* (Anvil Press, 2003). He has a MFA in Creative Writing from UBC and is a past President of the BC Association of Magazine Publishers. He is the Managing Editor of *Event,* lives in Vancouver, and enjoys the use of all four limbs.

Kanina Dawson's work has been published in *Other Voices, Event, subTERRAIN, Prairie Fire, Room of One's Own,* and *Descant.* She is currently writing about her experiences in war-torn Afghanistan, from which she recently returned.

Jeramy Dodds grew up in Orono, Ontario. He is the winner of the 2006 Bronwen Wallace Memorial Award. He currently lives outside of Uxbridge, Ontario.

Liz Dolan is most proud of the alternative school she ran in the Bronx and her eight grandchildren who live on the next block. A Pushcart Prize nominee in both fiction and poetry, she has also received a fellowship in poetry from the Delaware Division of the Arts and is now on the poetry board of *Philadelphia Stories.*

Gord Grisenthwaite loves "to have written," but struggles with "to write." He's of Nlaka'pamux and Irish/English origin, born in and raised by his grandmother in North Vancouver. Currently, he's a graphic designer and he writes for fun.

Luisa A. Igloria is an Associate Professor in the MFA Creative Writing Program and Department of English at Old Dominion University (Norfolf, Virginia). Originally from Baguio City in the Philippines, Luisa is the eleven-time recipient of the Carlos Palanca Memorial Award for Literature. She has published nine books including *Encanto* (Anvil, 2004), *In The Garden of the Three Islands* (Moyer Bell/Asphodel, 1995), and most recently *Trill & Mordent* (WordTech Editions, 2005). www.luisaigloria.com

Svetlana Ischenko was born in Mykolaiv, Ukraine, and has lived in Canada since 2001. She has published two books of poems (in Ukraine), *Chorales of Heaven and Earth* (Mozhlivosti of Kimmeria, Mykolaiv, 1995) and *B-Sharp* (Vyr, Kyiv, 1998). Her latest book of poems, *The Rain Dance of Dana* (Marigold Publications, 2006), was published in Canada. Her selected poems, *The Trees Fly Up in Couples*, is due out in Ukraine in 2008.

Dmitro Kremin is one of the leading poets of Ukraine. He won the T.G. Shevchenko prize, the highest literary award in Ukraine, in 1999, for his collection, *The Scythian Breastplate* (1997). His other collections include *The Elegy in the Troyan Wine* (2001), *Atlantis Under the Willow Tree* (2003) and, most recently, *The Hunt For the Wild Boar* (2006).

Nancy Lee's first book, *Dead Girls*, (McClelland & Stewart, 2002) was named Book of the Year by NOW Magazine, and has been published in the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, and the Netherlands. Recipient of the VanCity Book Prize, a National Magazine Award, and a Gabriel Award for Radio, Nancy Lee has served as Canadian Writer-in-Residence at the University of East Anglia in Great Britain.

Bridget Moser is a printmaker and video artist who lives in Montreal. She grew up in the suburbs of Vancouver but escaped in 2004 to enroll in the Studio Arts program at Concordia University. Her work has been exhibited in Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto.

J.R. Myers' short fiction has appeared in the *Windsor Review*, *Carousel*, and *The Toronto Star*. His nonfiction has been broadcast nationally on CBC Radio. He lives in Ottawa.

John Pass lives near Sakinaw Lake on BC's Sunshine Coast. His most recent book, *Stumbling In The Bloom* (Oolichan Books, 2005) won the Governor General's Award in 2006.

Nikki Reimer is currently based in Vancouver, BC, where she has a terrific day job. Work has appeared in *filling Station*, *dANDelion*, *NÔD*, and *Queen Street Quarterly*. A former member of the KSW collective, Nikki currently performs with the Pppoetry Band, and also likes to pretend she's a photographer or textiles artist in her spare time.

Michael Eden Reynolds' book, *Slant Room*, will be published by The Porcupine's Quill in 2009. Poems from this manuscript were shortlisted for the CBC literary awards, and received an honourable mention for the Bronwen Wallace Award, and *The Malahat Rewiew* Long Poem contest.

Matt Santateresa is a Montreal poet who has published in literary journals and is presently working on his fourth volume of poems.

Russell Thornton is a North Vancouver poet whose book *House Built of Rain* (Harbour, 2003) was a finalist for the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize, and for a ReLit Award. His most recent book is *The Human Shore* (Harbour, 2006).

Paul Tyler has lived in the Yukon, Vancouver, Brighton England, Baltimore, and now Ottawa. His poems have appeared recently in *Prairie Fire*, *Grain*, *The Antigonish Review*, and the anthology *Listening with the Ear of the Heart*. He is currently an associate editor with *Arc Poetry Magazine* and works as a library reference assistant.

Gillian Wigmore grew up in Vanderhoof, BC, graduated from the University of Victoria in 1999, and currently lives in Prince George. She has been published in *Geist*, *CV2*, *filling station*, and the *Inner Harbour Review*, among others. Her first chapbook, *home when it moves you*, was published by Creekstone Press in 2005. *soft geography*, her first full-length book of poems, will be published by Caitlin Press in Spring 2007.

Stephanie Yorke is an English student at UNB in Fredericton. Her poems have appeared in *QWERTY*, *The Fiddlehead*, and PRISM *international*, and her plays have been performed in the NotaBle Acts Theatre Festival.

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Fiction/Poetry/Drama/Translation/Creative Nonfiction

45:4

Sometimes, instead of going to either my father's or my grandmother's, I would crawl through the Brown's bathroom window and lay on the floor where Mavis Brown's bed had been. And I would talk to her until the lemon gin let me sleep.

—from "Mavis Brown" by Gord Grisenthwaite, Page 10

Fiction Contest Issue

Judge's Essay: Nancy Lee

Elizabeth Bachinsky
P.R. Barr
Rhonda Batchelor
Heather Cadsby
Katherine Cameron
Ian Cockfield
Kanina Dawson
Jeramy Dodds
Liz Dolan
Gord Grisenthwaite
Luisa A. Igloria
Svetlana Ischenko
Dmitro Kremin
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John Pass
Nikki Reimer
Michael Eden Reynolds
Matt Santateresa
Russell Thornton
Paul Tyler
Gillian Wigmore
Stephanie Yorke

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