

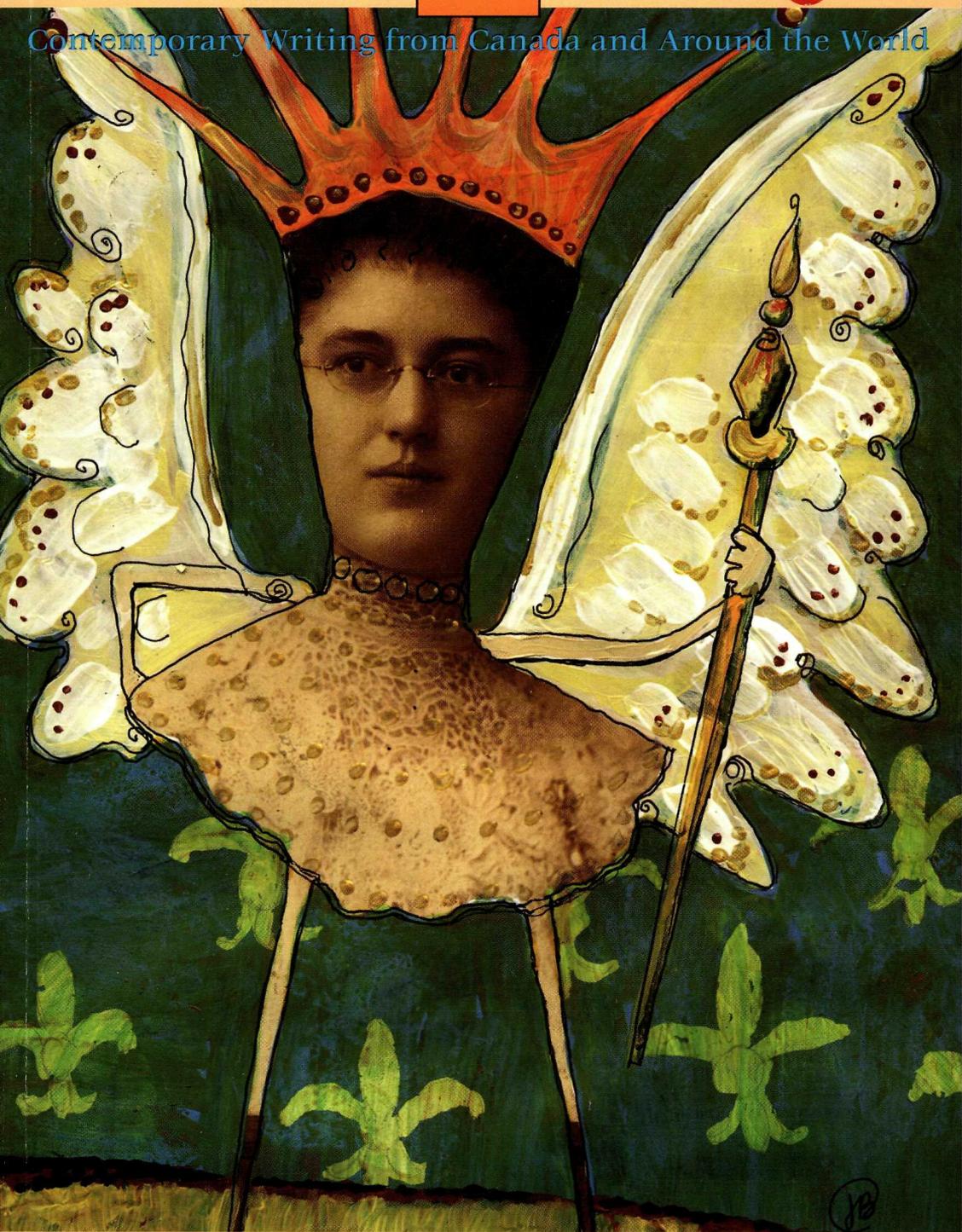
# PRISM international

Fall 2006

45:1

\$9.00

Contemporary Writing from Canada and Around the World



the 1990s, the number of people with a mental health problem has increased in the UK (Mental Health Act 1983, 1990).

There is a growing awareness of the need to improve the lives of people with mental health problems. The Department of Health (1999) has set out a vision of a new mental health system, which will be based on the following principles:

- (i) people with mental health problems should be treated as individuals, with their own needs and wishes;
- (ii) people with mental health problems should be given the opportunity to participate in decisions about their care and treatment;
- (iii) people with mental health problems should be given the opportunity to live in their own homes and communities.

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## 2006 Earle Birney Prize for Poetry

\$500 was awarded to

Sheri Benning

for her poem

"Descent from the Cross"

which appeared in PRISM 44:2

the 'information' and 'communication' fields. The 'information' field is defined as:

the study of the nature, production, distribution, use and effects of information, and the development of methods for the control of information resources [1].

The 'communication' field is defined as:

the study of the nature, production, distribution, use and effects of communication, and the development of methods for the control of communication resources [1].

The 'information science' field is defined as:

the study of the nature, production, distribution, use and effects of information and communication, and the development of methods for the control of information and communication resources [1].

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# PRISM international

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*Sheree-Lee Olson*

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## The Princess Diaspora

*Assigned by: Mr. K*

*Due date: Oct. 29*

**M**y son says to write about a diaspora you have to know where they came from. I do not know where we came from. There were the great-grandparents who left Boston under a cloud to farm in Alberta. The cloud followed them and the crops failed. It's possible the cloud had attached to them on the voyage over from England, or maybe it had followed them from the Hebridean island where they were born into melancholy. Of course the Hebrides were settled by Norse raiders too stupid to see that the weather was hardly better than at home, so what does that say about my family?

I could call my mother, but it's been awhile. Three years, in fact—since my father suggested there was nothing wrong with my son that a little discipline couldn't fix. My mother just went along. It's what she was raised to do.

That was when Kai was four. Luke says it's long enough. He says I should call, even though Luke barely speaks to his own mother and she just lives across town.

If I called it would go like this:

Hi Mom, yes it's me, no Kai's fine, no there's nothing wrong, look I wanted to ask you, no really, I just wanted to ask this one question, no *don't* get Dad, I'm *not* going to talk to Dad, *can't you bloody listen?*

Aside from the North Sea losers in my family, there's Luke's mother in North Toronto.

Kai likes Grandma Margaret; she's one of the few adults who will listen to him for the two hours it takes to enumerate the details of his current web sites. Luke says she's not actually listening. Margaret's a bit vague these days, especially about Luke's father. Key details have changed in the ten years I have been her daughter-in-law: once described as a financial whiz, Luke's father has become "that scam artist."

Anyway, Kai's supposed to be doing a modern diaspora. What he is doing, at the moment, is lying under the table, meowing at the cat.

"Kai. Get up please."

"I wish I could do the cat diaspora," Kai says. "Did you know that

housecats came from ancient Egypt? I bet Kevin's ancestors lived with King Tut. I bet Kevin is a royal cat."

People are confused to learn that Kevin is the cat and Kai is the boy. They ask if we traveled in Asia. I have never been to Asia, except in books. The name came to me when my son was a hot wet hatchling being pulled from my body. His first sound was like the cry of a bird, a proud lonely seabird flying across the top of the world.

That was another sore point for my father. What kind of name is *Kai*? It sounds foreign, he said. What about a good Scottish name, what about Craig (Gaelic for a rocky outcropping), what about *Gordon* (a three-pointed hill)? It wasn't until later that I found the name in a book of Arthurian legends: Kai was a mighty warrior who could hold his breath for nine days underwater and needed no sleep for nine nights. He also had a superlative fashion sense.

My son didn't seem surprised when I told him this. I never told my father.

Names are wishes. Kai named the cat after his new teacher, a Johnny Appleseed of a man who plants ideas like weeds on every scrubby patch he encounters. Kevin's classroom reminds me of one of those little boutiques in Yorkville—you go in there and see the hand of the artist. Someday people will be willing to spend extra for an artisanal education the way they are currently happy to pay for hand-embroidered linens or raw-milk cheese. But right now there is only one class like Kevin's in the entire public school board and only ten children lucky enough to be in it.

Of course it wasn't just luck. It's never just luck. I started calling our trustee halfway through grade three. I called her so regularly she would answer saying, *Hello Kate*. I reminded her as often as I could that I had paid two thousand dollars to an educational psychologist who had assessed Kai as both gifted and in need of immediate intervention. I reminded her of the government's promises on education. I reminded her of where I worked.

I used to wonder why I had gone into journalism instead of making my parents happy and teaching high school English. Now I know.

"Kai. Don't hold Kevin's paws. You'll get scratched."

"Ow, ow, ow, ow, *ow*," says Kai, as the cat gallops past me, a tiny snorting mustang. Kevin-the-cat was my friend Dianne's idea. She said pets teach empathy. They also teach consequences.

I lean under the table but I can't reach him. "Kai, Sweetie, let me see. Did Kevin scratch you? Let Mommy see."

Kai rolls in farther, retreating into a fugue of sensation. "Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow, ow, ow," he chants. "Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow, ow, ow, ow, OW, Mommy, OW—"

"Kai," I say, raising my voice over the din, "do you remember when we read about Bast, the cat goddess? Did you know they used to mummify the cats along with their owners? The British dug up *acres* of cat mummies and shipped them back to England."

The *ows* stop. Facts are like potato chips to my son, he can never get enough.

"Are they in museums? The British put everything in museums. Even people."

"There are lots in museums. But the British used them for fertilizer. They plowed them into the fields."

"Yuck, Mommy," says Kai, crawling out from under the table. His cheeks are red and there's a large dust bunny in his hair. It looks jaunty, like a little cap. He gives me a gap-toothed grin. "Yuck mummy. Get it? M-u-m-m-y. Get it?"

I goggle my eyes and throw my apron over my head, shuffling toward him stiff-limbed, like Boris Karloff. "Kai," I moan in a sepulchral voice. "Doooo your homework."

Kai shrieks happily and rolls back under the table. "Help! Help! It's the homework mummy! Summon the palace guards!"

This is what the homework thing has done to us; it's made us bad comedians. We will try anything, but we have learned it can't be rushed. My new friend Jen says it's like making risotto: it's about putting in the hours. Jen is from Trinidad; her ex is from Northern Italy. Their daughter, Princess, is from Alpha Centauri.

Princess is the only girl in Kevin's primary gifted/behaviour class. The slash means that, besides their high IQs, they all have a *thing*—something less socially acceptable, explosive episodes or toileting issues or a habit of drooling on everything. In the case of Princess, it's "oppositional syndrome."

Jen says our children can't help it. "They have geek blood," she said. "They get it from us. We're geeks who married geeks."

That was two months ago, over a bottle of pinot grigio on the first day of school. We were on the deck at SpaHa, a bar on the U of T campus. I fell for Jen right away. She was the only parent with any fashion sense: she was wearing an asymmetrical red leather skirt and pink tee shirt silk-screened with images of Axl Rose. She was also the only one who talked to me. She had an MA in library science, she told me, but supported herself by running guerrilla knitting workshops.

But geeks?

"I never thought of myself as a geek," I said. "Luke, okay—he spends most of his time on-line—"

"It's true, you don't *look* like one." She pulled out her knitting; she

was making a pink cell phone cozy for Princess to attach to her backpack. "But women are better with camouflage. Are you sure you don't collect safety pins or alphabetize your makeup or something?"

"Well, there's the shoes."

"All women collect shoes."

"I also destroy them." I told her about my shoe disasters, the Miu Mius I went swimming in the time Kai decided to stay at the bottom of the pool, the Sigerson Morrison stilettos that were taken by the ocean on my trip to South Carolina the previous spring. I didn't tell her what I was doing on the beach in South Carolina. I hadn't told anyone except my friend Dianne, and Dianne had said, That guy you met, David? He's not going to call. Davids don't call, okay? Which is a good thing.

Dianne's the only one who knows I've been trying to have an affair. She says, Been there, done that. She says, I can't tell you not to, but make no mistake: it will end badly.

Jen was laughing at me. "You lost your Sigerson Morrisons? See, you're a *spaz*. That's classic geek. Let's order another bottle."

It isn't often that I meet another woman who likes to drink in daylight. "It's self-medication," Jen said. "It's wine or Zoloft, and Zoloft makes me tired."

I raised my glass. "To self-medication."

"To geekdom," Jen said. "To all the geeks we know and love."

Jen pointed east, toward the main campus. "That's my old hangout, the engineering building. They knew I wasn't studying engineering, I just liked dating engineers. It was their pocket protectors. I think I dated about ten engineers until I discovered I could just buy my own pocket protector and walk around with all my coloured pens lined up perfectly."

That was another reason I fell for Jen: she made me laugh. I was happy that day. September has always meant promise to me, the promise of new friends and new shoes and new challenges. But that day was the first in a long time I had felt hope for Kai.

Luke had had the best line, walking into Kevin's classroom that morning. "Oh my god," he'd said. "It's the Junior X-Men's hideout."

I'd elbowed him, but I couldn't restrain a snort of hilarity. Luke makes me laugh too; it's what he does best. And I could see it right away, see how everyone in the class was cursed with a different mutant power: the tiny Asian boy playing an invisible piano, the furious pair hunched over the chessboard, the kid spinning balletically on the computer chair, his long hair skimming the floor. There were more boys glued to the bank of computers, already being directed by a rotund brown kid whose parents hovered fearfully.

They were like a room full of human antennae, receiving signals we

don't get. But that seemed okay to me. They were trying to find the right channel. They were trying to connect.

And then there was Kai, off in the corner, staring into the fish tank. He wasn't alone. A baby goddess had appeared beside him, towering over him by a good four inches, an unearthly beauty with platinum dreadlocks and caramel skin. She was dressed entirely in bubblegum pink. That was Princess.

I elbowed Luke and we watched as she edged closer to Kai, curling her back like a cat to come down to his level. He glanced over and a look passed between them—a look I could not decipher—and they both turned back to the glowing blue.

In the X-Men, Princess would be Storm, of course, breaker of hearts, maker of bad weather.

But who was Kai?

Princess had named herself when she was five. She'd been baptized Isabella, but Jen said Princess is a traditional name on the Trinidadian side of the family and her child had been jealous of a cousin who had been blessed with it. When they arrived back in Toronto from a visit to the island, her daughter had assumed a new identity.

Jen wonders what we would call ourselves if we could just switch like Princess. She also wonders what accident of genetics made her spit out such a stunningly beautiful child, when she and her husband Gianni are both “squat and peasanty” (not true of Jen, she's a beautifully proportioned five-foot-five).

Jen likes to keep up with the sciences. Her latest thing is the human genome project. According to her, we are now in the post-genomic era: the whole thing has been mapped.

“That's not to say there aren't *decades* of research ahead,” she said last week. “But what we do know is that most of us have a regular United Nations in our chromosomes; no one is pure. Will that change our cultural paradigm? I'm not holding my breath.” In Trinidad, Jen says, everyone has a little Spanish, a little African, a little South Asian. In Jen's case there's more South Asian, but she has sisters who are paler than Gianni.

I said, maybe it will all come down to aesthetics. You only have to ride a Toronto streetcar to know the bottom-line truth about race: the most beautiful people on the planet are the most obviously mixed; they are the colour of maple sugar. They are the colour of Princess.

I tell the single girls at the newspaper that Jen is my new best mommy friend. They're always shocked to hear how children reconfigure your social life, how even personal relationships are brokered by the compat-

ibility of your offspring. What's the difference, I ask them, between that and the way you bond with your fellow fashion scribes?

I think it's simply this: Women are natural conservationists and friendship is a resource; we do not waste opportunities.

There are three of them in Features: haughty Miranda, super-nice Sarah, and potty-mouthed Skye, all princesses in one way or another, born to money or just allergic to cheap things due to early overexposure. They are streaked, willowy, golden, as if they come from the same laboratory or artist's pen—Arthur Rackham's Three Graces in Day-Glo.

Jen eats up my tales of the fashion tribe: how they can make a party of any occasion—prosecco at the Four Seasons to celebrate their new shoes, a glass of wine at the Holt's café to compare makeup purchases, pad Thai at Tarot because, well, we had to come uptown for the Tiffany thing and I need to eat something.

The fashion girls always need to eat something. They never do. I think this is because they thrive on hunger. What is the business of fashion except unfulfilled desire? You will be beautiful if, *when*, next month, next season. It's like the girl in the fairy tale: you must harvest thistles till your fingers bleed in order to weave a perfect garment; you must never touch the food in the ogre's castle lest you end up the ogre's wife.

The Fashion Girls never eat the food that circulates at the *cinq à sept*. Crabcakes, god, why do they always serve seafood? Teeny potato pancakes? High glucose. And the cute little test tubes of consommé? It will ruin my lipstick, sweetie.

Eating rarely looks good, and fashion girls must always look good. I love them for this. I love the fact that they will take a cab the two blocks to the next event because their new shoes are pinching—because their shoes always pinch, and they're always new—and let's face it, hobbling up to the red velvet rope is hardly the right kind of entrance.

I love that they *make* an entrance, even though they aren't anyone, the way they emerge from a cab on a cloud of fragrance and laughter and pixie dust, the way they work to spark up a crowd. They spread ideas the way Storm spreads weather; they add oxygen to a room.

I love that they are all thirty-something and beautiful and unhappy in love—and that they will always be unhappy in love, as long as they care more about what looks good than what feels good. I love this because it is both deluded and noble, and also because it leaves the other kind of guy—and I have told them this, I don't make a secret of thinking this—the guy who doesn't look good on paper, the guy willing to stay at home and raise your child, tap-tapping on his daddy blog, it leaves him available for women like me.

Oh, but do I still want him?

Luke has put me in charge of the diaspora project, ostensibly because he and his partner Larry have a deadline for their software thing—they claim someone actually wants a demo—but really because he has hit a wall.

Every night, he tells me, it's the same: Kai needs to lie on the floor and weep; he needs to complain of hunger, boredom and human rights violations; he needs to chew erasers and snap the points off several pencils in the cracks between the floorboards. Two hours in the dining room, and then he does it in ten minutes. It's not that the work is difficult. Apparently it's about discipline.

Luke despairs. "Did the fucking right-wingers think of this when they brought in this fucking homework policy? I thought they wanted to keep families *together*."

Princess doesn't do homework.

Jen is called in regularly by the principal and her story is always the same: Princess doesn't do homework.

"How can I force her?" Jen tells them. "She's oppositional; she *opposes* homework. It's her *thing*."

Kai's thing is more complicated. He opposes homework every bit as fiercely as Princess, but he is fetishistic about rules. Every night his warring halves thrash it out under the table. Every night, eventually, the rules geek wins.

I take off the apron and pour myself a glass of wine. And then I fuck it up. "I bet Mr. K *would* let you do cats," I say. "Why don't I call him?"

"Why did you have to *tell* me that, Mom? How can you *say* that? The assignment is *people*, Mom, *people*, *family*." He's back under the table.

I don't mean to fuck it up. It seems like a reasonable compromise, given that any diaspora project Kai does is going to be artificial, a construct like the Canadian Room at his old school's open house. It had been in early December and it had been called Winterfest, and every self-identified cultural group had been given a classroom. The Tibetan kids hung prayer flags; the Jewish kids made dreidels; the Indian kids sold flower necklaces for Diwali; the Ukrainian kids put on a dance.

The "Canadian" kids, the white trash kids from the rundown houses on Dundas, they had a tea. They did good business; the room was packed with tired mothers in saris sipping Red Rose and eating "Squares of Canada."

"Don't knock it," was Luke's comment. "The Nanaimo bars are awesome."

I want to cry but I call Jen. "I'm hung over. I can't deal. Kai says I'm torturing him."

"What was the party last night?"

"Baume and Mercier dinner. You're knitting, aren't you?"

"I always knit on the phone. It's relaxing. What happened at the dinner?"

"I took my wine into the washroom and the glass fell into the toilet. It broke. I thought I should flush."

Jen bursts out laughing and I start laughing too. "Don't tell me," she says. "It overflowed, didn't it?"

"Yes. All over my new Pradas."

"No! Not your Pradas!"

"Yeah. And it was one of those unisex washrooms, so there were about ten people lined up right outside the cubicle—" We are screaming now with laughter and I realize my cheeks are wet. "—and I can hear them saying someone must be in there doing a *line* or having *sex*, and I'm on my fucking knees, mopping up wine-coloured water with toilet paper. I think I used up two rolls."

"Oh Kate, Kate. You know I live through you."

The Baume thing was held at a new sushi place called Spine. The food was served on and around two very attractive nude models, a man and a woman, lying supine on large glass tables. The fashion girls weren't impressed.

"Yuck," Sarah said. "The food's two inches from her *feet*."

"She's stoned," Skye said. "Look at her pupils. It's how she stays so still."

I thought the naked sushi—the Japanese term is *nyotaimori*, adorned body of a woman—was in poor taste, T & A by an older name. ("Culinary lap dancing" was Miranda's comment.) But I liked the restaurant owner. We were smoking on the terrace when he told me the story behind one of his dishes, a roll featuring fat orange fish eggs that burst juicily in the mouth.

"It's a Toronto story," he said. "My father was very strict; he was an engineer in Korea. We had a corner store and, naturally, I worked there after school. I was in love with a Polish girl, and to woo her I would give her Pop Rocks when my father wasn't looking. That's why I call this dish Pop Rocks. It's about desire."

I thought of my own father, the stone. The one who cut me off when I decided to study art because he wanted me to be a teacher like him and my mother, the man whose only lesson was how to withhold things, the sad man with the cold northern blood whose hearth fire had long ago burned out.

The owner had moved closer. I wondered if I reminded him of his Polish girl. "Did the Pop Rocks work?"

"No," he said. "My father caught me. I was never allowed to see her again." He spread his hands in a gesture of *kismet*, and he kept them that way, palms out, waiting. I placed my hands lightly on his, and then he

pulled me close and my head was full of Pop Rocks, exploding.

Jen's still on the phone. She wants to know what happened then.

"Nothing."

"*Nothing*? That's too bad. He sounds like a poet. He sounds like someone I'd like to meet."

"What about Gianni?"

"Gianni doesn't have a poetic bone in his body. Thank God Princess takes after me. You know what she told me yesterday?"

"What?"

"She says Kai is her soul mate. She's seven years old."

"Kai's lucky. Oh, there he goes. Call you later."

My son's heels are beating a furious tattoo on the dining room floor. He has a stainless steel saucepan lid in his right hand and he's crashing it against the boards in time. His rhythm is good.

I wish that I could comfort him, warm up the cold part of him, seduce him with hope. I think of the man I kissed last night, kissed open and deep and wet in the shadows of his terrace before I got so drunk I trashed his washroom. There's something different about you, he said. You're not like the others. And I said, yes, I'm a selky. A what? he said. A mermaid. I don't belong on land. And then I kissed him again, and ran my wet wet tongue over his teeth, thinking of raw fish and salt water and wondering if that was my myth, the way the Polish girl was his.

I think of the frigid Scottish island my parents' parents sailed from and the sultry West Indian one Jen's parents left behind—one abandoned to the elements, the other overrun with drugs and crime.

I know that Princess will nevertheless grow up to mythologize that island, to conjure tropical nights perfumed with bougainvillea, the ceaseless murmur of the Caribbean. In this she will be like all the members of her tribe, the seekers of the golden apples, the believers in beauty and expensive shoes, the princesses.

We are carriers of more than genes. We are carriers of beautiful ideas. So what if we have to make it up? It's what humans do.

I fetch pillows and the faux fur comforter from my bed and carry them downstairs and push them under the dining room table. Kai has stopped his racket and I decide to risk an approach, sliding halfway in with him.

It has grown dark under here and I imagine a peat fire in the hearth, the roar of the North Sea outside. There's the toasty smell of baked bannock and shadows dancing on our stone walls.

"Kai, my love," I tell him, stroking his hair. "I'm going to tell you a story."

*Tanis MacDonald*

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## Daylight: Saving

Elongated winter into spring, frail  
white months splinter into slivers  
and then the scent of mud. Last year's

deaths march me into the sun. Too pale  
by half: I'm nearly blue. The window  
box ekes out tight mauve buds. Let me

weigh in on this one: photosynthesis  
expects so much. Mid-month approaches  
with its anniversary of birth, its killing

Ides. Out, damned spot, like a lion. A snap  
in the synaptic weave. I grow older, that slow  
virus, predictable as hunger or sleep,

rain or a deadline, words that will not  
line up, mucks in a row. Once again.  
Winter, sun, march, window, long, birth,

death. Finches in the cedar nest close to  
the cat's mouth. Again. White spring, mud,  
soapbox of grief, mourning's long and gritty

residence. Rattled sleep. Death, nest, mouth.  
The virus in the mauve rain. Anniverse.

# Take Measure

What spills out of us, what spills over  
into the dragtown of gall. Catch it  
in a cup. Measure the meniscus.

The trees too brown, every green withered.  
Who let you out to do the wishing? Inmates  
run the asylum; hear them praying

for snow. The lines that lead on, the highway  
stuttering into the horizon. Days fake their own  
death, stupid dissolution, hiding in a book

or behind the drama of despair. What foolish  
pursuits. Hand me poison, that gift.  
Hand me the road home. Bring me to the tuba, its

deep sad notes, the player's puffed cheeks, music  
like soft shouting, a wise moan, a whale  
in pain, an elephant kneeling in its graveyard.

The curve of the liquid at the lip of the cup.

*Kate Hall*

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## Variation on a Theme by Lyn Hejinian

*In the gap between what one wants to say (or what one perceives there is to say) and what one can say (what is sayable), words provide for a collaboration and desertion.*

—Lyn Hejinian

Many blocks of sentences make a nice castle

You can go on saying but you can never recover the pattern of small roses not even in *the pattern of small roses*. That's the crack in the sidewalk you turned into a shape. So drop it. The window needs to be fixed; it's gaping. Neurath decided the body of knowledge is a raft that floats free of any anchor. We have to stand somewhere. Repairs must be made afloat. Feeling of impending disaster: he liked detective novels and puzzles too. I scabbled my name into your book. It became my life. That's the beauty of it. Riddles are much heavier than tea leaves because they make points of intersection: ask and answer. *We are not forgetting the patience of the mad, their love of detail*. When you say it like that I cannot know if I'm really knowing. There are socks in the underwear drawer. Who can argue with that? Our mothers were both in the kitchen clanging pots, standing back to back so I could measure and see who was taller. Astigmatism makes me see double. Disaster in the bathtub: contained waves, small splinters of wood drift around you as you move. My life doesn't make sense. There are always elaborate coffee grounds at the bottom. Because of this the poems in the closet are on hangers but they no longer fit. I thought of that. Also of liver, kidneys and lungs as drying fruit. My autobiography unravels there. Only forty-five years. What happens at the end of the book? Tomorrow I won't speak. I'll walk everywhere and barefoot. If I can't walk, I'll swim. If I can't swim, I'll crouch pressing one hand into the dirt to steady myself. With the other, I'll gather twigs.

*Elise Moser*

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## The Advanced Pilates Tickle Trunk

“**Y**ou’ve got some nice muscles in there,” he said, as he rode her like a horse. She half-expected him to sweep an invisible ten-gallon hat off his head and whoop.

He was kneeling, and her knees were up and bent; he held her feet against his chest like a pair of warm bricks. She rolled her head on the pillow and looked around. The ceiling was uninteresting. No cracks in the shape of the Yangtze River, say. Not that she’d recognize the Yangtze River, or any other river for that matter. She was lousy at geography. But anyway. No cracks.

She could hear herself making little mewling sounds and deduced that she was enjoying herself. But the enjoyment seemed to be taking place on some level of existence just slightly removed from her consciousness. Overlapping, like a piece of paper that comes through the printer at an angle and only gets part of the text.

She looked down; her stomach sat like a mass of white, over-risen bread dough. She felt briefly sorry that it was there; as if she could have removed it before having sex, but had forgotten. The thought made her snort, a little laugh he didn’t seem to hear. He wasn’t paying her any notice; he was peering straight up at the point where the upper edge of the wall met the ceiling. She watched his face for a few minutes before she realized that he probably wasn’t really seeing anything at all, his attention focused on his nether regions. Then he looked down, his jaw tight with concentration, and noticed her looking at him. Their two pairs of eyes slid across the same angle, and there was an almost audible click as their gazes met. He let out a hiss of breath. She was startled by it. And then even more startled when he twisted his mouth into a grimace of a smile. It was a moment of awkwardness—she didn’t know if she was expected to smile back. It was like meeting someone she’d insulted at one time or another and not knowing whether to say hello or to set her face and push past. She didn’t have to decide though; he sucked in his breath and raised his face again, as if preparing to resume contemplation of his wall.

She couldn’t decide whether she liked him. There were times she was

attracted to him, sometimes long enough to end up here—him plugging away in his erratic rhythm like a toddler with a saucepan and a wooden spoon. Other times she arrived in this position out of a kind of inertia—one thing following another without any actual volition on her part, but also without any resistance. They might have finished the evening sitting in uncomfortable chairs and strained silence instead; that had certainly happened before. She knew inertia was a bad way to come to sex, realized it was a lifeless substitute for passion, but at a certain point in the evening she would begin to feel that expectations had risen. And there was always the possibility that once they got started she would get carried away and actually enjoy it. Like, beginning to eat a meal only to find she'd been hungry and not realized it. Or finding just enough pleasure in the food to make the eating worthwhile. Then there were the meals she'd left half eaten, the food indifferently prepared, her appetite unaroused.

What did he mean by *nice muscles in there* anyway? It gave her the unwelcome mental image of a toy chest, the lid opened to reveal a tangle of rubbery straps. Good quality tangled rubbery straps. Some sort of physical fitness accessories. An Advanced Pilates Tickle Trunk. She snorted a second time, and he looked down at her, searching her face, smiling tentatively again. She made a mental note not to snort any more. She didn't want to draw attention to herself. Then, for a moment, she was irritated with him for looking at her that way—bashfully inquiring, as if he were a stranger on a crowded train, hoping the seat next to her was free. She knew she was being unfair, but she couldn't help it. Then she felt guilty and decided to make an effort to be a better sport. She closed her eyes and tried to think a more rapt expression onto her face, imagining her tickle trunk abundantly full of very delightfully stretchy and responsive muscly toys. She contracted and he made that hissing sound again. She made a mental note to do it again soon. She experimented with various liftings of the hips, tiltings of the pelvis, and more of the mewling noise—none of which had any appreciable effect except to make her feel she was participating more actively. It offered the same sort of satisfaction she got from picking up bits of litter on the sidewalk—the minor thrill of good citizenship. After a bit more of the same, though, it seemed a silly waste of effort. Not to mention insincere. So she went back to the contraction option, timing them to coincide with his spoon-banging.

Her mind kept wandering, although never far enough. "Nice muscles in there." She imagined him kneeling by the side of the tickle trunk, leaning in to do something or other, his arms buried up to the elbows in the equipment. It was like watching a plumber at work, knowing he was feeling something at the end of his outstretched arm that she would never feel. Palpating a dried-out washer or the gunky interior of a drainpipe. She shook her head to clear away the mental picture. He responded by

moving faster inside her, and his breathing quickened. For a moment, she was embarrassed that she had given him the impression of excitement when in fact she was just trying to refocus her errant attention, but then she thought, hey, whatever works, and threw herself back into her contractions for what appeared to be the home stretch.

She wasn't sure why his innocent comment about her muscles had provoked such irritation. It was a compliment, really. It wasn't his fault it made her feel like a toy chest full of exercise equipment. On the contrary, if only she could be more sincerely involved, more responsive, more open to his diligent, friendly, even affectionate efforts there above her, maybe she'd enjoy herself. He groaned and thrashed a bit, his head thrown back, his hands pressing her feet against his chest, almost prayerfully. A moment later, he exhaled slowly, and disengaged. He sat back on his heels, lowering her feet to the mattress on either side of him. She arranged a smile on her face to greet him as he opened his eyes. He smiled back at her, almost blankly—as if he'd forgotten who she was, but might remember at any moment.

*Emilia Nielsen*

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## Indifferent Season

I

Down-at-heel, undone—  
the weather, galvanized.

*There ain't no cure for  
the summertime blues.*

Yellowjackets held within  
their skin's slim black bars.

Migraine's fluorescent hum;  
a cloudburst, a flash flood.

Jet lag: the corporeal present,  
the heart four hours behind.

## II

Fire, water, a stainless kettle. Pungent tea:  
blessed thistle, passionflower, angelica.

Give me a moment to be Ophelia, to float—  
summer's too much in love with its own heat.

Artemisia Gentileschi's Judith. *Artemisia*  
*Absinthium*: aphrodisiac, bitter stimulant?

Extemporal: black-capped chickadee  
tapping at the glass. Its beak, hard rain.

Kiss my collarbone, my someday tattoo:  
blue water-lily. Offer me one breast.

III

*Pray for a life without plot,  
a day without narrative.*

Born with my father's blue  
eyes: he's since been blind.

This kick of gas-flame, weeping  
willow, for taprooted melancholia!

Monotony, straight country gravel,  
traffic jeering past fallow fields.

A millstone, a horse on the road:  
*Slow Down and Circle Wide.*

#### IV

Cherries, black plum, blood orange:  
my breakfast vividly carnivorous.

The turkey vulture's wings a scythe,  
dihedral; its aerial circumambulation.

Wild carrot: umbel of white needlepoint  
lace, tiny central flower, a red pinprick.

A mouthful of mad chickenpox berries,  
tongue an itching curse—calamine, ice.

Morning glory, noxious bind-weed. Bell  
flowers, bugles sounding at daybreak—

V

Rainbarrel drinking water  
heady with yellow pollen.

The body's brash reflex:  
antler flush; summer's rut.

*Neither for me honey  
nor the honey bee.*

The oversexed smell  
of daylilies, dog-rose.

My mouth, obtuse:  
no spark of new love.

VI

The full moon: an  
aster gone to seed.

Spent the hot morning  
reinventing the wheel.

Curios: moon-dog, halo,  
opal, howl, dog-star—

The garden plot chock-  
a-block with dandelions.

Sunburnt, pink and turning,  
I can keep myself up all night.

*Brecken Rose Hancock*

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## *from* Winter, Frontal Lobe

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Moth-hermit hum of the refrigerator quiet. Old Lucycat, no mate, twists between the table's legs. Stilted curlicue her half-tail; raspy bawl. Midnight, dull skunk steals downstairs.

Accident #1: Fire! Starts in the popcorn maker when Mom and Dad are out. Logan squelches the weird thing with baking soda. We vent the eruption of smoke with Mom's best tea-towels *swish swish* the open window. All the terrible glee.

Stripped bare, this kitchen would not resemble the despondent stool-pigeon that it is, always revealing sadnesses. Disemboweled amphibious cookie jar; frog himself grips guts in shame.

Accident #2: Digger-upper of dead deer limbs finds the apple pie. Using the sly agility she honed shredding library books, Harmony wolfs 60% of our dessert without spilling. Nearly sated, her poise slips when Mom flips the switch. Traitor under a bright light and the pie-plate coin-toss. Tails up the carpet loses.

Pretend this is the first farm kitchen, 1979. A tray of *Pillsbury* cinnamon buns eaten in one sitting, all the rocks picked from the fields, and the Irish Setter does not yet have mites. Ruckus of bees in the archaic green grain-wagon. Good honey.

Accident #3: Promise ring from my boyfriend at 16. Mom wakes up and gives a lecture about sex while I drink water over the sink (lucky James had gone; I was still a virgin). Desperate bulb cannot support the room.

Dad rips up the carpet; goodbye stains.

Accident #4: 2L bottle of *Pepsi* from above-fridge pantry escapes my grip, plummets. Kitchen-bomb; cats and dogs run. Mom comes home and ends the Cold War. We'll meet again. The stain, the stain, the stain.

Five open throats: Lucy circling, russet nest in duvet; Logan driving the road with his band, guitar the syrup we pour on our pancakes; me watching home-renovation shows, \$1000 to fix a kitchen; Dad calling from the airplane phone, wobbly spindled chair; Mom passing through for cigarettes and toast (*puff puff* no inhale).

Accident #5: Slow freezing of the caulifloric lobe. This disaster, weasel of thwarted desire.

\*

owned a  
but hated  
all reflection  
clutch  
when he pumped  
fumes that  
worried  
a toothy  
farm  
electric fence  
anything  
lap at night  
those stinking  
faces

She sold funerals. Before that she owned a daycare. Before that, was a farmer. Pigs she considered smart but hated the damned vacuum in cows' eyes, all reflection. Learning to drive the tractor, she'd pop the clutch on purpose just to see Dad lurch out of the stooker. But those days when he pumped the pit, methane fumes that had once killed a sow and litter, she lectured me about perilous stunts, vanishings. She worried. I came to see him as hero, braving this pit that seemed a toothy hypnotic maw. There were corners of that farm that plotted our deaths. Bertha worms, the electric fence. Even the Siamese cat was vicious, but Mom loved anything that would fight for a living and curl up in her lap at night. Maybe that's why she planted marigolds, those stinking flowers that lined her garden. Their heavy orange and yellow faces gritted. Abrasive, vibrant.

## It's a Long Dang Life

Laney leans on the butcher block and listens for the front door. In her other ear, her daughter-in-law, Julia, carries on and on about an eighty-year-old woman who was assaulted on top of her dryer. "You need a real dog, Mom," Julia says. "No place is safe." Laney wonders if she's supposed to be that age already—saying a rosary and pulling on clean underwear every time a repairman comes to the house.

Julia taps a hard-boiled egg against the bowl, devilling eggs no one will eat. No one in the family likes devilled eggs, and even the children sense that this slight gives their mother a dark satisfaction.

The front door whumps open. Odd ducks in and sets a Miller Genuine Draft fridge pack against the wall, then strikes into his Wild West stance—his torso squaring off, hands hovering quick-draw over his front pockets.

"I'm here to shoot some kids!"

A delighted squeal from under the wing chair.

Odd's eyes dart after the sound. He's got those great thick froggy eyelids that take so long to close, the bulge of the eyeballs moving underneath. He says, "I'll give you commie slime buckets two seconds to turn yourselves in."

Oscar dashes out from behind the TV. He drops and worms his way under the couch. Laney thinks these guys are out of their minds, or not even in them yet. She loves everything they do.

"Lousy pinko bastards!" Odd pulls a cap gun from each pocket and fires off two rounds, twirls the guns on his trigger fingers. "I'll tear your eyeballs out, shoot your brains into brain stew!"

The door of the coat closet bumps twice from inside.

"This is your last chance, suckers!"

Odd waits a fiendish beat, then starts shooting, firing the guns in alternation. Pink strips scroll out of the barrels as cottony puffs open all around him. A burnt sulfur smell.

Julia keeps right on talking over the commotion. Odd's been around long enough now, thirteen years, that people tune him out as you would a jackhammer when there's work being done in the basement. In the beginning, the family wasn't clear. Was Laney dating this man? Was Paul Odd her *boyfriend*? According to her youngest, Herb, what made it hard

to tell was the way Laney would enter a place some feet in advance of Odd, as though he were some homeless man who'd followed her in off the street.

"*Man, I cannot wait to pop that first head off! You dug your graves, boys.*"

The closet door springs open and ejects five-year-old Tucker, full throttle. Tucker on those hormone-deficient stick legs high-steps up and over the couch then lashes himself around Laney's calves. Tucker isn't natural. He had to be injected into Julia's womb. Nearly three now, and already he seems to sense he's different kind of breed with his pumpkin-coloured hair that emits a vegetable odour when freshly cut.

Odd says, "Gutless, Charles. You think that cracker's gonna save you?"

Laney scrabbles her fingers through Tucker's hair and hands down her Diet Coke. "Have a sip of this, honey." Then she mouths across the room, "*Cool it, Odd.*"

"You hear that! The FO tells me cool it. I wonder what she'll think when this place is...splattered with kid guts!"

Laney urges Odd, a bit louder, "I said cool it."

Oscar wriggles out from under the couch.

Odd noses his cap guns into his pockets and flicks his hair out of his eyes. Still all that hair. Laney can picture him in college pumping down the basketball court—his sweaty black ringlets and white satin shorts. *Daddy Long Legs* they called him, or *Daddy-O*. He is a looker today. Long and sexily slanted to one side, watching you as if from behind the wheel of his 1957 Thunderbird. He'd drive two hundred miles in those days to pick up rims or a door handle for that car. Laney'd go along for the ride, dealing blackjack between them on the seat. He'd accuse her of palming cards so he could pull over and frisk her, and she'd make sure there was a card to find. *Never trust a woman can find your fly faster than you can*, he'd say.

Now sixty-five-year-old Odd stoops for his beer and then comes and circles around behind Laney. He leans down and whispers, "Marry me."

Laney turns her head a little, nudges into his voice. "You've already got a wife. Her name's Miller Genuine Draft."

"Why can't I marry you both?"

"We are jealous Gods," Laney says. She doesn't like to refuse Odd, and does so with what spunk and colour she can muster.

He drops his head in behind her ear, takes a schoolboy's toke on her perfume. "You'll marry me, Laney Jane. You wait."

He slips out the screen door without a sound. The next Laney sees of Odd, he's chasing Tucker across the backyard. Tucker has the black

hood to the barbeque pulled over his head. Odd yelling, "I'm gonna rip your arms and legs off!" Oscar follows last in the chain, clubbing Odd in the back with a whiffle bat.

This marriage idea, this is new. Two weeks earlier, Laney awoke in the middle of the night feeling watched, and there he was, propped on a pillow with her reading glasses on. "We should get married," he said. "Probably tonight." She looked at the clock and then rolled back to sleep, but he's been proposing ten times a day ever since. When Laney pulls back the shower curtain, he's standing in the tub, fully clothed. "Okay," he says, "I'll cut back. I need a few for the protein, but no more blacking out." When Laney goes to adjust her rear-view mirror, there he is in the back seat like a spy. "Swear me in, LBJ. Let the Oddman *do for you*."

Just yesterday, Odd recounted their whole history to the check-out girl in Safeway who regarded him the way you might a talking ape. "Now you tell me that's not a true Hollywood romance, and yet here she is *turning the Oddman down*." The girl scanned through a twelve-pack and a box of bran. "Do you think it's the Oddman's shoes?"

The girl said, "Can the Oddman please take his foot off the ledge."

But he left it up there, his scuffed tasseled loafer and no socks. "These shoes weren't cheap, I can guarantee that."

Those feet are flatter than ground round, but when Odd padded down to the draft board to cash them in, the Army took him anyway. Odd's curls in a pile on the military barber shop floor. That strange erotic terror when something irreversible is happening and you can't see it yet.

Seven months into his tour of duty, Odd stopped writing. His letters had gotten more impersonal and piecemeal until the last one spiralled into a tailspin about a Vietnamese boy from a nearby village.

*...this guys goddamn gorgeous with brown eyes that see to the pit & this guyd come and trade for C-Rats but last time he took my boots. that doesnt make sense bec. the boots were on & so how did he get them off my feet? it makes no sense but I have to laugh too bec. how did he get them off my feet? thats what I cant get is how he...*

On it went, round and round. Two months after the letters stopped, Laney's Mother came in and sat at the foot of her bed. Laney braced herself for word of Odd's death. While dicing onions or clipping her toenails, she had imagined Odd in every posture of gore and mutilation and asked her mother simply, *Just tell me how*. And her mother, who hated Odd and wanted Laney to marry a carpet salesman who worked for Laney's father, seized the moment in a godzillian stroke: *Landmine*.

It never occurred to Laney that anyone, even her mother, would lie

about a man dying in combat. Not even when her father's protégé, Edmond Edmondson, started showing up soon and often for dinner. Edmondson was a noisy eater whose sense of humour should've predicted future meanness, but to Laney there was only Odd and not-Odd. She did crossword puzzles for fourteen months then married the guy. Two kids into the deal, Edmondson started pushing her around. Pushing her into the fridge when he was horny. Pushing her down the stairs when he was hungry. One night, Laney took a pretty hairy spill, broke her leg in three places, and with her boys looking on. When the painkillers ran out, Laney hired the area lawn-man-slash-rental-goon to break Edmond's leg in *four* places.

"What if instead I broke each leg in two pieces, six pieces total?" The guy kind of an albino, kind of not.

"That's fine too. Whatever's easiest."

"Easiest is just to kill him. You get him on the run and *splat*, without having to get methodist."

Here, Laney considered backing out, but then she got an itch deep in her cast. "I need to know if you're able to do what we said and not kill him. He's a father."

He picked something out of his teeth, examined it, and put it back in his mouth. "I can try. For the pups' sake."

This conversation made more sense when, five days later, instead of harming Edmondson—in fact, *swerving around* Edmondson—the man ran over their beagle, Duncie.

In his tasseled loafers and cut-off jean shorts, Odd huddles in on Herb at the barbeque. Clear across the patio, Laney hears Herb say, "I think Mom just doesn't want to get married again. Period. To anyone."

Herb pulls back the barbeque lid and lowers in his baster. Herb with his huge pink face and dragon nostrils. As boys, Laney's sons were darling, toothy and alert, but their features aged strangely. They look like child actors grown up. Also, their arms stopped growing at some point. The sight of them struggling on the monkey bars was a lot to take. Odd said, once, "Those boys didn't have to look like that. If you'd just waited on me."

Odd opens a fresh beer and studies the playhouse in the corner of the yard. At one time, Herb had ventured into the custom playhouse business, but he was too much of a perfectionist to make a go of it. Each house took him a month or more to build, and with the bills piling up and Julia and the kids, Herb gave in and joined his dad at *Carpet Jungle!* This one playhouse remains: a two-story Victorian about the size of a minivan, with fish scale shingles on the façade, a brass knocker and roll-top garage door.

“That right there is something fine,” Odd says, waving his beer towards the playhouse. “What that says to me is—you got to do that thing right there or die.” Herb shakes his head, doesn’t want to talk about it. “Forget the god-dang money. Whatever you got to do *to do it*, do it.” Odd crumples his beer. “It’s a long life when it’s the wrong life, man.”

Just then, Oscar whizzes across the patio and starts circling Odd. Each lap, he pokes Odd in the gut with an action figure he’s gripping like a hunting knife. Odd plays it cool—see nothing/feel nothing—then swoops down and slings Oscar upside-down over his shoulder. Oscar shrieks and kicks and starts slipping out of his swim trunks, oozing head-first down Odd’s back. Laney has asked Odd not to pick up these kids when he’s drinking which means *don’t pick up the kids*, but, before there’s time to spit, Odd contorts himself forward and sets the boy on his feet.

“That’s G.I. Joe!” Oscar says.

Odd takes the doll in his hand. “I’ll tell you, man, he doesn’t look like any GI I’ve ever seen. They did it right, your little guy here’d come with a little bag of weed. A coupla boom-boom girls—a couple of prostitutes, you understand?” He pulls the tiny camouflage pants down, points at the doll’s smooth-surface privates. “He’d have a dose of the clap, maybe a little Saigon Rose.”

Laney reaches Odd and cups her hand over his mouth. “Slow it down, Odd. Slow it down.” She glances around for Julia, who tolerates Odd only conditionally and kept the boys away for two months the previous spring after Oscar raised his hand in class and asked if they could play Hide the Salami (it turned out an older kid had put him up to it). When Julia does come out of the kitchen, Oscar’s doing a little dance, hula-hooping his hips and chanting, “Boom-boom girl, boom boom boom.” Julia thinks this is cute and joins in the dance. She sings, “Boom boom boom.” Herb gets one look at this and starts laughing so hard he squeezes the baster out on his shoes. He has always been a good son, but Laney’s not sure about the man as a husband or father. What puts her mind at ease is, while she can take or leave Julia personally, she knows the girl would’ve had an answer for Edmonson. She would’ve left him when the boys were in diapers.

The turkey isn’t cooking. It’s five o’clock and it’s still pink inside. In the kitchen, Laney and Julia and Herb covertly debate a Domino’s pizza bail-out when Julia says, “Hold on a minute, Mom.” Laney hates the girl calling her Mom. Nothing personal. She’s just squeamish with the word. “Does it sound too quiet to anyone?”

They listen, wake up to this.

“Where are the children?” Julia says.

Next there’s the sound of Duncce-2 trundling down the hall. He seems

to know something they don't, so they follow him outside and file in along the edge of the patio. The dog raises one ear and barks a question towards the playhouse.

Laney says, "Well would you look at that."

The playhouse is all eyes. Tucker and Oscar on their bellies looking out the living room windows. Then there's Odd packed into the west wing, both floors, like a jack-in-the-box—his eyes and nose framed in the master bedroom window and each hairy knee in a dining room window below.

The garage door rolls back and Tucker charges into the sun with a red wagon in tow. He high-steps across the lawn, his sherbet tongue lolling, and curls the wagon to a stop some feet from the patio. "Okay," he pants. "We got that house hostage. For our demands, we want a banana split for each person. And Grammy has to say she'll marry Mister Odd. If we don't get our demands in ten minutes, we'll starting zapping people."

Julia asks, "You'll what?"

"We'll start zapping."

Laney says, "Oh for crying out loud. Sweetie, you go and tell Odd that he and I will discuss this *in private*." Odd glares through the master bedroom window. "And while you're at it you might remind him about our friend Miller."

Tucker scratches his crotch. "What's his friend's name?"

"Miller."

Truth be told, Laney could live with the material ugliness of drink—the sour breath and bloat, Odd pissing on the neighbour's cat. But opening every one of those bottles is Odd's own unbottleable ferocity for she-doesn't-know-what. He blows half a paycheque on tasselled loafers when his teeth are dropping out of his head. Every phone call he takes like there's some big shot on the line. Sometimes Laney thinks he's still talking after the caller's hung up.

Tucker parks his wagon next to the ice chest and, with a wild look back at Julia, crashes his hand into the icy slush. He drops a black and gold can in the wagon and reaches in for another.

Julia starts over. "Tucker, if that man wants a soft drink you tell him—*put those*—Tucker—*put those back*—" Tucker arches his back to dodge the swipe of Julia's hand. "So help me Tuck, if you don't—" Tucker U-turns and takes off, beer cans wheeling in the wagon bed.

Julia glowers at Herb. "I've warned you about this."

Herb says, "Come sit down."

"He's inappropriate around children. I'm sorry. He is."

"Come sit down."

Julia hangs a hand on her hip. "Now we have a situation."

"We don't have a situation."

Julia smiles. "No?"

"I see you trying to make a situation by calling it a situation."

Julia pulls her strawberry blonde hair back, holds it in a ponytail. She has shampoo-commercial features and should be pretty, but she wasn't born in any mood to energize her looks.

Laney sees Odd's hand poke through a second-storey window and reach a beer across to the window where his mouth is. He unhitches the tab with a pinky, angles the can in and drinks.

When Laney was a girl, she had an uncle like Odd. She knows the exhilaration of being drop-caught. It is a sensation she has known only once as an adult, when in a cafe in San Francisco she looked up from her coffee and saw sitting at the bar—not fifteen feet away—the dead love of her life. Paul Odd, not dead. Not anything like dead, but eating shrimp cocktail. Under the table, her boys—then six and eight years old—were driving matchbox cars up and down her shins. Odd looked right at her. She poured cream all over the table. It'd been ten years since the landmine. Only there had been no landmine because here Odd was, his black curls grown back bushy and lusterless, like a wig on him now. He was stoned. He held up a shrimp and made it wave with its tail, and just then Herb climbed onto a chair and held his matchbox Le Car up in answer to Odd's shrimp. And they waved like this. Shrimp and car. Car and shrimp.

"I don't care about my children's safety?" Herb says.

"I didn't say that," Julia says. "I said you don't think ahead."

Laney says, "Those children are safe with Paul."

"Mom, we don't know that. He's had too much to drink."

Herb says, "Who's cooking that turkey if I don't think ahead? It's not cooking itself!"

Laney looks over at the turkey which, snug on the grill, does in fact appear to be cooking itself. Herb must notice this too because he kicks his chair out and squirts the bird with lighter fluid. Ribbons of flame curl off the bird's rear and Herb's face eases into an expression of awe. He squirts the bird again, fastens the stream on its igniting body.

Julia says, "Real mature, Herb. We have five mouths to feed."

A series of cracks from the playhouse. Laney jumps. "When I get my hands on those cap guns—"

This time, Oscar bursts from the garage door. "We warned you!" he yells, tripping and heaving the red wagon across the lawn. "This is what happens when you don't listen!" A limp freckled arm springs out sideways from the wagon bed. What looks like blood on the hand. Then Oscar wheels over a sprinkler head and the wagon topples, dumping

Tucker onto the lawn, his body gelatinous, not moving, more a heap of parts than a whole.

Julia gasps.

Herb's beating the turkey with a broom, one drumstick madly ablaze. "What?" he says. "What?"

Dunce-2 reaches the body first. He noses the boy's crotch, takes a drag on his armpit, then nudges the boy's head up and over. It takes Laney a minute to make sense of her grandson's face. It looks like it's been dragged a few miles on hot asphalt. His forehead and one cheek are smattered in maroon-purple brain-looking matter. Dunce-2 snaps up a chunk of it in his jaws.

"Get him off of him!" Julia screams. "Get that dog off—" She takes hold of Dunce's collar and yanks him clear off his front legs.

Herb runs out with the broom and kneels beside his son. "Baby," he says. "Can you hear me?" He bends in closer and sniffs his son's face. Then he fingers the wound, sniffs it again, and then tastes it. He pauses, lets Julia suffer a moment, then says, "It's hamburger meat. And ketchup."

Julia catches her breath in her hand. "That's terrifying."

Tucker giggles and rolls out from under Herb.

Oscar belts out from the second-floor window, "That's what happens when you don't listen! People die!"

The curtains are drawn most of the way, but Laney knows Odd's watching. He never stops watching, and everything he sees is real. Even his hallucinations happen the way dreams really happen in your heart and your head—as anyone who's ever woken up unaccountably heart-broken knows.

Julia picks a clump of hamburger off the grass, squeezes it in a way that seems lonely. "Am I the only one who thinks there's something sick going on here?"

After Laney ran into Odd in San Francisco, she bided her time. She knew he'd call, would say, *Come with me, Laney Jane*. And he did call, twenty-one years later. Laney was sitting at her kitchen table with a cup of tea and a magic marker, blacking in the pages of her plaid *Betty Crocker* (2 *tablespoons butter or margarine* becoming ■■■■■). She was halfway through *Sauces* when the phone rang. Instead of a voice, there was someone munching nuts on the other end of the line. She knew it was him, recognized the timbre of his *munch*.

"So I thought I'd call and apologize about the other day," he said.

Laney heard herself laugh. "The other day, as in nineteen-seventy-one?"

"Yeah, yeah, that's it." The sound of a smile in his voice. "That was a

great suit you had on you. What colour do you call that?"

"Coral."

He ate another nut. She could tell he was nodding.

"Hey, does your boy still have that little car?"

"He's twenty-seven years old." She knew the smart thing was to hang up, but he already had her. And when he asked where in California he was calling, Laney didn't even blush. "The same place, Odd. I never moved."

Julia announces she's getting the boys and going home. She's halfway to the playhouse when a whistle blows and the playhouse roof cracks up and over like a lid on a tank. Oscar points at Julia and yells, "Fire!"

In unison, the boys let fly a raft of bright white soaring—what? Eggs, is Laney's first guess, but they're too cushiony for eggs—pelting Julia *fwap fwap* on the thighs, *thoop* in the breast, *ptahh* on the forehead. One flies stray. Marshmallows. They're throwing marshmallows. They duck to reload and, panicking they won't throw their share, fire off two, three, a handful at once. Julia twists and turns in the blitz, a figure in strobe lights. Julia pelted high and low but soldiering on.

Then someone throws a rock. It glances off Julia's knee in mid-bend. Her leg snaps straight and she jerks, genuflects, goes down. She slings both hands around her knee and starts rocking back and forth in the grass.

Laney can still see Herb's face the night Edmondson bumped her down the basement stairs. Ed—his boots eaving over the top stair, his fork in his hand and a stab of butt steak on the tines—had ordered the boys back to the table and then had watched five innings of a Giants game before he checked on her and found she'd not gotten up. But before he did, Herb had snuck back to the landing and stood where his father had stood. Laney had told him go back and eat before his father heard. He obeyed, but not immediately. He hesitated. And, though Laney would always love her son, she would never forgive that second of brute curiosity, Herb looking down from the top of the stairs while she lay doing rag-doll splits at the bottom.

Julia wants to call the police. Herb's helped her into a chair and plumped a cushion for her, now he's positioning an ice-bag on her knee. "This is bad," he says, "I'm not saying it's not. But let's not get carried away. If Tucker says it was an accident, that's what it was."

"Throwing rocks? How is throwing rocks an accident?"

"Rock. A rock."

Laney says, "Maybe a second rock came from over in that grassy

area.”

“There was one rock,” Julia says.

The turkey’s burnt Herb’s eyebrows off and large patches of his arm hair.

“Herb, please bring me the phone. I’m calling the police.”

“Call them on who, Jules? Our own kids?”

Julia comes forward in her chair, points at the playhouse. “On him! *He’s* doing this.”

Herb considers this. “He looks like he’s just sitting out there to me. Mom?”

In the chinked curtain, Odd’s stare is cold. It’s getting to be the time of day when Odd’s eyes sink in rings of melting like ice cubes sitting out, and you have to let him be, until tomorrow, when he’ll wake up and try his best for as long as he can.

Laney tells Herb, “I’ve told you I won’t do this with you.”

Laney says, “Those children are safe.”

“You know what I just realized?” Julia looks from Laney to Herb with that cynical savour you see on the blind when no one will help them across the street. “You two think exactly the same thing I do. Bottom line, you won’t go out there because you don’t want to excite him, because you think he’s dangerous.”

Herb says, “Maybe if you went and talked to him, Mom.”

Laney says, “Those kids aren’t under control.”

Julia says, “It’s Odd who’s out of control. He’s got my kids hostage out there.”

Laney says to Herb, “Maybe first things first, you get your wife under control.”

Not even the pizza, when it comes forty minutes later, smokes them out of the playhouse, though Herb makes a show of it, popping the steaming pizza-box lid and peeling off the cheesiest piece. “Mmm-mmm, does this look good!” He strolls around the yard eating off his hand, slurping strings of mozzarella off his block chin.

Two minutes of this and Oscar cranks a window open. “We’re not stupid! Pizza’s not what we want, and we’re still in command!” He draws back and launches a paper airplane into the dusk.

Julia says to Herb, “Don’t you dare go and pick that up.”

Herb looks out at the airplane. “But I want to.”

“So help me God,” Julia says.

“Just to see what he’s thinking,” Herb says.

“What he’s *what?*”

Herb kicks the G.I. Joe—the doll’s pants spin off and land by the dog dish—then he picks the airplane off the lawn. He unfolds it and reads

while he walks. "He wants us to call a priest," he says. Long before she's in range to take it, he holds the note out to Laney, as if in some larger spirit of offering.

*LBJ,*

*1. the pizzas bullshit. the grands want splitz—*

*2. marry me laney jane—call Father B—happily ever as long as we got—*

*PZO*

Herb pulls a chair up next to Laney, unloads himself with a sigh. She feels him study her profile then look away. "It's none of my business, but have you thought of marrying Odd? Independent of all this?"

Laney blinks the playhouse in and out of sight. All the shades of green in the yard have merged into a wilted-sandwich-lettuce green. *Independent of all this*. What could this possibly mean?

"It's getting late. What about calling Father B? Just to talk."

"To trick him, you mean?"

"Not trick him, Ma."

Laney folds the note back into an airplane, pricks her finger on its nose. "You did a beautiful job on that house, Herb. You did superbly."

Herb crosses his arms, holds a finger to his lip. "You think?"

"I've always said so."

Julia talks around her leg like it's in traction. "For me," she says, "it's the priest or it's the police, and I don't particularly care which."

Herb says, "I couldn't make a living at it." He smooths the hair over his ear like he's always done when he feels momentarily understood. "I'd be stone broke. That's what I'm saying."

The neighbours on the other side of the fence switch a light on. Laney loves the creep of evening, how long you resist pulling a lamp on when you're sitting reading, and it's always someone else comes along and insists, and because of their itch to do it, you let them, and they're right and the room lighting up makes you happy, so you thank them, and she bets there's a word for this in German, a word like *schadenfreude* only darker. "You need a certain amount of disappointment in life. It's something you can rely on later on."

Herb stares, his eyelashes minuscule curls of ash. "I'm a disappointment to you?"

"Don't be dramatic, Sweetie. I'm talking about people." Laney glances at the uneaten pizzas. "Listen, I won't trick him. If you think calling a priest is the answer, then call him."

"Meaning?"

Laney meets his eye. "You think he's a danger to your boys? Out in that house right now? You think that?"

Julia says across the porch, "It's more like how can we be sure, Mom?"

Herb says, "It's getting late. That's all I know."

Laney tightens her grip on the airplane. "You divide me, Herbert. You split me in two."

While they're waiting on Father B, Tucker sprints from the playhouse, tripping the motion-sensor floodlights and not breaking stride until he's balled in Julia's lap. They breathe together awhile—Julia molding down around him so they are like a fist within a fist—then Tucker flies up to give his report. "I had to wait to escape until Oscar went to sleep. And Mister Odd is stuck out there, too. Oscar made him get in there, but he's too big to get out."

Herb says, "Are you saying Mister Odd's trapped?"

"He's not Lassie, Herb. Let him talk."

Herb pushes Julia's shoulder, not hard, but her hair moves.

"Oh," Tucker's face broadens, "Mister Odd is stuck bad. He really is. I think the house'll have to come apart to get him out. And Oscar put him in there because he doesn't want chicken. And then Mommy gets hit with a grenade. Oscar said it probably tore her legs off."

The doorbell rings. Julia picks Tucker up, shifts him onto the saddle of her hip. "See," she says, kissing his forehead, "Mommy's legs are fine. Good as new."

Father B steps out onto the patio, his smiling cheeks the size of a baby's bottom with one dimple so deep Laney thinks it's a stab wound. His foot turns funny and almost sends him over. He bends down and picks up the naked G.I. Joe. "What do we have here?" He inspects the small plastic buttocks.

Herb lashes an orange extension cord across the lawn and jogs out with his drill. He crowbars the strips of molding off and starts working his way clockwise from screw to screw—his arm recoiling and the drill engine fluttering as each screw comes loose.

Father B says joyfully, "Seems a funny time of day to run a drill."

Just then Herb yells, "Here we go!" and scampers away from the playhouse. For a moment, nothing. Then the playhouse sort of looms forward. The façade peels apart from the building, creaks, then accelerates into its fall, landing in the grass with a *thunk*.

Father says, "Well isn't that a picture."

Herb moves his flashlight beam over the rooms, open now to the night like a sit-com set. "It looks like a suicide cult."

Oscar's curled up in a miniature wing chair. On the other side of the wall, two-storey Odd slumps forward in a lawn chair, his hands and knees and feet nuzzled in pairs.

Laney steps on a beer can in such a way it cleaves to her shoe. She sets her palm to Odd's forehead. His chest takes in air in quick punches and he's sweating, feverish. Laney lets go. Something so personal in that heat. The inside-out look he gets when he's sleeping.

He wakes squinting into the floodlights, glancing left and down to place himself. Then, grumpy, adorable, he finds Laney. "I'm tired, LBJ. I wanna go home."

"We will."

"Lousy pinkos trapped me."

"I know."

"Lord love 'em." He smiles himself back to sleep and an entire dream plays on his face. All in a span of seconds.

"Father's B's here," Laney says. "Like you asked."

He pulls Laney into his lap and belts his arms around her waist, locking his punch-flat knuckles and shifting her against him. Over her shoulder he says, "Father B, good to see you. How's God?" He says this every time he sees Father B.

Every time Father B responds, "God is good."

Oscar crawls out and shuffles over, his shoulders in a penitent hang. He climbs into Laney's lap who's in Odd's lap and she belts him in too, holds a kiss to his cheek so long she has to breathe through her nose. His skin smells like when you open an empty glass jar. "You hurt your mother," she says. "You hurt her feelings."

He picks at her sleeve, watches his fingers. "I don't know why I did it."

Julia's on her way out now with Tucker riding piggyback, his arms cranking like a symphony conductor over the podium of her head.

Odd's telling Father B that Laney's going marry him, but not tonight. Not until she knows herself it's right.

"Of course not. I guess I'm just confused as to—"

"I'm saying it is a long dang life, Father, and look at these boys. A guy like me can only take them so far. You understand what I'm saying?"

A few feet off, Herb sits in the grass reorganizing his drill bits.

Father B rests his chin on G.I. Joe. "You want me to bless them?"

"Give 'em all you got. Your full horsepower."

Laney is trying to remember how they go, the vows. It's hard to believe now she said them once. This close to it, she thinks it's not marriage she resists so much as the words, the vow-taking itself. What she has now is her life, how things happened, in what order, and it would hurt too much to pretend all that had been taken could be restored, or that Odd was a man without habits or demons or secrets, a man she could trust with her babies and her babies' babies. But he will drink too much again and he will play too hard, he will pick them up, *the grands*, hold

them screaming in mid air, and some day he'll play until he's not playing anymore. And Laney won't stop him. She never will. If he asked her, if it's what he needed to make it through the night, she would deliver them to him in her own arms.

*Anna Swanson*

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## Lullaby for Small

What do I know of the world these days?  
This room, the merciful windows  
and whatever weather hits them. The world is  
this: the eagles calling out into the sleepless night,  
and me, small enough to fit in a coat pocket.  
There is a box I keep on the table by my bed.  
A box just large enough for all the doctors'  
perfect remedies. The eagles call out into the night,  
the falling notes of their cries like ripples around a pebble  
which has disappeared into dark water.  
At five, a peacock walks the ledge  
outside my bedroom window. The light  
begins so slowly. And me, curled in my bed,  
small enough to fit in a coat pocket.  
I have worn out my anger, and there is not much  
of me left. I want the backseat  
of our old orange Datsun. I want my father  
to carry me in. I swore I'd never get too big.  
*Sleep, baby, sleep.* All the old songs.  
*Thy father tend the sheep.* I want  
*shhhhh.*

The falling notes like ripples. The pebble.  
The dark water closing around it.

# The moment

when the world says go. When everything  
turns green: the neon signs, the on-ramps,  
the sun rising like an oversized traffic light  
across the highway. She's left the muffler  
on the side of the road. She's cut off the roof.  
She's speeding down sunburnt tarmac.  
To have a body. To move  
from inside the skin. She remembers now.  
To pivot around a paddle into white water.  
To somersault, to hipcheck, to handspring.  
To nail a baseball into a glove. To reach  
past safety and smack against joy.  
She remembers. To jackknife  
off the wharf into cold water.  
To wake up. This body:  
the green sap rising.

# Tulip

The tulip starts out all knee socks, headbands,  
good posture. There is an elegance that grows out of this,  
flawless, youthful, expected. But not quite beautiful.  
She marries her law-school boyfriend.  
Her life is slender, smooth, punctuated.  
Stand next to her and everything makes sense.  
The house. Retirement plans. A boy and two girls.  
She accents any room she stands in.  
She is the perfect dinner-party acquaintance  
you never really got to know after all these years.

Only in the last days does she open.  
She stops brushing her hair and her dark eyes  
have fire in them. The death that grows in her  
is not a diminishing, more an unhinging;  
the diver's body pausing in the high air,  
arced and beautiful before it falls. Suddenly  
you feel small before her, unbearably restricted,  
as if she had saved a lifetime of abandon  
for this one meeting. She takes death as a lover,  
hangs out her satin sheets,  
stains to the wind.

*Mari-Lou Rowley*

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## Quantum Leap

Try building a universe from scratch  
quarks on up, it's true they travel in packs  
of threes, red green blue, inseparable  
as adolescents in coordinated fleece,  
bound by gluons they eventually become one  
proton or neutron with no colour at all. White  
Madonna in need of a partner. Boys lined up  
against the gym, buddies/anti-buddies growing  
unstable, mesons that like to mess around  
turn into electrons and nefarious particles, spin  
girls on their heels, carry them off by force.  
Attraction electromagnetic they orbit around her  
make a quantum leap to the heart's core  
emitting a whoop and a photon of light.

# Gravitational Waves

We, briefly observable, a point in time, a curve  
in space, two bodies pulled toward each other.  
Now universes between us. And language,  
our familiar and foreign utterances. Tell me about  
your weather. The quantum effect of touch,  
excited electrons, other acceleration phenomena.  
It is blowing here. Squalling. Thugs of snow hug  
the cabin. Threaten electrical disturbance, frozen locks,  
disorientation. Perhaps the moon looks like this  
on the shady side. Remember our walk on moonrock  
the hot sun, my flimsy sandals, our quick gasps,  
the cool Mediterranean, our contrasting skins.  
Macroscopic memories for weightless words,  
gravitons of longing riding wave after wave.

## Trude

I remember the day Wyatt first told me about Trude. It was some time not long after New Year's. I'd been up at my sister's acreage for a month or so and had just got home. I was out back shovelling snow when he came over. He asked how the visit with my sister went and I started telling him a bit about that but, I don't know, while he was listening he kept kicking at the snow and putting his hands into his pockets and then taking them back out again. I guess I knew he must have had something else on his mind so I put away the shovel and said, let's go down to the river. That's where we usually go when we want to talk about something. When Wyatt's mother died last summer we spent a lot of time down there.

At the river, Wyatt told me about Trude. He was pretty excited about the whole thing. Trude was a grad student over at the university where he works as a welder. They'd met one day last November when Wyatt was helping set up an exhibition in the art gallery. The two of them got to talking and I guess they hit it off right away. Later, Trude invited him to spend Christmas at her folks' place in a town a couple of hundred miles northwest of the city. He'd had a real good time up there. He and Trude's dad, Luc, had really hit it off. It was the happiest I'd ever seen him.

A few days later, I invited Wyatt to bring Trude around for dinner. After dinner, they took care of the coffee while I started a fire. When I had a good flame going we sat down with our coffee. Shelby came over and jumped into Trude's lap. The three of us talked a bit while Trude scratched Shelby's ears. I said to Shelby that it looked like she'd found herself a new friend. Trude said she already knew Shelby pretty well since Shelby spent a lot of time across the street at Wyatt's place. She said Shelby sometimes sat on her lap while she worked on her dissertation and helped her out with the tricky parts. I asked Trude what she studied and she said she was writing about Leo Tolstoy's green stick. I knew who Tolstoy was because I'd read one of his books but I'd never heard of his green stick. Trude said that when Tolstoy was a boy his older brother had told him that he knew the secret for world peace and human happiness. The brother wrote that secret down on a green stick and buried it in a forest near their home. Trude said that Tolstoy spent his whole life looking for that stick. You could see that in the way he wrote

his books. She said that when he was an old man Tolstoy wanted to be buried in the same forest as the green stick.

When Trude was finished, no one said anything for a while. Then I said I thought it was a good story and that it was too bad Tolstoy never found his stick. Wyatt said he figured one way or another everybody's looking for a green stick. I guess that was a pretty serious conversation. Afterwards, we just sat there for a long time looking into the fire and not saying anything.

When the accident happened, I was at home drinking a cup of coffee and reading a book. Wyatt and Trude had gone up to her folks' place for Easter. They were supposed to be coming home that night. I remember how I kept looking out the window at Wyatt's house to see if they were back but every time I looked the windows were still dark. Then the phone rang. Somehow the RCMP figured out that I was the one they should call. The mountie told me Wyatt was at the university hospital. I asked if he was okay and she told me that he'd been hurt real bad. I asked her how Trude was. She said Trude was dead. I don't know. After I heard that, I just couldn't say anything. I hung up the phone, went back to my desk and picked up my coffee cup and carried it into the kitchen. I poured the coffee out in the sink, washed and dried the cup and put it back into the cupboard. I wished Shelby were there. She usually comes in to eat something around that time. I wanted to wait for her so that I could make sure she was okay but I guess I knew I'd better get going.

I took my keys off their hook and went out to the car. It was about fifteen minutes to the hospital. I didn't even know if Wyatt would still be alive when I got there. I drove to the end of the alley. I sat there looking out at the traffic, waiting for a space to open up and trying not to think too much about what might happen.

When I got to the hospital, I went into emergency and told the woman at reception I was there to see Wyatt. She asked my name then she called someone on the telephone and told them I was there. After a few minutes, a man came by and asked for me. He introduced himself, told me he was a social worker. I followed him down the hallway and into a small room. I asked him how Wyatt was and he said he didn't know. He said that Wyatt had a real bad head injury; he'd needed an operation and he was just coming out of surgery. He said the doctor would come by in a few minutes to talk to me. He asked if I was a relative of Wyatt's and I said, no, I was his neighbour. He asked if Wyatt had any family and I said no. I told him Wyatt's mother had died not too long ago. When he heard that the social worker put down the papers he was holding and rubbed his eyes. Then he asked me if I'd known Trude. I nodded and then said the RCMP had told me she was dead. The social worker picked up his papers again and started looking through them. He

said he'd talked to the RCMP and the paramedics who had been at the accident.

Trude's truck had gone off the road. Some people in another vehicle had seen it happen but they didn't know what had caused it. No one knows. The people said the truck had drifted onto the shoulder and then suddenly jerked back, hard to the left. It went into a sideways skid on the gravel and when it hit the ditch it started to roll. It hit a barbed-wire fence and a post came in through the driver's window. That post killed Trude. The social worker told me that even though Wyatt was wearing a seat belt he'd still hit his head somehow, maybe on the doorframe. Those folks in the other vehicle called the RCMP on their cell phone and, since they were near a town, the police and paramedics got there real quick. When the paramedics saw how bad Wyatt was they called for a helicopter to airlift him. The RCMP took Trude's body into town, found out her parents' number and called them.

When the social worker had finished telling me about the accident, we just sat there for a while not saying anything. Then he stood up and said he would go find out if the doctor was ready to talk to me. After he'd left, I sat there not thinking too much about anything.

A few minutes later, the social worker came back into the room and handed me a glass of water. He told me the doctor was right behind him. The doctor walked into the room with two younger guys who I guess were medical students. He introduced himself and shook my hand. He asked me how I was. I said I guessed I was okay under the circumstances. Then the doctor told me that when Wyatt had arrived at the hospital he'd been in critical condition and would have died without an operation. He was bleeding inside his head and there was a large blood clot pushing in on his brain. The doctor told me that he'd drilled a hole through Wyatt's skull so he could get the clot out and stop the bleeding and then he'd screwed a titanium plate over top of the hole. Then he pointed to one of the students standing next to him and said that he'd helped with the operation. The student smiled down at me.

I asked if Wyatt was going to be okay. The doctor said he was out of immediate danger but that they'd have to keep him in the hospital for a few days just in case the bleeding in his head started again. He said that Wyatt's brain was probably okay but that it was still too soon to say if he'd have any permanent problems or not. He told me we'd talk again after Wyatt had woken up and he'd examined him. Then the doctor shook my hand again and he and the two students left the room.

I told the social worker I wanted to see Wyatt. He told me which room he'd be in but he said that he still wouldn't be there for a while. He said maybe I should go get myself a cup of coffee.

I went over to the hospital's food court, got myself a coffee and car-

ried it over to one of the tables. I set the cup on the table and then sat down and waited there until the coffee was cold. Then I got up and went to find Wyatt.

When I got to his room, he was lying on the bed and, I don't know, I guess he looked pretty bad. They had him hooked up to a couple of different machines. He was strapped down with nylon straps across his arms, legs and waist. He had a neck brace on. His face was pale, and was scraped up in a few places and a bit swollen. They'd shaved off some of the hair on the right side of his head and there was a cut in his scalp about four inches long with some stitches holding it together. He had two black eyes.

Wyatt was still unconscious. I stood there and looked down at him, touched one of his hands and it felt warm. I said his name but he didn't respond.

A nurse came into the room and I asked her why he was strapped to the bed. She said he'd attacked a paramedic and an orderly before going into surgery. They wanted to make sure he didn't hurt himself or anyone else when he woke up. I don't know. Wyatt's the most gentle guy I know. The nurse told me sometimes people act violently after a head injury and that it probably wouldn't happen again. They'd take off the straps after Wyatt woke up and they'd talked to him. She said he'd probably sleep through the night and be up in the morning. She told me to go home and get some sleep so that I wouldn't be too tired the next day.

When the nurse left the room, I sat down next to Wyatt's bed. I took one of his hands and held it for a while. I was too afraid to touch his head. I told him I'd see him in the morning and then got up and left. I didn't mention Trude.

The next morning, I met that social worker in the hall outside Wyatt's room. He told me that Wyatt had woken up a couple of hours ago. I asked how he was. He said that Wyatt didn't remember anything about the accident. As soon as he was awake, he wanted to know where Trude was. He wanted them to take off the straps. The nurses had called another social worker. She came and told him that Trude was dead. He didn't take it well. He was still pretty weak but he'd started shouting and struggling against the straps and they were afraid he would hurt himself so they gave him a sedative. The social worker said that if Wyatt didn't take it real easy for a few more days he might end up having a seizure or the bleeding in his head might start again. He told me to let the nurses know as soon as Wyatt woke up again and then he left.

Wyatt woke up around lunchtime. I was sitting next to his bed reading a book when I heard him say my name. I looked up and he was staring right at me with those two black eyes. He told me Trude was dead. I said I knew. He said he didn't remember anything and I told him what

the social worker had told me. He lay there not saying anything. After a while, he fell asleep again. I went to tell the nurses and one of them came and looked in on him.

Wyatt slept most of the time. When he was awake, we talked a little bit but it was really hard for him. In the afternoon, a doctor came to examine him. She asked him a few questions and then removed the straps. The doctor told him that he'd have trouble talking for a few days but that he should slowly get better. I remember that she had a long curving scar across one side of her forehead.

In the evening, an orderly brought Wyatt a tray of food. He was trying to eat a bit of it when a man walked into the room. It was Luc, Trude's dad. He said he'd been to see Trude's body and to arrange for her to be taken home. Then he'd come the rest of the way into the city to see Wyatt. Wyatt introduced us and we shook hands over the bed. I went for a walk so they could visit. When I came back, Wyatt was asleep. I told Luc he could stay at my place for the night. He thanked me but said he couldn't leave Trude's mom alone for too long so he was going to drive home that night. He said that Trude's funeral was in four days and I was welcome even though Wyatt wouldn't be able to come. I said thanks but that I should stay with Wyatt. Luc nodded and said he'd sit with Wyatt for another hour or so. He told me I should go home and get some sleep.

Three days later, the doctor who put the metal plate into Wyatt's head came and told him he could go home. He gave him a prescription for painkillers and for some pills that would help stop him from having a seizure. He told him to make an appointment to come back in ten days to have the stitches removed from his head. He said to take it real easy until then.

I brought Wyatt home and helped him to his back door. He was real slow on his feet and not very stable. He said that if he moved his head too quickly it made him feel sick. When we were on the back steps, Shelby appeared. Wyatt managed to sit down for a minute and scratch her ears. Then we went inside. He took a couple of pills and went to bed.

In the evening, I woke Wyatt up and we ate a bit of soup and bread for supper. Then Wyatt, me, and Shelby went for a walk to the end of the block and back. After that, he went back to bed. I spent the night at his place sleeping on the sofa.

The next morning, I got up and checked in on him. He was still sleeping so I went across to my place to take care of a few things and to get some fruit and coffee to bring over for breakfast. When I was in my kitchen, I heard a car stop in front of Wyatt's house and his front door open and close. When I went to the front window, I saw Wyatt slowly

coming down his front steps and a taxi waiting in the street. I ran out the front door and caught him before he got into the cab. I asked what was happening. He said he was going to the station to catch a bus up to Trude's funeral. I don't know. I really didn't think he was in good enough shape to make the trip but I guess he still had a right to go. I told him I'd take him there myself.

We ate some breakfast. Then I helped him out to the car. I put some pillows and a blanket in the back seat so he could lie down. When I was backing out of the drive, I saw Shelby sitting on Wyatt's back step watching us leave. Wyatt looked out the window at Shelby and raised his hand to the glass and waved goodbye.

He slept for the whole trip. On the way, we passed the place on the road where the accident had happened but, since we were going the other way and that stretch is separated by a median with some trees, I didn't see the exact place. I stopped about half way to fuel up and get a cup of coffee and I remember how the guy working behind the counter had a scar running down his forehead and along one side of his nose.

When we got to Trude's town, I woke Wyatt up and he told me how to get to the church. As we walked in, Luc saw us. He looked angry and came over to Wyatt and said what the hell was he doing here and isn't one dead child enough. Then he put his arms around Wyatt and started to cry. Trude's mom came over and gave Wyatt a hug too but she didn't say anything. I helped Wyatt to the front of the church where Trude's coffin was. The lid was closed. A framed picture of Trude lay on top. Trude's mom came over and gave Wyatt a rose and he laid it on the coffin next to two others. Then we sat down for the service.

Six pallbearers carried Trude's coffin out of the church and put it into the back of a hearse. Everybody got in their cars and followed the hearse to the cemetery. We watched as Trude's coffin was lowered into the grave and the priest said a few more words. Then one of the pallbearers came up to Wyatt and Trude's parents and gave them the roses. They threw them down into the grave. A few people came up to Wyatt to talk to him but he didn't say too much. I don't know. He was starting to look pretty pale and tired. I told him that maybe he should go lie down somewhere for a while. He said he was ready to go home. He'd sleep in the car.

We said goodbye to Trude's parents and Luc helped Wyatt to the car. Wyatt got into the back, laid down, and closed his eyes. After I'd shut the door, Luc took my hand. He looked me in the eye and said thanks. He said I should take care of Wyatt.

On the way back home, we passed by that place where the accident had happened but this time it was coming up right there on our side of the road. I don't know. I remember thinking maybe I should've gone a different way just in case Wyatt couldn't handle seeing it but he looked

like he was sleeping pretty deep back there and, anyway, it was getting dark and I thought maybe the sooner I got him back home the better.

When I saw that broken fence getting closer, I suddenly felt a bit shaky. I took a few deep breaths and grabbed the wheel tight. I checked the mirrors and the road ahead and I thought maybe we were going to get through it okay. Then, I don't know, everything went kind of crazy. Wyatt was suddenly sitting up and leaning over into the front of the car. He was grabbing my jacket and pulling at it and yelling at me to stop the car. It was pretty scary. I thought we might go off the road, so I slowed down and pulled over onto the shoulder. Before we stopped, Wyatt was already out the door and stumbling down across the ditch. I put the hazards on and got out.

By the time I got around the car, he was already through the hole in the fence and running out into the field. I went after him but the earth was cut up pretty bad from the accident and it was hard to see in the twilight, so I had trouble staying on my feet. When I finally caught up, he was down on his knees tearing at the ground with his hands like he was looking for something. I knelt down beside him, put my hand on his shoulder and tried to settle him down. I asked what he was doing. He shook off my hand and kept digging. He said he was trying to find Trude's green stick. I don't know. I guess it was pretty strange. I looked at him digging in the ground and wondered for a second if maybe none of this was really happening. I knew Wyatt was right there in front of me but, somehow, in the twilight, I felt like he could disappear at any moment. I leaned forward on my knees and touched his shoulder. Then I grabbed hold of him and pulled him in towards me. I held him tight in my arms and told him to stop acting crazy. I said it was time to go home and that there was no such thing as a green stick. It was just a story. Wyatt broke my grip and hit me. I don't know. Wyatt's pretty strong. He knocked me backwards onto the ground and I kind of lost my senses for a few seconds. When my vision cleared, I pushed myself up and saw him crunched up on his side. He was shivering real bad and throwing up onto the dirt. I crawled over to him and laid my hands on his back and held them there until he calmed down. Then I tried to pull him up onto his feet but he lost his balance and fell onto the ground and started throwing up some more. When he was still again, I managed to pick him up and carry him back to the car.

I laid him in the back seat, put the pillows in behind his back and head and the blanket over top of him. I went to the trunk and took out another blanket, a clean rag and a bottle of water. I cleaned the dirt from the stitches in his head and the vomit from his face and I tucked the second blanket in around him. Then I shut the door and leaned back against the car. The night felt suddenly still. I looked at the deep blue sky

to the west and I saw Venus shining just above the trees. I touched my cheek where Wyatt had hit me and could feel that it was starting to swell. I took a few deep breaths and walked around the car a couple of times to make sure I was still okay to drive. Then I got behind the wheel and looked back at Wyatt. He was sleeping. I put my hand on his forehead, held it there for a few seconds and listened to his breathing. It seemed like he was going to be okay. I turned back around, started the car and headed for home.

When we got back to the city and down into our neighbourhood, I turned into Wyatt's back alley and parked behind his house. As the headlights swept across the backyard, I caught sight of Shelby's eyes shining out from under a chokecherry bush. She must have heard us coming. I got out of the car and went around to the other side. I opened the door and leaned in and woke Wyatt up. It was a cold night. He started shivering so I took a blanket and put it around his shoulders and then helped him through the yard and up the steps to the back door.

I stood in the kitchen while Wyatt used the bathroom. When he came out, I gave him one of those pills against seizures and a bit of water and then helped him into bed. He was still shivering so I laid the blanket from the car on top of the bed covers. It didn't help much. He was pale and, when I touched his forehead, his skin was cool. I went to the living room, took an afghan from the sofa and brought it back to the bedroom and threw it over the bed. Wyatt kept shivering. Finally, I took off my jacket and got into the bed. I put my arm around him and held him close. I lay there until he finally stopped shivering and fell asleep. I kept laying there, looking out the window trying to figure things out. After a while I guess I must have fallen asleep too.

When I woke up, the sky was just beginning to brighten. Wyatt was still sleeping. Some colour had come back into his face. I touched his forehead and his skin was warm.

I was standing at the kitchen window when I heard Shelby yeowl. I went to the back door and out onto the steps. I don't know. Somehow, I couldn't see anything very well out there. Everything was gray and hazy. Then there was a bit of movement over alongside the shed and Shelby suddenly stepped out from the bushes. She was coming straight towards me through the haze. She had something in her mouth but I couldn't tell what it was. She was staring straight into my eyes in a weird kind of way. I don't know. I guess it made me nervous because I couldn't remember her ever acting so strange before. I remember wondering, why can't everything just go back to normal.

When Shelby reached the steps, she stopped and dropped the thing in her mouth at my feet. It was a small gray bundle of some kind. I nudged it with a toe and a little head rolled out and I saw that it was a small bird.

I didn't know what to think. I guess I was pretty mad at her but she was just sitting there staring at me in that weird way and, somehow, I didn't really feel like yelling at her or anything.

I picked up the bird and held it in my hands. I ran a finger along its body, could feel the edges of its broken bones catching on the inside of its skin. I don't know. I really think there's nothing harder than when someone you love goes and gives you something you just can't handle. Looking down at that bird I didn't know how I felt about anything anymore.

I carried the bird over to a corner of Wyatt's garden. I cleared the weeds away from a patch of ground and pushed my hands down into the soil and pulled out a damp clump of earth. I did that a couple more times until I'd dug a small grave. Then I laid the bird down in the hole. Shelby sat nearby, watching me while I worked. I pushed the earth in over the broken body and pressed down on the soil with both of my hands. Then I said to Shelby that I wished it were Wyatt who was buried under there. I don't know why I said that. I felt ashamed and confused. I thought maybe I was going crazy too. I tried to stand up but somehow my legs just wouldn't hold me and I fell back onto my knees. My hands started to shake and I jammed them hard against my face and held them there tight. A pain shot through my head from the bruise on my cheek. There was a roaring sound and a flash of light and the world suddenly froze in around me in a single terrifying image. Then it was gone. Everything started somehow to move again and I felt tears begin to force their way out from between my fingers.

*Sue Sinclair*

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## Big East Lake

This is the world, impenetrable, the flat  
black pupil that doesn't look at you.  
This is when it's hardest to praise  
the world. You want to be wooed by the mysterious  
and to cherish it. Instead, you're bored:  
beauty, beauty, beauty—what of it?

You feel yourself at the bottom of a well;  
love of the landscape can't be roused.  
Nature has shifted into your blind spot,  
no longer a vision, no longer the ego  
revealed to itself. The trees immersed  
in growth, occupied by their own being.  
The water slips off your paddle.  
The shore slips into the water's darkness.

You shift uncomfortably in the bow,  
haven't the heart for this.  
The light travels a little slower here.  
The trees quieter, sober.  
If it weren't too late, you'd go back  
on whatever promise brought you here.

*Rocco de Giacomo*

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## Louis Riel

- Head east on Broadway.
- Make a right at the Safeway.
- Keep going until you get to the intersection with a Superlube.
- Turn left.
- This road turns into Highway 20. Keep right. Get off at the first exit.
- Follow onto Goldwheat. Then to River Road.
- House number 330. The red one.
- On the right. The wide driveway. The vegetable garden.
- The rope mattress. The part-time actor explaining
- everything. The enormous kitchen stove. The wooden cradle. Winter
- hangs over each word like a millstone. Summer beckons like a faded serigraph
- on the wall; the wildflowers on the table stunned with silence. Your hands
- remain there, poised over a piano key; this is the wake of someone
- you knew; or an office Halloween party: everyone smiling
- as if into a flurry, red-eared, endearing ourselves
- to our self-effacement: the soft eradication
- of one more dream into the details
- of waking.

# Nonetheless

*for Winnipeg*

Every morning, it's the same thing: east  
of where she wants to be.  
She picks herself up from the road,  
shakes the rust from her eyes, the old  
tires and patio chairs from her hair,  
and makes her way west again. She starts  
off strong enough, like a rock pine

cutting through a stampede.  
But by midday, her throat  
is as parched as a storm canal  
blazing with crickets, and the evening  
shade, in the bones of all the rocking chairs,  
aches within. Just the thought  
of that first breeze through her  
long prairie grass, brings on the shivers  
of late afternoon. By nightfall,

curtains are flowing  
from her bedroom windows, lighting  
bathes her wooden balconies in white  
and the rain and floodwaters  
begin to gather in the potholes  
along Maryland Street: little cups  
offered to her lips  
in consolation.

*Jim Kennedy*

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## Cheerleaders

**I**t was a college campus set back in the woods. On a warm summer Saturday, with a few clouds moving lazily across the sky, I biked onto the main campus driveway, past acre after acre of pine, beech, and oak. Off in the distance I heard some voices. Lots of voices. Enthusiastic voices. But they were muffled by the woods.

I turned a corner and came upon several large athletic fields full of lively colors and movement. There were hundreds of girls, some as young as ten or eleven, most fifteen or sixteen, in separate groups of a dozen or so. They were all wearing brightly colored cheerleading uniforms. Bodies were being tossed in the air. Some groups were moving in unison. One girl ran away from her group and then did a triple cartwheel.

Some of the younger groups seemed to be undergoing an initiation. I could see some slight hesitation by one girl as she was about to be tossed in the air. Was it for the first time? I watched as the same girl did not pause when she stepped up again to be tossed.

Most of the groups were coached by young women. But some were led by young men, wide shouldered and athletic. They all looked familiar. I had seen cheerleaders at high school and college basketball games. But this was outside and the sun was shining, accentuating their bright red, blue, green, and yellow uniforms. They numbered in the hundreds. And their energy was fresh and uncompromising.

I wondered if I was breaking some rule, intruding upon this scene. I expected glances, perhaps followed by a cheerleader camp administrator or security guard heading in my direction. But there was none of that. I was outside of everyone's focus and nearly invisible. All attention was on the instruction, especially on the demonstration of the next move.

I could have lain in the field and watched all day. And maybe I was beginning to when one of the group leaders called over to me, shouting, "Hey, we need you." She motioned with a swing of her arm for me to head on over.

I was slow getting up. So she offered further explanation: "We need a body."

The tone of her request was friendly and I walked over.

"This is all you have to do: lie down. Hold your legs straight and rigid,

next to each other, like two steel poles that have been welded together.”

“Um...” I heard myself mumble. She blew right by my hesitation.

“And your arms,” she said, “hold like this.”

I lay down and began following the instructions. My hesitation was replaced with a concern not to miss anything.

I wondered if this was a well-rehearsed practical joke. Is this how they dealt with intruders? I expected an enormous burst of laughter as two groups of about a dozen girls each lined up, one on my left and one on my right. At exactly that moment I remembered going to the circus as a child and watching a man being loaded into a cannon, also holding his body rigid.

The instructor signaled with her hand. The group on my left stepped closer and wedged their arms under me and began lifting. Those on my right stepped back, forming a tight line. They appeared to take a deep breath in anticipation. I had no idea what was to happen next.

“Okay, toss him!”

Evidently these teenage girls of very modest individual strength were discovering their group strength. I was one hundred and eighty pounds but now light as a hollow hula-hoop in their arms.

I shut my eyes in fear as they tossed me spinning far up in the air, and for a moment, I wondered if I had escaped gravity’s clutch. Then my direction reversed. I opened my eyes and saw a mass of arms stretched out under me. Would I plunge through their arms onto the hard ground? Fear became exhilaration when they caught me and gently rolled me onto the ground.

Then they ran off.

A bell had rung and I could see all the groups funneling toward a building adjacent to the fields. I said to myself, “They don’t even know my name.” Then I remembered how the instructor had called over: “We need a body.” Body. My name was Body.

I was still holding my arms and legs rigidly. Meanwhile, I stared up at the single cloud slowly moving across the sky. It was shaped like a body, lumpy and disfigured, but with two arms, two legs, and a head. I forgot where I was. And then I came to, rolling onto my side, tasting and smelling the grass, and recalling falling back to Earth.

*ken cathers*

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## at coal harbour

at coal harbour  
the bodies of the whales  
were dragged up  
on the sloped concrete  
for rendering

the huge carcasses  
of blues, humpbacks, fins  
lay limp, glistening

their flukes already tattered  
by relentless sharks  
thrashing half way up the ramp

where the men worked  
with long knives  
stripping back the fat  
cubing blocks of flesh  
for freezing

blood rivering back  
to shallows...

& the stench  
thick enough to wade through—  
unbreathable.

how one becomes numb to it  
arms slick  
with viscera

the mind wandering  
elsewhere, beyond  
the barrels of teeth, oil  
piled against gutting sheds

opaque carvatures  
of bone  
stacked up for export

& always  
the war surplus  
rusted scrap  
of the whaling station  
breaking down

scream of burnt bearings  
bent couplings  
echoing down the inlet

dissipating  
like the black smoke  
of choked diesels

at least  
that is what  
he tells me

welding the broken details  
of 40 years  
back together

offering up  
the delicate ear-bone  
of a gray whale

like jewelry  
he has polished  
with his description.

*Josh Rathkamp*

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## Tattoo

When I turned sixteen and found my licence  
read '74 not '79, Peanut drove for the twelve pack  
we drank too quickly at the drainage creek,  
throwing our empties at the robins in the trees,  
which would take off, in panic, and return,  
take off and return.

It was a game the birds knew. Soon we would leave,  
soon the sky, like a rotting apple, would darken.  
And when it did, we did.  
We walked two blocks to the tattoo shop.  
We flipped pages of anchors,  
of anchors and waves, of big anchors splashing

like a whale's tail before a face appeared, a demon with a tongue  
that curled. I thought I was living. A car, no curfew,  
no black eye, and a buzz better than the first puff of smoke.  
I wanted to be crazy, not end up like my father  
or brothers or friends who have grown roots  
too long in a town surrounded

by streams. Now, we're no different, him  
and me. Our imperfections. There is a fiery face  
on my leg I see before bed, a face on my leg  
not mine. And I remember my father  
placing his soft hand over it, pleading  
*how's it come off, how's it come off?*

*John Barton*

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# Him

*after Ron Mueck's Dead Dad, mixed media, 1996-1997*

there is no rhetoric in an open mouth, the lips caught  
mid-breath, nothing left to expel, his last few rasps

etched in my ear, a moth against wind-rattled glass  
as dusk grew silent, the perpetual thrum of traffic

unheeded, no pulse. He was a man who grew small  
in my eyes, how else could I remain a nonbeliever

until his features petrified into a mask no one lifts off  
chin canted downwards, eyes stoppered into unscanning

ellipses, his pajama redundant, an inscrutable shroud  
—if this is love, I have learned it too late: little stays

private when hands are held with the dead, my life  
leached out, evacuating queer ethers into his body

denying rot in the final moments of touch, my face  
wiped of awareness while, in lamplight, his continues

as life-like, hair unbrushed, skin wanting soap, jaw  
clenching, gaze thrown askance. His was another self

the stand-in I could not betray for men I have known  
men secretive as he was about an invisible set course

gone nowhere now, time dumbstruck, a presence felt  
pressures the body erases subsiding into bedclothes

*Mark Anthony Jarman*

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## The RPM of Wolves

**W**eird herd of mice drives out of the woods and devours our fall fields, our food, our dogs snapping at a carpet of a thousand grey creatures. The dogs drive into that herd, biting necks and nerves of rodents, tossing them in the snarling air. Then that wagon of severed pigs' heads—damn thing turns over, pig heads rolling the road. The kid runs out, nabs himself a head.

His mother mutters in our bed, Leave me alone.

Make way for my itchy antlers, my spikes of rage, my affection for the slippery slope. In the fall I shoot a buck, directions in my head. She rides to the city, leaves the boy. In the winter the safe road on the ice is marked with cut evergreens.

A giant owl attacks my dog, gashes its back. I hear his yelps, move outside to help him, drive the owl away with a rake. Scabs later hard as platters, but dogs forget their fights.

The deer are not yarded up; we see them moving on the ridges above the mouth. It's easier for the deer when the snow is low and easier for me to cut and haul trees out of the woods.

February sun leans with its lost purpose. Food short: our dalliance with our teeth. March's pretty chain of lights in ice-water; the liquid world occurs. A man's drowning lungs, weeks of coughing, soundly sick of sound.

Weather warms, we've survived another fucking winter. But another winter waits; should all slit our wrists, really. Tough people. They keep going; I follow like a retarded child. Snow becomes muck, and immediately attacked by insects—cutting, digging, planting, going mad.

Female dog in heat, males excited. We're in the dooryard cutting wood. The boy sneaks outside with his pig's head. We have our heads down, bucking and sawing away.

What the hell?

The dog has a deer or something.

Oh Christ come quick! The dogs got the boy!

We run to racked snow: one dog with blood over its chest, mouth

bloody and it wants to play more. Torn clothing scattered, his little boots and blue cap, my boy naked on his belly, on red snow. I can't look.

If I don't walk over, then it hasn't happened yet. I can't touch him. He's bit up everywhere.

Levon turns my boy over—chewed up, throat open, vein ripped. Is he even breathing?

We need a doctor. You go to town, you go upriver.

I put a quilt over him. I don't want to see him like that—remember him like that.

Was there a pulse? Why'd you leave him in the yard? yells grandmere, her long hair flying.

We had to go get help.

Cowards.

(Would a woman have picked him up? Maybe a woman would have picked him up.)

You murdered my grandson! Her face contorted. Are you a man? You don't leave a child to die all alone.

I didn't know they was out! As far as I'm concerned Levon murdered my son letting those dogs out.

Liver-coloured bitch in heat and black males excited.

That big male did it.

You don't leave a child and dogs alone.

You always did!

Not with all those dogs together, and one in heat.

I didn't know!

Cuz you're stupid trash. Kill them.

No point now.

Kill them.

That big male did it.

You damn coward.

Grandmere kills my best dog with a shovel, that devoted canine brain bending like a coconut.

Stove flames reflect in the white door's paint, flapjacks taste of iron. You think you live forever. A pulse waits in each son's throat and our father can't move.

Wham! The shovel finds each dog, each eye still golden brown but no depth, no light. Wind blows up, cyclones of black leaves tilting, biting into our house.

Just dead leaves raking walls, I know this, but I have to peer out in case someone is there, in case someone needs me.

*Erin Knight*

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## Horse Latitudes of the Atlantic (Malinche travels home)

*i.*

Days the greatest weakness  
is the wind, and we can not  
be light enough. We eat meat,  
stilled muscle, pare the ship  
to ribs. Morning is what we ask  
our bodies to consume.

*ii.*

Belt of calms.  
With a lens held to the sun,  
I sear a pin of white gold  
to my palm. Because reason  
is meagre, boredom a cruel governor  
of men. The moon changes shape  
without falling from the horizon, myth  
of proximity, the salt burn of lack  
and sleep.

*iii.*

Stagnant astride the held breath  
of the sea. They say, Marina,  
what might you offer, for wind?  
I could tell them it is easier  
to drive in a gasp than force  
its release.

*iv.*

My hand in the last earthcool  
store of coffee beans. To dim  
this migraine of heat. My hair shorn  
(mats of salt, my swollen  
tongue) and seven weeks  
for a blood blister to heal.

*v.*

To fill a sail: surrender. Exhale  
the same morning as the rough  
bundle of burlap disappears  
underwater. The rust colt  
I folded in canvas, his eyes the milk  
blue of having never seen the sun.

*Robert Colman*

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## Save the Tiger

The way the eyes of that Caddy  
opened into the night  
as if stung by the smog;  
Jack Lemmon in a lumbering slab  
of metal, slow and cautious  
even at high speed. Reminds me  
speed is what I want to be—  
getting somewhere, stripping  
the road, its passive asphalt.  
I like to think of myself that way  
—more than sluggish, suburban.  
But when a policeman pulled me over  
tonight, asked me if I'd had anything  
to drink, it was nice to say  
no and have it be honest.  
Not that I'm on the wagon,  
but for a moment there's no argument,  
no need for it inside.  
I look at my face  
in those damn TV screens  
at the gas pumps, the shine  
on my nose, how proud I am  
to hit the station when it's cheap  
as it'll get and think,  
what am I saving?  
What am I saving it for?

# Contributors

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**John Barton** has published eight volumes of poetry and five chapbooks; a bilingual edition of *West of Darkness: a self-portrait of Emily Carr*, his third book, is forthcoming from BuschekBooks this summer. He is co-editor of *Seminal: The Anthology of Canada's Gay-Male Poets*, due out next year. He lives in Victoria, where he edits *The Malahat Review*.

**Jennifer Brum** is an American illustrator and muralist living in Pennsylvania with her husband, two daughters, and a menagerie of animals. After attending college in New England, she spent five years in New Orleans as a graphic designer. Now she is pleased to be doing what she loves most, illustration.

**ken cathers** has a BA from the University of Victoria, a MA from York, and has worked in a pulp mill for over thirty years. He's married with two adult sons and two grandchildren. Over the years, he's been published in numerous periodicals and anthologies, as well as publishing four books of poetry.

**Robert Colman** is a writer and editor based in Newmarket, Ontario. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Malahat Review*, *CV2*, *Queen's Quarterly*, and *The Antigone Review*.

**Rocco de Giacomo's** poetry has appeared most recently in *Lichen*, *Quills*, *On Spec*, and *The Antigone Review*. His editorial debut, *Looking Back Looking Forward*, is available from LyricalMyrical Press, and his latest collection of poetry, *Leaning into the Mountain*, will be launched this fall by Fooliar Press. Rocco lives in Toronto, where he writes poetry, co-manages the arts ezine *Latchkey.net*, and plans his next escape.

**Kate Hall** is co-editor of Delirium Press. Her poems have appeared in various Canadian journals and are forthcoming in *jubilat*, *The Colorado Review*, *The Denver Quarterly* and *The Boston Review*. A graduate of the MA program at Concordia University, she lives in Montréal.

**Brecken Rose Hancock** lives in Fredericton, New Brunswick where she writes poetry while pursuing a PhD in English. She's interested in things like science fiction and post-modern architecture. In December 2005, JackPine Press released *Strung*, her second chapbook. She has poems forthcoming in *Grain*.

**Mark Anthony Jarman** is the author of *19 Knives, New Orleans Is Sinking*, and the travel book *Ireland's Eye*. His hockey novel, *Salvage King Ya!*, is on Amazon.ca's list of 50 Essential Canadian Books. He has been short-listed for the O. Henry Prize and Best American Essays. He won a Gold National Magazine Award in nonfiction, has twice won the Maclean-Hunter Endowment Award, and has been included in *The Journey Prize Anthology* and *Best Canadian Stories*. He has taught at the University of Victoria, the Banff Centre for the Arts, and now teaches at the University of New Brunswick, where he is fiction editor of *The Fiddlehead*.

**Jim Kennedy** recently completed *Holding Hands*, a volume of short prose and poems. "Cheerleaders" is his first professional publication. He and his wife enjoy reading one another's work. He also enjoys rereading the writings of Tolstoy, Chekhov, Joyce, Maugham, Cheever, Carver, and Nasdijj. His younger son still laughs at his jokes.

**Erin Knight's** writing has appeared in journals including *Event*, *The Fiddlehead* and *The Malahat Review*. She has also been published in the anthologies *Edmonton on Location* (NeWest 2005) and *Talk That Mountain Down* (littlefishcart 2005). She has recently moved from Fredericton to St. Catharines, Ontario.

**Jeff Kochan** grew up in Edmonton, and has lived, for the last several years, in Europe. His work has previously appeared in *Zygote* and England's *May Anthologies*, and will soon appear in *filling Station*. When not writing, he forages in the Alps for wild mushrooms.

**Tanis MacDonald** is the author of two books of poetry, *Fortune* (Turnstone, 2003) and *Holding Ground* (Seraphim, 2000), and the editor of *Speaking of Power: The Poetry of Di Brandt* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006). After many years on Vancouver Island, Tanis now teaches at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo.

**Elise Moser** has published short stories in anthologies and periodicals such as *Descant*, *Prairie Fire*, *Broken Pencil* and *Room of One's Own*. She is also the coeditor, with Claude Lalumière, of *Lust for Life: Tales of Sex and Love*. She lives in Montreal.

**Emilia Nielsen** is completing a MA in Creative Writing at the University of New Brunswick. Her poetry has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Descant*, *Event*, *Grain*, *Prairie Fire*, *The Antigonish Review*, and *The Fiddlehead*. She currently divides her time between Fredericton and Victoria.

**Sheree-Lee Olson** is the editor of the weekly "Style" section of *The Globe and Mail*. She has published fiction and poetry in numerous Canadian literary magazines, including *Descant*, *The Antigonish Review*, and *Contemporary Verse 2*. She lives in Toronto with her husband, two sons, and two metrosexual cats. And she really loves Prada shoes.

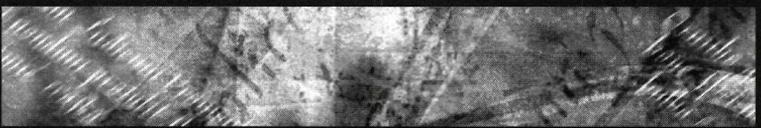
**Josh Rathkamp's** first book of poetry, tentatively titled *Missing Cities*, will be published by Ausable Press in the fall of 2007. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in numerous journals including, *Indiana Review*, *Passages North*, *Puerto Del Sol*, *Sycamore Review*, and *Rosebud*. He teaches at Arizona State University.

**Mari-Lou Rowley** has published five collections of poetry, most recently *Viral Suite* (Anvil Press 2004) and *Interference with the Hydrangea* (Thistle-down 2003). She has performed her work across Canada and in the US, from Harbourfront to Bumbershoot. In May 2005, Rowley was one of two writers internationally to receive a full-stipend residency at Can Serrat, Spain. She recently moved from Vancouver to Saskatoon, where poets can afford to buy houses.

**Sue Sinclair** has published three books of poems, the most recent of which is *The Drunken Lovely Bird*. She is currently studying philosophy at the University of Toronto.

**Anna Swanson** lives in Vancouver and spends the summer in an Alberta fire tower. She studied writing at the University of Victoria and the Banff Centre for the Arts, and received an honourable mention for the 2004 Bronwen Wallace Memorial Award for Poetry. Her writing has been published in various literary journals, most recently appearing in *Grain* and *The Antigonish Review*.

**April Wilder** is a McCreight Fiction Fellow at the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing, where she is working on a novel and book of short stories. Her hobbies include mindless Internet consumerism and insulting strangers at parties. As always, many thanks to Delmario and HHH.



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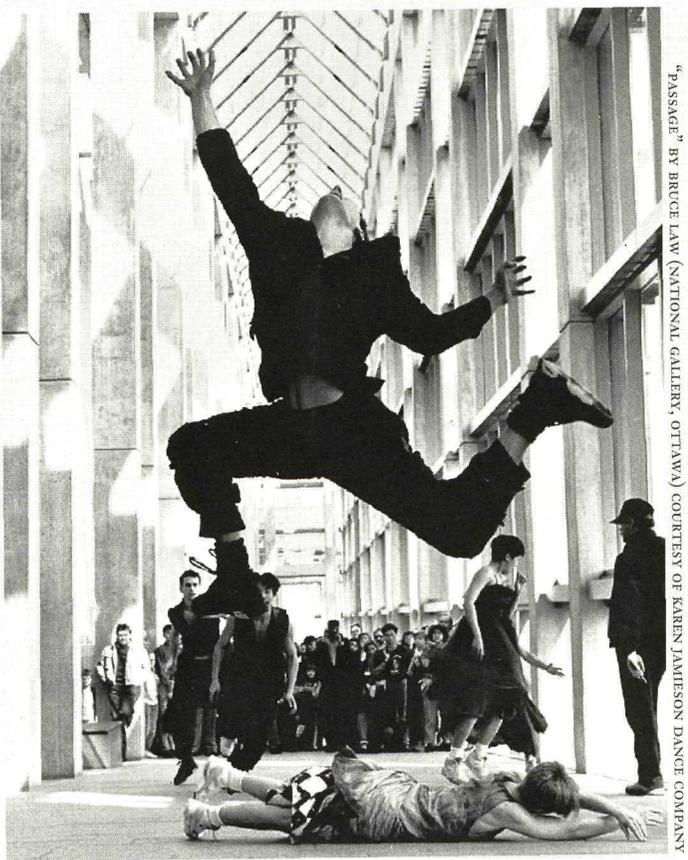
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*What spills out of us, what spills over  
into the dragtown of gall. Catch it  
in a cup. Measure the meniscus.*

—from "Take Measure" by Tanis MacDonald, Page 17

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