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Earle Birney established UBC's MFA program in Creative Writing in 1965—the first university writing program in Canada. The Earle Birney prize, awarded annually and worth $500, is *PRISM*'s only in-house prize. Special thanks to Mme. Justice Wailan Low for her generous ongoing support.

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Mallory Tater

MORNING

Mum leaves me to go to the store. She French braids my hair, then leaves me on the leather sofa, a bowl of plump blueberries in my lap. The sliding door to Grandma's room, left open. I watch Samara in her primrose apron and white nurse-shoes as she leans over the queen bed, feels for my grandma's breathing carcass in the sheets. She shakes her awake. Grandma curses in German, then whimpers in English about too much light in the room. She digs her face between two pillows. Samara says Emma, good morning Emma, lifts the floral duvet off Grandma's creased and craggy body. Grandma had stripped off all her clothes in the middle of the night. When she sits up, I see her flaccid, long breasts, and slacked rumples of arm fat as she reaches for the Kleenex Samara holds up near her face. She takes two Kleenex, blows clumps of yellow mucus into one, then she spews up in another to drain out her throat. I dreamt about horses, she says, twenty horses with their foals, trotting through ice water. Samara slips Grandma's arms, one at time, through the sleeves of a purple blouse. Grandma watches Samara's fingers button each button. It was so cold, she says, I could see their breath.

Sarah de Leeuw

SOFT SHOULDERED

This part is true.

It is true because it is named and found. People have investigated and made inquiries. And inquires result in findings and findings can be documented and published and circulated and so people pay attention and they search for solutions.

Dystocia is the name given to any difficult childbirth or abnormal labour. During childbirth, when the anterior shoulders of the infant cannot pass below the mother's pubic symphysis, when a baby's shoulders are wider than the opening in a mother's pelvic bone, it is called Shoulder Dystocia. Imagine an infant gasping for breath, trying to emerge into the world. Imagine watery panic. Contractions. Bone against bone, unyielding.

The quickest solution is to break the baby's clavicle bones. Reach inside, first one side and then the other, thumb on tiny collarbone, hand grasping around the curve of shoulders, fingers on shoulder blades. And snap. Yes. Snap. This must be done with force and conviction. A clear fracture heals with fewer complications. We tell mothers that their babies will not remember that excruciating pain. We tell mothers that their children, their daughters, will cross a threshold into life with limp and broken shoulders. But the bones will bind themselves back together again and the breaks will set and arms will again stretch out strong, poised for running, running, and being alive with breath pulled deep into lungs. It's enough to make a person cry. With relief.

This next part is no less true.

And it hurts no less.

But there is nothing named or found and so nothing is documented or published. The sparseness of findings and inquiries has resulted in almost nothing and so nothing has been circulated and solutions are slippery and invisible.

No name is given to a child born to vanish. There is no diagnostic term for those who slip into this world born to disappear.

There are no solutions or diagrams or carefully recorded scientific data about the daughters who effortlessly take their first breath, who pull air into their lungs for years and years but for whom each breath is a breath closer to the moment when, on the shoulder of a highway, they will go missing.

This too is enough to make a person cry. With anticipation of what is coming.

And it too begins at birth, the edge of life, a life running and rushing, arms outstretched, towards a vanishing.

So begin with me at the edge. That borderland where pavement ends and soft shoulder begins. This is a land bordered by a wall of green so dark it might be black. At highway speeds, this is how Engelmann spruce trees appear. Through

a car's passenger window, branches blur and trunks transform. Things get hazy and things get lost. The details disappear.

Asphalt dissipates into gravel, gravel touches mud that curves into ditches scarred and slashed by the bulldozers and the D-9 Cats sent to scrape the foliage, the never-ending efforts of devil's club, slide alder, Indian paintbrush, and salmonberry bushes. This is a space where everything is feral and weedy, growing and growing, creeping up past the boundaries that separate the regulated and patrolled highway and the wild, wild, western wilderness. Soft shoulder of road, slip of pavement, downward slope from the centre line, a space of refuse and discard.

You are in northern British Columbia. Nowhere most of the world will ever go. A land bordering on the lost. An unseen. A beyond cities, a far outside the imaginings of most.

Still, it is worth looking at. It is worth looking closely at, if only to see what has disappeared, what is missing. Look into the thin shoulder space that borders this highway. Here is what you might find.

Broken beer bottles tossed from cars. Can you hear the hilarity, teenagers partying, driving drunk on unpatrolled roads, sweaty and in love during the few days of heat that summer offers up? Ice-cold beer and the freedom speed of a car, a carborator-smoking-nearly-used-up-bought-off-a-neighbour-car with the windows rolled down and the wind rolling in. Yes, oh yes, toss those beer bottles, watch them shatter, just because you can. Nobody is patrolling you.

Plastic bags, snagged on brambles and translucent as lungs, filled with wind and the rushing exhaust of cars.

Mufflers rotting into metal rust, patterns like muscled lace in thin seepages of water.

Thick black curls of rubber, the ruins of wheels from transport trucks, skid marks like scabs.

Carcasses of broken deer, necks snapped and smears of blood, legs always, always, bent in that running position, some frozen reminder of a futile attempt at escape.

Fallen rocks and the remnants of blasting caps. What is left after dynamite has done its job and the fireweed has come back to ignite the dips and drops; first there are the bright purple flowers, then during pollination the fluffy cotton white. And as it dies, the fireweed gasps into red, a red so red it looks like fresh meat, road kill.

Things decay and things are consumed in the ditches and crevices on the edge of Highway 16. There is meat and metal and flowers and there is rot and there is rejuvenation. These shoulders are thin and strong, exposed and jutting. Imagine the shoulders of a very young dancer, clavicle bones jutting through flesh. The ever-present risk of breaking.

Broken shoulders.

Soft shoulders and sharp shoulders and oh, oh, such are the shoulders of a sinewy highway, Highway 16.

Things go missing at 120 km per hour on long desolate stretches of road, straight shots between one place that almost no one has heard of and another

place even fewer know about. Truck stops and Indian reserves, logging camps and precarious towns clinging to the edges of giant gouges, open pit mines exhaling molybdenum. Endako and Gitsegukla. Kitwanga, Kispiox, and New Hazelton. Usk and Rosswood. Smithers and Moricetown.

We have stopped many times on the shoulders of that highway and the time we stopped years ago was not so much different, a detour to the edge.

Pulling off onto the highway's soft shoulder for a soft-shouldered young woman, standing there on the edge of the road on the edge of a town that seems to have no hard and fast boundaries. Smithers simply evaporates. Slowly. From downtown core to mountains, from Main Street to railway track to cabins on lakes to glaciers that trail like tongues up the valleys and into sky.

And the sky is blue the day we stop for her, her in a tight black tank-top and tight jeans and jaunt and confidence on the side of Highway 16, walking backwards on the right shoulder of the road, right hand out, thumb spiked skyward.

By the time we reach Smithers we have already been driving for five hours. We left late but the long summer days make driving all night seem possible. The air is warm. Our car windows are unrolled, our dog is riding in the back seat, head hanging out the window, face streamlined in glee and we have passed rigs and beehive burners with sparks like fireflies in the long light of late August. We have counted seven black bears, fish-fat fed and glossy handsome, lumbering along the highway's edge. Our dog has barked. The evening has remained warm but we know it will grow cool before the girl will make it to where she surely must be going. And that is part of the reason we stop. We do not want her to get cold on the edge of the highway.

And of course there is something else.

Moricetown, she says, slipping into the front seat beside me. I'm going to Moricetown.

We have decided I will drive, you will sit in the back seat with our dog, and the girl from the edge of the highway will sit in the front seat beside me. We do not want our dog to make her uncomfortable. So soon she is settled in, all smiles and teeth and chitter-chatter and stories of summer basketball games in Smithers. Stories about kids from the reserves hitching "into town."

Into town, that descriptor that covers every place that is not the reserve, not her reserve with the Moricetown Canyon at its heart, a canyon through which waters boil, waters that men tether themselves over, strapped onto rock faces, spears in hand, the gut-blood of speared salmon spewing into the fine mist that sprays up from the Bulkley River, narrowed for such a breathtakingly short span, dizzying, fish leaping. Salmon by the hundreds for canning and smoking, fillets of red meat crisscrossed and hatched and slung over ladders made of green sapling alder bound with cord and bendable enough to withstand the winds that careen in. The wind smells of all of this and more.

And it is precisely this, this smoky-sugared scent of drying fish and the slippery sweat of men tethered to canyon walls, which is everything she wants to escape.

Hitchhiking into town. Because in Smithers the smell of reserve smoke disappears.

How old is she? Fourteen. Going into Grade 9 in the fall. The call of new jeans, runners white and unscuffed, crisp pages of notebooks, and moist bright highlighter pens. Geometry sets with not a single missing piece, the protractor's needle perfectly sharp. These are the things she is looking forward to, things she dreams will unfold come the early days of September, come the first whispers of frost.

We curve into Moricetown. Past the roadside hut selling smoked salmon, past the bridge over the canyon, past the Band Office and the community hall and up the hill on the other side of the reserve and onto the shoulder once again. She points out a trail. An almost invisible cleft in the ditch's vegetation, a path through bush and bramble that we would never have seen had she not known just where to look. We let her out, sun-setting light on her swinging arms as she crosses the highway's shoulder, descends the cupped lip of the ditch and then up the other side and back to her home hidden beyond the tree line.

Our hitchhiker crosses a borderland, walks over the highway's soft shoulder and is lost from our sight. Enveloped by all that grows on the sides of roads.

I have picked up other women hitching their way home. Once there was a woman in Gitsegukla, perched on a stack of Coors Light cases, teetering in the dark, hitching back to Kitwanga. I round the curve and my headlights catch her eyes no differently than headlights would catch the eyes of a highway coyote, trotting along the side of the road. Glowing illuminated metallic yellow like asteroids. She is so drunk I take her in my arms and fold her into the seat beside me. I pack all the cases of beer into the trunk of my car and I do not argue about the can she keeps in her hand.

She tells me stories as we drive, warm boozy breath wrapping around descriptions of her daughter, her cousins, tales of picking berries or heading down to Vancouver. She is heading home to her auntie's house and in the morning there will be tea. She calls it angel's tea, tea so milky white, warm and sweet, it is like the clouds we see in pictures of heaven. She is certain of this tea, this tea that awaits her. It will mark her return home. And my headlights shine and the ditches on the edge of the highway fade into blackness beyond the light of high beams and her voice hits the pitch of tires on asphalt and we are hurtling together down a mean, mean, road.

Think of this highway as a cut. A slice through darkness or wilderness or vegetation or the towns from which we all run.

And now think of this.

A slash right down to the bone can be done in less than three seconds. A slice so deep the skin may never bind, the scar will most assuredly never fade.

Now think of that highway once again and hold your breath and contemplate all the soft shoulders you have touched. Close your eyes and feel the softest slope in the world, the slope at the top of a baby's arm, curve up to neck. The landscape of your lover's clavicle bone, rising and falling with the deep breathing of calm sleep, facing you and the early morning sunlight with a familiarity that

knots your stomach and makes you reach out, again and again, just to touch that beautiful skin. Think about every shoulder you have ever touched, ever loved. Think about every person you hold dear.

May you never know what it is to lose your daughter. May you never know a disappearance never explained. A missing without reason or answer or end. May you never dream of your daughter's shoulders buckled and torn in the mud and silt of a ditch. May you never know what mothers know in Moricetown, in Kitwanga, in Burns Lake, Kitwankool, Terrace, Hazelton Kitimat Prince Rupert or in Kispiox. May you never think of your daughter as roadside prey.

May you never be the mother of the daughter gone missing from the shoulder of Highway 16 in July, in July when the days can be so cruel. A month of forest fires, a month thick with mosquitoes and decomposition. Fish rot. Of course there are daughters for almost every month of the year because slaughter has no timeline. Thirty-three murdered and missing daughters, sometimes at a rate of more than one per year.

The missing daughter of July was a treeplanter. Hitchhiking between Smithers and Prince George, backpack and hemp necklace and a shadow cast on the shoulder of Highway 16. When I think of her I think of long moments when nothing is audible but the sound of wind on the leaves of aspen trees. I think of sun on pavement and the rustle of shrubs and blood red fists of elderberry thick with juices that birds will drink come fall. I think of the safe stretch of time that existed for her between cars passing. Yes, there would have been that flicker of disappointment when the minivan with a mother and two children did not stop or when that fully loaded logging truck barreled on past. But as long as she was walking, as long as a killer did not stop, that July daughter was safe.

In Moricetown there is a billboard on the side of the highway. "Girls, don't go hitchhiking. Killer on the loose."

They search for her in waves, ripples of people winding through the ditches. They sift through the foliage and the growth and the rot. Where the roadside slips into fields, they use long sticks and methodically beat back the wheat and alfalfa swaying in the wind. In those roadside tides of green, search crews hope one of them will stumble upon her body. Even a piece of her would be a clue. Please, they think, please let this stick connect with a portion, any broken portion, of the family's daughter.

Let her not have gone missing without a trace, let the soft shoulders of this highway reveal something.

These daughters go missing in the spring and in the winter. They are only occasionally found, frozen and crumpled amongst the roots of alder trees, left torn with pine needles resting on their eyelids, tossed without concern and scratched at by eagles and ravens that draw no distinction between someone's child and the body of a porcupine clipped by a careless driver. Blood on the shoulder of a highway is blood on the shoulder of a highway. So may you never think of your daughter as roadside prey, shoulders soft as dawn, shattered in a ditch overlooked when we travel at highway speeds.

May you never know this truth.

Eric Freeze

THE ICE WOMAN

Seventeen days of snow. The first had been blizzard-like with thick flakes gusting, slanting in the wind. Malik used to welcome the snow. It was like bats of insulation muffling everything in white down. He fired up the snow blower the first day, cleaned off the blacktop and the rutted gravel driveway down to County Road 33. He shovelled the drifts where snow reached the eaves, where he'd had to push the striated layers off the roof. It had creaked with the weight of it. Snow. Now another day with flakes filling the yard, his pines thickly covered like they had been dipped in wax.

Malik was in mourning. That was the official word for it. Or the French, *deuil.* It had been a year since he'd heard Geneviève's and his child's Québécois lilt, the language they spoke at home. Last night he had dreamt of his daughter Marie. In the dream, he was looking for something, a book, a batch of photographs, something small, boxed from his move. After searching his shelves, running his fingers through the dust that had accumulated over the fall, he came to the attic stairs and the knotted rope that dangled just above his head. The stairs clacked down and Malik climbed up into the hole. Marie stood at the dormer window. A gauzy veil covered her hair and face, down to her chest. But the veil clung to her like she'd been out in the rain.

When he first saw her, he was flooded with relief. Here's what he was looking for, the doll-child of his previous life, preserved at five years old. She was humming softly, fingering her charm bracelet and rotating the letters of her name. "Marie," he said.

She turned. He meant the words to be soothing, like the time she was lost at the State Park and they found her crouched in a grove of pawpaws, picking ripe fruit off the ground. It hadn't been long, a half-hour maybe, but by then they had already called the state police. Marie had never wandered off before and in their first-parent mentality, that meant she'd been abducted, lost, or killed. When they found her with her chin wet with pawpaw slime it was like she'd been gone for ages, a child back from the abyss. "Marie," he had said, with relief. They smothered her with embraces and Marie smiled, saying "pawpaw" over and over, Malik unsure whether she was talking about the fruit or her father, her papa who cradled her in his arms.

Now, it was like he'd said something wrong. Her face scrunched up like she'd asked for a glass of juice and he'd given her milk. But there weren't any tears. Through the veil her features spread, smoothed out like her face was soft and pliable as egg cream. Her eyes grew, saucers of white daubed with brown, and her lips pulled back so that her teeth were carnivore-huge. Marie's small body expanded with one deep breath and then her mouth opened in a scream.

Malik stepped back. "It's OK honey, it's me. *C'est ton papa.*" The scream

rose in timbre and her body shook with exertion. He simultaneously wanted to flee and approach her, feel her warmth and calm her fears. But the scream kept getting louder. She was a kettle come to boil, a bomb ready to explode. Whatever this being was, it couldn't tolerate his presence. Her mouth opened wider, her jaw coming unhinged like a feeding python. "I'm sorry," he said, mindless of the hole behind him. He backed into the void. It was his own scream that woke him up.

Hours later, he was still awake, the lights on. He microwaved hot cocoa. He sank into his couch.

When he awoke the next morning, he discovered it had rained ice overnight. The pellets stuck to the top layer of snow and covered it in a pitted glaze. After breakfast, he suited up, put on his Sorels and marched outside. The ice had formed about a six-inch layer. It was like walking on a blacktop. Near the house, the ice sloped down, a steep slide reaching almost to his windows. He'd had to shovel it now how many times? The back of the house he'd just let pile up. But this stuff. No way he was going to try to chip it out.

He went to get his square shovel anyway, just to see. The shovel bit into the snow, sending chips of ice, little white teeth scattering on the surface. He would need a blowtorch or prolonged days and weeks of sun. Warm temperatures. A mineful of salt. He climbed up the snow bank to get a view.

Malik remembered a scene from *Nanook of the North* of an Inuit in sealskin cutting blocks of snow with a long serrated knife. The snow here would be perfect for an igloo; any shape he cut out of the ice would be rigid as a brick. He thrust the shovel straight down and was satisfied when it sank to the top of the blade. Underneath the ice, the snow was light and fine. When he picked up the first block, the backside was covered with soft powder like a layer of sawdust or mould on a rotted peach. He cut out rectangle after rectangle and threw them into a pile.

By noon the sun had finally penetrated the haze and lit up the landscape. He would need sunglasses, could use food, too, after three hours of chipping ice. Inside, he heated water for pasta, zipped open a can of spaghetti sauce. On a yellow legal pad, he sketched a brick house the way you'd draft plans for a dream home. This is where the toilet is, this is the kitchen. Here are the stairs up to the second floor. Right. He thought. Today he'd at least get up the walls.

A blinking message on the phone. He was surprised the ice hadn't knocked out his lines. He pressed play, heard his supervisor's concern. "You let us know when you can make it in. The county's all shut down—first time in twenty-five years. No one on the roads except emergency vehicles." So that was it, no more work.

Outside, Malik's snow quarry was an open maw of white. The snow underneath was still dry. They would have cold temperatures for the next couple weeks. He took the first brick in his mittened hand and laid it down, then another. In his mind he had pictured a perfect line, square, like the brickwork for a school or a correctional facility: a practical box for keeping people in. But as the walls grew, he was disappointed. The snow on the backside of the bricks helped the ice blocks set in but it wasn't uniform enough to keep the

lines straight. And some blocks were thicker than others with their fair share of variation in size and shape. The wall looked more like a bombed out building or the snow ruins of some ancient castle. Pinholes of light pierced the corners where the ice bricks didn't meet. But the walls went up: one row, two. Before long, he'd need more bricks. He'd have to dig further out, lug the bricks back in his wheelbarrow.

The Ontario sun finally winked past the horizon, over the copse of trees to the west. It would be dark soon. The walls of Malik's ice house were near complete. He'd bricked out a doorway, made ice headers for windows. And, at one end of his box, an empty hearth.

Once they went to an ice hotel in Québec, a honeymooner's place. Geneviève was six months pregnant with Marie and they had booked it for a couple days over the break while they were visiting her parents. Their room had a hearth with an electric log that lit up the ice with orange light. They took photos. In one, Malik, in a loose car coat, squatted with his hands palm up before the fake fire. That night, they left the fire going and Geneviève straddled him, letting the blanket fall away, and her breasts bunched together in the cold. The electric log spun, backlighting her like a cherub. He thrust up inside her and her pregnant belly bobbed and she opened her eyes and laid her hands on his chest for support. "Don't stop looking at me," she said.

Now he was alone in this space. A frozen replica. Did he know that he was building a hotel room when he started? But that's what it was—a house small enough to be a hotel room. He had come out here to forget.

A week before the accident, Malik had imagined a four-car pileup, a semi on its side, cars crushed like tin cans. Geneviève and Marie were going to be driving north, to her sister's place in Sherbrooke. Sometimes he pictured calamities like this as a hedge against what could happen. It was always the worst possible thing: at Marie's birth, massive haemorrhaging, a baby with two heads. For his wife's conference the April before the accident, an airplane plunging to earth. Sometimes, selfishly, he dreamed of silence, of being liberated from the bonds of family through freakish chance. Maybe he'd flirted with a cashier or noticed a job posting abroad and felt drawn to the feeling of possibility. He would mourn, grieving was always hard, but he loved his wife, his child, and that love would be buried with them. He could start anew, remake himself, his petty dreams. What he wasn't expecting was the guilt.

He mistrusted coincidence. Geneviève's head had cracked the windshield and Marie was crushed in the back seat. The semi fishtailed and caught them head on. When he heard, he wanted the dispatcher to describe what happened, where the truck went, how it skittered across the asphalt, what speed Gen was driving. He made him go back, repeat what he said earlier. "How many other cars were involved? Was there a Volvo?" The man apologized eventually, other people to call, so Malik could never be sure the scene was exactly as he had imagined it. But the similarities were too strong for him not to feel like he had somehow caused their deaths.

In the moonlight, Malik thrust his hands into the powder underneath the ice. Much of the centre of the room had been tamped down, the crenelated teeth

of his boots reminders of where he'd stepped. It was getting cold now and the snow was hard to shape. So instead of building up, he dug down, removing the excess snow until a figure started to emerge. First, a belly, plump and distended. Then arms and hands, cradling it. It was a form like a giant gourd with space between the arms and torso creating amphora-like handles. He dusted snow away from the breasts, swollen with the colostrum and milk that would come only after the birth. He framed the head in a pillow of snow. The eyes and nose were a mangled mess, even as his tools (plastic trowel, tooth brush, tooth picks) got smaller and smaller for the detail. The nose was an avocado-like lump. The too-sculpted lips of a Mr. Potato-head. There was something about the shape, though, that suggested Geneviève. The face had the same roundness, the same slight tilt to the head. The night cold seeped in now, numbing the exposed skin, circling his parka'd neck. But still he worked. Occasionally moisture fell from his face. He dabbed around the spot where the drops crystallized and hardened. It left indelible pockmarks on the snow-skin, circles of imperfection, stains. He brushed away until he had space for the eyes but again he was disappointed. There were none of the wrinkles, the crow's feet at the corners. Instead, the snow was smooth as a plastic mask: simple lines, a forehead, a brow. Finished. He shovelled out space next to the supine figure and then lay in the fetal position next to it. He reached out his arm.

It felt solid. Or solid enough. He nestled his arm between the breasts and the pregnant belly. There. He closed his eyes. The angle of his arm was so familiar, the feeling of the body underneath like sinking into memory foam. He wasn't going to move. During the school year, he would have weeks where duties piled up like harbingers of disaster. Just one more thing, one more passed-out girl who needed her stomach pumped, one more instance of sexual assault, one more flunking kid depressed and playing videogames in his dorm room and Malik would go over the edge. He wondered vaguely about the state of the campus, students protesting frozen dorm rooms, huddled in the student centre. Maybe Eddie, the student body president, would have the whole campus in one safe, gigantic pyjama party. People would stay in their dorms or in the library buzzing with intellectual pheromones, studying. There would be sex, lots of it, he could be sure of that. Something about the warmth of another body when the numbers drop below zero. But all Malik felt now was cold. This was nuts. Even through his parka he could feel the relentless cold. There was nothing reflecting back heat, no reciprocation. Might as well be humping a block of ice.

Malik rolled onto his back. How often had he recommended counselling for students? You're going through a rough patch right now, and giving voice to your concerns can help alleviate your struggle. Utter bullshit. Still, you couldn't underestimate the power of conversation. It was one of the touchstones of being human. Dialogue. That was what he needed now more than anything.

An arm. There was an arm across his chest that wasn't there before. An arm and a weight. The thought was absurd but still he entertained it. It could be a line of melted snow that had stuck to his parka or perhaps it was his own arm, asleep, bisecting his torso in a self-hug after having lain on it wrong. Or maybe it was a kind of transference; it was his wife's arm, Geneviève's arm, like a vestigial

limb. She had been cut off and he could still feel her body—feel her feeling him as evidence of their closeness. Frozen dew from his eyes had sealed them shut. Opening them was like un-velcroing a pair of children's shoes. He should sit up. But if he did, what would he see?

"You were snoring."

The face hovered over him. The crude protuberances: nose, chin, breasts, had smoothed somewhat, firmed up. It was like she had been carved from marble. A snow woman. She sighed and stretched and the snow packed itself tighter, forming the contours of a solid body. Her buttocks and feet were still connected to the ground but then she leaned to one side and puffed out her cheeks.

"Help me out here?"

Malik sat up. Her hand opened and closed with wooden regularity, like the too perfect features of a computer-animated cartoon. He scrambled to his feet and tepidly reached for her. He half expected her fingers to break off, smash open in his hand like burst snowballs. But they held, elastic. The pregnant woman knelt in a Captain Morgan position and then hoisted herself up, still holding his hand up between them like a couple ready to declare their vows. Chunks of snow and ice clung to her buttocks and she chopped at them like she was dusting flour off jeans. "God I'm hungry," she said.

Inside, Malik rifled through his refrigerator. He tried to think of things that Geneviève liked. If what was out in his yard was some incarnation of his dead wife. Most of his eating habits had degenerated since she died, even though he was the one who usually did the cooking. Who was there to cook for? Better to scrounge, to eat a little at a time: crackers, microwaved burritos, cheese sticks. He still had a thing for perogies but he always bought them now, never made them from scratch. The bounty of his vegetable-laden meals, the sauces and recipes and side dishes made way for the economy of minute-rice, meals in a can, Ichiban. He'd become like a college student without roommates. Still, he found some grapes, picked through the half-withered fruit and washed the remaining dusky globes in a bowl. He had some whole grain bread, and sliced Swiss, mustard, lettuce, for a couple sandwiches. It would be enough.

Malik stood for a while in the entryway, one arm balancing a plate of sandwiches and the bowl of grapes. In the other he held two glasses by their stems and a bottle of claret. He'd hesitated about the wine but he felt something celebratory that made him want to impress. The room had changed already, the crude blocks and rugged lines smoothing to sheets of ice that looked like new sheetrock. Baseboards emerged, crown moulding, a wrought-iron poster bed, lamps, rugs, pictures. He paused too long and worried that the food would be cold, ice already forming around the meat and the wine too chilled. The pregnant woman was sitting on a mission-style chair next to a small, café-style table pushed up against a wall. She combed her hair with a tortoise-shell brush in long even strokes. Her breasts perched on her belly like ripe eggplants.

"You got wine?"

He tried to tell from her tone if she was upset or pleased. He had forgotten, somehow, that she was pregnant, that she probably wouldn't want anything

alcoholic, and he half-expected her to turn him away. But she put down the brush and took the glasses from his hand. "Just one glass," she said. "It's perfect." He watched her eat. She took long, large bites and the bits of sandwich bulged out her cheeks while she chewed. A snail's trail of mustard clung to her lip. A torn leaf of lettuce the size of a postage stamp fell among crumbs on the table in between swallows and sips of wine. By the time she finished, he was half-convinced he was hungry himself.

"You have some mustard," he said.

"More," she said.

She handed him the plate and he balanced it on his palm. Her breathing had intensified and the earlier smile was gone. The contours of her face seemed more and more distinct from Geneviève's. The lines of her brows were inverted checkmarks, her nose a triangle with round dots for nostrils. And still no wrinkles. It was unnerving, like looking at a wax statue that was suddenly ambulatory, an airbrushed model that had just walked off a billboard and into Malik's life.

"More, *please*," he said.

She didn't laugh. Malik backed out the door, almost kowtowing in his retreat. The walls of the snow house were thick limestone now, etched from the snow like a trompe l'oeil painting, a hologram that at any moment could fizzle or fade. Yes, he would get more. Plenty more.

Meat. His freezer was full of blocks of it: boxes of a side of bison he'd split with a friend last winter. He unwrapped a couple steaks from the white butcher paper. The stamp "steak" in red ink broke where the paper met. Soon his kitchen was alive with the smells of cooking: Herbes de Provence, sautéed mushrooms, steak sizzling in its juices. He folded in some cream, salted and peppered the steaks to taste, and put them on plates. Two sets of cutlery, serrated knives and forks ready to slice the rare meat open so the blood pinked the white sauce. "Your steak, Madame," Malik said. He set the steaks on the table like a maître d' with a bow and an open palm. She picked up a fork and waved it through the steam rising from the meat.

"You trying to kill me here?"

She poked the meat and let the fork clatter on the plate. It was too much. Something about the meat, the sizzling undercooked steak an accusation: *How dare you do this to me*. He thought e-coli and salmonella. Did she have some olfactory superiority, a way of detecting meat gone bad? Or perhaps it was simply preference. He would make it right.

"Too hot," she said. She lifted her shoulders—no big deal—and then pushed her stomach forward, her posture textbook straight.

"I'm sorry—I didn't think."

She stood up, walked back to the mirror. Strange how she watched the food, sneaking glances at it even as she feigned disinterest.

"You'd better get that out of here," she said. "Can't you see I'm starving?"

The plate was cold now, the last wisps of steam gone. He cut just one sliver and dipped it in the already congealed sauce. Lukewarm, at best. "Five minutes and this'll be cold as a hockey puck."

"I guess you're right." She paced now, making a horseshoe around the bed.

Her impatience measured in heavy footfalls, in sighs of exasperation. When Malik turned to confront her, it was like he wasn't there. He was just a screen for the steaks, an empty chair.

Finally, she sat down. Before he could object, she dumped the contents of his plate onto her own and lifted the meat to her mouth with her hands. "You did this to me," she said. The snow room filled with the sounds of the woman's mastication. Sauce smeared her face in gobs. She gnawed on the bones until the gristle came off. Tilting the plates, she slurped the sauce then cat-licked them clean.

"More."

Little beads of perspiration had emerged on her skin. She held up the plates. "More food," she said again. She was panting like some carnivorous animal. He could bring her more, sure, if that's what she wanted. But at this pace she'd clean out his freezer in a day.

"It'll take me a while. Any requests?"

"Don't cook it."

He tried inviting her in, so much easier not having to bring the food out to her in plates, but she refused, shook her head vigorously like she was ending an argument. At the door he turned back and she was pacing again, hands under her belly like she held a great stone. He got a cooler this time, a gray Rubbermaid with a white handle that locked the lid in place. In it, he dumped cold cuts, blocks of cheddar, a wilting head of lettuce. He stuffed in a box of ground beef patties, tilapia fillets, jalapeno poppers, frozen blueberries, a bag of perogies, all the remaining contents of his freezer. Back in the snow room, he lifted the lid and half-expected her to refuse. "This what you want?" But she was already feeding, kneeling before the cooler like a pregnant penitent. She lifted the bags out, scissored them open with her teeth, and crunched the frozen food down. Halfway through the cooler, she started to slow, giving the cold cuts a once-over before chewing and swallowing. "Finished?" Malik asked. The snow woman nodded and Malik closed the cooler. "It's so hot in here," she said.

"Hot?" Beneath his parka, Malik was bone cold. It was warmer than outside but the temperature still had to be well below freezing. It felt more like an ice arena or the air during spring skiing, an anticipatory cold. The woman walked over to and then opened one of the windows, letting the wind bathe her pregnant belly. "Better," she said.

She turned and looked at the bed. Malik was suddenly self-conscious. They had been spooning earlier in the night and he had felt himself awaken to the presence of another body. The look, what did it imply? The woman, as she developed, was more and more distinct from Geneviève. Her legs were storkier, her feet and hands longer, like fine fans. She was so sculpted, too perfect, an ideal that couldn't exist except in his mind. He approached the bed, expecting her to beckon to him. She grasped the wrought iron at the foot of the bed and tried to shimmy or slide it along the floor.

"Shouldn't you be taking it easy?"

"Pregnant women aren't invalids."

Fair enough. Malik grasped the headboard and together they pushed the bed to the open window. The woman climbed up from the foot of the bed and lay on her side with her back to Malik. She lifted her head once, a half-backwards glance, either inviting him in or wondering why he was still there. All right then. Malik unzipped his parka and knocked off his Sorels. His Wranglers and t-shirt and underwear rumpled to the floor. Goddamn. He couldn't stay out here long like this but right now he felt like his body was radiating heat. The bed was soft and cool. The woman's body was a still question mark. Was she already asleep? But then she shifted and flung her hair up and over her pillow from where her body had pinned it against the bed, the hair as fine and uniform as the hair in a shampoo commercial. He slid closer, suppressing the urge to shiver. He reached out his hand and held it an inch above her hip. The contour, where it dipped to her waist, was not as he remembered it, the slope not steep enough, the curve lacking the claw-like stretch marks he used to linger on.

"What are you doing?"

He balled his open hand into a fist, retracted it. She turned her head slightly so he could see the profile of her nose pointing up at the open window and after a few seconds he could hear her solemn breathing. He reached out again, for a caress, a place to put his hand. He laid his fingers on her hipbone and felt her body stiffen.

Pain. The woman was on her feet now, her hands smoothing the stain on the side of her hip. He had burned her, or melted her, he couldn't be sure. She was hurt and she was pressing her hands into her snow skin. "I'm sorry, so sorry," he said. She was limping, watching his naked body on the sheets like he was a giant roach. He felt now the dampness in the bed, like she'd had a toddler accident or soaked the bed with summer sweat. He reached for his rumpled clothes. She picked up a chair and held it out like she was a lion tamer. The imprint of his fingers on the side of her hip was deep red, pushing up ridges of skin.

"Get out of here," she said. "Out. Out!"

The next day, sick. He was frozen when he came in, his body shaking from delirium. Soon, after hot cocoa and blankets and a scorching shower to try to wash the shame away, he started to sniffle and felt the nodes in his esophagus swell. Now his throat was inflamed and his breaths were pinched and catarrhal, a cough coming on. Worse, still, was how his head was reacting. He had one of those migraines that felt like a flint arrowhead had been lodged into his skull. The pressure pushed on his eyes and all light and colour assumed a kind of day-glo quality. His house was carnival-bright, the beams of sun exaggerating every mote of dust or lint.

He lay down now on the couch with a roll of toilet paper. When they'd been a family, sickness always circulated through them one at a time. Even days when Marie came down with some bug from school, Malik and Gen always took turns. It was like their bodies knew they each needed to take care of the other. He felt more than a proprietary-like concern over the ice woman but now he was sick. Would she be hungry? Should he will himself out again onto the ice? He could leave something for her: dry cereal or frozen toast, a little conciliatory

breakfast. Just a knock and then leave it on the doorstep before a glimpse of his face threw her into a rage.

But the knife in his head. Like a syringe or a vise, a stuck needle pulling or pushing for a vein. Being sick like this always reminded Malik of college, those cheap LSD-induced highs that infused his days with hallucinatory clarity. The world coming apart and then being put back together again, like he was resequencing his DNA. Everything had this frangible quality to it. Once, pre-Gen, he was at a Grateful Dead concert and saw a woman sprout wings from the nubs of her shoulder blades. She floated up and shot red rays from her eyes like Superman, carving up the night sky in little triangles of light. They'd fallen at his feet, all these fragments. He picked them up in his hands and accordioned them out into a long line of paper dolls, a card trick with the cards flying from one hand to the other. He opened his arms to the air and the pieces of sky winged their way back up to the heavens, regrouping in many-starred constellations.

He needed sleep. Couch time, conked out with some herbal tea and some Chopin nocturnes. The woman with her appetite would surely be up now, pacing, ready to comb the local woods foraging for food. Judging by the size of her belly, she should be near nine months, her body a perfect bulbous pear.

When Gen was pregnant, Marie's fetal limbs would kick the uterine wall, bulging in lumps, sections of round hardness. Gen's belly was like a giant dehiscent seedpod, ready to split at the seams. As far as he could tell, the ice woman was one solid block carved from snow, not an expectant mother. There would be no mewling newborn, no whoosh of liquid and blood. He had to put her out of his mind, banished in the way of bad dreams. Better to hunker down into the blankets, feel his pulse and breathing slow, turn up the heat, let the humidifier crank out wet saturated air until his body started to recover. He was near gone when he heard a long faint moan, like the lowing of a wounded animal. He sat up, unsure. At night with Marie he always waited for the second cry, the third, before getting out of bed. Sometimes she would calm herself down and his footfalls to her crib merely hastened her displeasure. He was cautious. If he went out now, he was sure his presence would disturb her. There was another moan, this one more gravelly toward the end, like a throat churning up bile. Another, higher pitched. And another.

His boots and clothes were in one inchoate pile near the sliding door. His head felt like it was being squeezed from his forehead to his brain stem, a large pair of callipers grasping it with ridged teeth. The sun was stronger now, slanting through his mini-blinds and striping his naked calves. He left his bathrobe on—no use getting cold for nothing—and pulled on his snow pants, zipped into his parka. Still the incessant moaning. Outside, he felt the whoosh of thin air, a cold and constriction in his lungs like he'd just had the wind knocked out of him. A couple tentative steps on the ice and he felt his line of vision shift, and his right leg slipped, dropping him to his hands and knees. "Ow," he said. The ice was board hard, slippery as sealskin. But the "ow" was more for how his brain ricocheted in his head, pain at every juncture. The moans were more insistent now, separated by shorter pauses. Malik crawled the rest of the way to the snow house. The door was slightly ajar and he clambered up, his feet gaining purchase

on the carpeted floor.

It was still cold, pipe-freezing cold, even with the door closed and Malik's breaths pluming in smoke-like clouds of condensation. The woman rested her head and arms on the poster bed, legs slightly apart, like she was a linebacker pushing a blocking sled against the wall. Her body blushed with an incarnadine hue. Ice or not, the woman looked to be labouring, sounded like she was far along, farther than Malik was prepared to accept. Hadn't it just been moments before when he first heard her plaintive moans? Maybe it was time stretching through his sickness, his pinched mind recalibrating to accommodate these sudden events. He didn't know what to do. Marie's birth had been a C-section after forty-eight hours of wandering the birth centre, cringing through the contractions that rocked Geneviève's athletic body. She had prepared for the birth like she would for a marathon and she'd made Malik participate as though he were her own personal trainer. They moved from position to position like adolescent lovers trying out sex: a foot here, an arm there, pressure *there*, but nothing seemed to alleviate her pain, make the birth move along more smoothly. The midwife came in at regular intervals, always with that look, and Gen said, "No drugs" in a way that sounded increasing ideological. The one thing that Gen seemed to like more than anything was for Malik to push on her lower lumbar vertebrae whenever a contraction would hit. Gen sucked air through her teeth and she started to arch her back and Malik fanned his hands out on either side of her spine and pushed.

The ice woman moaned again. His eyes bulged; his head ballooned with fluid and pain. He wanted to put his hands on her now, but his memory of the ice woman lashing out at him last night—*just last night!*—kept him from trying. She began to wallop the bed, fist blows to the pillow, the mattress, the ruched up covers. His yearning to touch her was adamant, insistent. He was the only one within miles of frozen landscape who could possibly help. But the screaming and the recognition that he had hurt her were enough to stop his progress into the middle of the room. They were from different worlds, she and he, and damned if he'd touch one inch of her hypersensitive body. He was an observer, nothing more.

Another cry. It started soft, with a slow intake of breath, the woman's body expanding like a bellows. Then a stricture of pain around her abdomen that forced her mouth open and erupted in a loud high note, somewhere between a scream and a belch. Malik threw his hands over his ears, lost his balance and fell to the floor. His body felt sore all over, like his skin was a burning glove stretched over too-large hands. He pushed up on one elbow and the ice woman's pelvis began rocking from side to side in a slow hula. The cry diminished to a lulling "ahhh." Relief. He was sure that she was aware of him now, a man in a parka lying mere feet from her forked legs, but she wasn't showing any signs of it. For all he knew, he was as innocuous a presence as a fly on the wall, just part of the room. Or maybe not even visible at all? Perhaps she was so concentrated on the wracking of her own body that anything else was a distraction. But he was here, sick, listening, watching. She tensed again and Malik covered his ears.

To hell with it. He rolled over, crouched on all fours, brought one leg up and then the next. The sound filled the room, his head, so that the air around

him vibrated with it. Before touching her, he took a towel from the ground, just something from this place, something cold, for a buffer. He placed the towel on her back, just above her coccyx, splayed both his gloved hands with his thumbs along the ridge of her spine, and pushed.

The effect was almost instantaneous. She coughed first, a quick intake of breath, and then the moan petered to a croon. When the contraction was over, he moved back, waiting for a signal, and then pushed when her cries began again. The contractions were close now, less than a minute apart, and building in intensity. His head rang and the light in the room was a suffused amber, the colour of sunset before the gloaming. Her back was damp, the towel soaked through, his gloves glistening and sopping. There was a change the next time. She stood up and shooed him away, then turned, still bent at the waist, and reached her hand down below. The room was still but tense, as though the snow walls and bed and framed prints hummed with electricity. She held her breath, exhaled and inhaled as though she were diving and had just come up for air. A lump emerged between her legs and she guided it. One push, two, and shoulders, a torso, and legs that quickly bunched like a frog's emerged. She was kneeling now and she pulled the baby up high on her chest and cradled it there, fluid leaking down her still-swollen belly.

Malik had seen births before. When Gen was pregnant, they watched whole video libraries of alternative birth: a woman with triplets giving birth at home, vaginal breeches, water births that women claimed were orgasmic. In all the births, there was at least someone there, an attending physician, a midwife, or a doula. This was the first time he'd seen a woman pull the baby from her legs like she was laying claim, like the baby was literally an extension of her body. Hers. Seeing this here, now, brought about a birth mash-up in his brain, a compendium of each groan, each position and setting. He and Gen sat on their Ikea couch in the basement, the TV flickering with these women's contorted bodies, locks of sweaty hair clinging to faces, grimaces and smiles and Enya-like background music coming over him in waves. Afterward, Gen would finger his hand like it was a lucky rabbit's foot. "What did you think?" she asked, and he'd say how beautiful it was, astonishing really, and she'd cuddle and nuzzle her head into his shoulder. But inside he was thinking how the babies looked like little gremlins and the women exhausted, spent. He mistrusted their triumph the way he mistrusted climaxes in sports films. Nothing could be so perfect, so transformative as the screen was telling him it should be.

The baby, he realized, wasn't breathing.

The ice woman held the baby away from her and looked at it. The cord still pulsed but the baby's conical head flopped to the side, the lips in a droopy-dog frown. He expected her to panic now. Or for snow paramedics to miraculously appear with their child defibrillators and ventilators and stethoscopes dangling like headphones from ears. Instead, she turned her head and embraced the child, covering its nose and mouth with hers like a sloppy ardent lover. And breathed. She did it twice, the child's cheeks and tiny torso inflating. The child coughed once and emitted a cry like the squawk of a strangled chicken. Another breath

and more noise and the baby pinked up. The ice woman held the child to her body and struggled to her feet.

"Out," she said.

Months before Marie's birth, Gen said, "We need to talk about what happens if something goes wrong."

"Nothing will go wrong," Malik said. "You're low-risk, healthy. The midwife said to prepare for what will go right."

"I don't mean just the birth."

"What, then?"

She wouldn't say. In the kitchen, Gen turned and sliced summer squash with gusto. They listened to the radio, Click and Clack guffawing about a squirrel under the hood. They snapped beans, cut zucchini, added cream, tomatoes, a farrago of vegetable goodness over pasta. "You've wasted another perfectly good hour listening to Car Talk." Clinking utensils and the sliding of food and "Will you pass the salt please?" breaking the silence.

That night, in bed, he asked, "What are you trying to tell me?"

Genèvieve turned, the five-month-old baby a tiny muffin top, barely visible. "You shouldn't have to ask."

"I'm asking."

She sighed. All the changes, the new accoutrements, the garage-sale crib and pastel colours, had been so celebratory. Not this sadness. "What if one of us ends up alone?"

After the ice woman kicked him out, Malik went to his house and lay down on his couch and slept, only waking up in a delirium once to go to the bathroom. When he finally pulled his parka back on it was the middle of the night. He wanted some assurance that the baby was fine, that the mother was happy and healthy, that there wasn't anything he needed to do. He thought: maybe a blanket, a child's outfit, some gift as an offering to ease him back into her presence. In Marie's old room, he slid the closet open. Dresses and toddler sweaters hung in variegated rows. He reached in back for an 18-month jumper, the smallest he could find. Before pulling back, he wrapped his arms around and bear-hugged the clothes. Opened his mouth and breathed her in.

Outside, he stood at the Ice Woman's door, expecting to see her supine body, a nursling child by her side. But she was gone. The bed was empty, the sheets stripped off, also missing. He could still smell the birth: the blood and amniotic fluid and urine and sweat. A few steps and he found the source: a steak-sized placenta with the cord almost straight out like the fleshy stem of a rose. It coated his gloves with translucent goo. Down the driveway, out the clearing down to County Road 33, he looked for footprints, some marring in the icy landscape, an indication of her passing. He imagined her with the sheet over her shoulder, wrapped around her and the infant like a great toga binding them together. But no. The ice was hard and solid, the wind picking up and scouring the landscape clean.

Peter Härtling

Translated from the German by Susan Thorne

SCHNEEGEDICHTE

I.
Nichts, was erstarren kann:
Heiß unterm Schnee
die Sommerschritte
und die Linien des Vogelgesangs.
Unmerklich häutet sich
die Erde.
Erst, wenn im April
auf dem See das Eis
reißt
und im Donner
durchsichtig wird,
kehrt die Erinnerung zurück.

II.
Ich rede mir Bläue ein
und atme sie aus.
Die Berge stürzen
hinter den Horizont.
Es könnte sein,
das Meer steigt hoch
und schwemmt meine Kinderjahre an:
Buchstaben im Schnee,
der Abdruck einer Frauenhand
und eine Mütze,
sehr klein und hart
vom Frost.

SNOW POEMS

I.
Nothing that can freeze:
hot under the snow
the steps of summer
and the routes of birdsong.
Imperceptibly
Earth sheds its skin.
Not until April
when ice on the lake
tears apart
and grows translucent
in the thunder
will memory return.

II.
I make myself believe in blueness
and breathe it all out.
Mountains plummet
behind the horizon.
Perhaps
the sea will rise high up
and inundate my childhood years:
letters in the snow,
the imprint of a woman's hand
and a cap,
quite small and hard
from frost.

III.
Immer schneit es,
wenn Krieg ist.
Soldaten schwimmen unterm
Eis,
das Gesicht zum Grund.
Eine Stimme ruft
und will mich
ersticken.
Wer kann fliehn vor wem?
Wen frißt die Lawine?
Im Schnee wirst du
schlafen
bis zum nächsten Krieg.

IV.
Ich sehe ihn, den Hut,
den Hut im Schnee,
und weiß, wie er lag,
ein Dichter, mein Dichter,
endlich nach allem Schlaf
und
unter den Wörtern,
die schneien –
dieses eine Bild
in meinem Wintergedächtnis:
wie Glück friert.

V.
Schneeweißchen,
eingefroren in ihr Märchen
hinter
den sieben Spiegeln.
Wenn es taut,
lange
nach meiner Zeit,
kehrt es zurück
als Ophelia.

III.
It always snows
when there's a war.
Soldiers are swimming under
the ice,
facing the bottom.
A voice calls
and wants
to choke me.
Who can flee from whom?
Who is devoured by avalanches?
You will sleep
in the snow
until the next war.

IV.
I see it, the hat,
the hat in the snow,
and know how he lay,
a poet, my poet,
finally after all sleep
and
under the words
that are snowing –
this single image
in my winter memory:
how happiness freezes.

V.
Snow White
frozen in her fairy tale
behind
the seven mirrors.
When she thaws
long after my time,
she will return
as Ophelia.

ICH BAU DIR EIN ZIMMER

Ich bau dir ein Zimmer,
sag ich, es schwimmt
auf dem See, es hängt
zwischen Ästen im Baum,
es nimmt seine Wände
nicht ernst, es wird
weit, es wird eng.

Ich bau dir ein Zimmer,
sag ich, für alle
Jahreszeiten, einen Teppich
aus Schnee, und den
Sommer in der Tapete,
die Wiese unterm Tisch,
Weinlaub an der Tür.

Ich bau dir ein Zimmer,
sag ich, es ist unsre
Wiege und es ist
unser Sarg. Ein Zimmer,
sag ich, aus Nichts
und aus allem. So haltbar
wie dieses Gedicht,
das du bewohnst.

BUILDING YOU A ROOM

I'm building you a room,
I say, that will swim
on the lake, hang between branches
in a tree,
not taking its walls too
seriously: first growing wide,
then narrowing.

I'm building you a room,
I say, to span
the seasons: a carpet
of snow, and summer
in the wallpaper; a meadow
beneath the table,
a grapevine at the door.

I'm building you a room,
I say, to be our cradle
and our coffin. A room,
I say, made of nothing
and everything.
As enduring
as this poem,
which you inhabit.

Sam Shelstad

NEW ICE KINGDOM

Things different in New Ice Kingdom, but things also same. Things same: snow, water, ice, ice holes. Spend most of time at ice holes. Sun comes during day as always, then go away at night. Things different: not as many polar bears—just me. That means no Bud, Bud being my son. Miss Bud. Not so much miss others.

Also different: not good at killing seal. Before, was good at killing seal.

To kill seal, first find ice hole. Wait by ice hole, possibly for long time. When seal comes up for air, there is smell of seal's breath. When smell seal's breath in hole, reach down and kill seal by biting head. If still flopping, bash with paw. When seal dead from head bite/bashing, drag to nice spot, eat. Or, if not hungry, bury in secret spot for later.

As said, was very good at this in Old Ice Kingdom. Ate lots of seal, gave seal bits to son, Bud. Also gave seal bits to other, less-good seal killers like Maury, who is kind of mooch. Now, since come to New Ice Kingdom, not so good at killing seal. Hesitate. New Ice Kingdom has ice holes and seals, seals swim up to ice holes for air; all this normal. But when smell seal breath now, not quick. Hesitate. Seal go back down.

Last meal? Long time ago; sun come and go away one hundred times or more. So, hungry.

Today, maybe good day. Optimistic. Find ice hole, lay down. Wait at ice hole. No seal breath. Wait long time, then go away. Find new ice hole.

At new ice hole, lay down. Wait at ice hole. Wait very long time, and when about to go away: seal breath. Hesitate. Seal go back down.

Hungry.

Later, Sun go away. While Sun going away, thank Sun for day. Even though not good day—no catch seal. But not Sun's fault. Maybe tomorrow better. Dig small pit in ice, sleep.

Today, meet friend. No friends in New Ice Kingdom until now. Was at ice hole, waiting for seal breath. Waited long time, then smelled seal breath. Hesitated. Seal go back down. Then, heard noise. Turned around, saw fox. Thought was Bud at first—same size, colour—but not Bud. Fox.

Fox looked hungry—wanted seal bits? But no seal, so walked away. Would have given fox seal bits, because fox *friend*, but no seal. So fox go away.

Later, go to different ice hole. Lay down, wait. No seal breath. Wait long time, no seal breath. See fox in distance, waiting for seal bits, but no seal. Fox go away.

Decide to spy on Old Ice Kingdom. Have to be sneaky, because of Maury. Walk long time, see Old Ice Kingdom across water. Big swim from New Ice Kingdom to Old Ice Kingdom; water gap good boundary. Hide behind snow

pile near shore, look at Old Ice Kingdom. See Bud. Bud with Maury. Bud Maury's son now? No, Bud still my son. Miss Bud. Not so much miss Maury.

Hear noise, look back—fox. Fox followed. Fox good, fox friend. Maybe thinking: seal bits? But not killing seal now; spying on son and Maury. Good team, me and fox. Sidekicks. Will call fox "Foxy," go on adventures, kill seal and give Foxy seal bits. Foxy and Bear.

Fall asleep on snow pile. Wake up, Bud gone. Maury gone. Foxy gone. Go back to New Ice Kingdom.

Hungry. Tired.

Sun go away. Thank Sun for day. Thank Sun for Foxy. Today good day because have new friend. Also bad day because no seal. Dig small pit in ice, sleep.

Adventure for Foxy and Bear today:

After Sun comes, go to ice hole, wait. Wait long time, smell seal breath. Hesitate. Seal go back down. Hear noise, see Foxy. No seal bits, sorry. But still friends. Decide to look for different ice hole, maybe better luck. Walk for long time, see thing in distance. Maybe seal? Sometimes seal sits on ice, rests. This good.

Sneak up on seal behind snow drift, Foxy following. Get close, quietly peer over drift at seal, ready to attack. But, not seal. Not look like seal, not smell like seal. Get closer: shit. Own shit from different day. While walking away to find ice hole, see Foxy go over to shit pile. Foxy eats part of shit. Good adventure.

After that, at ice hole waiting for seal breath, thinking of Bud. Miss Bud. Bud miss me? Not know.

Miss own dad. Dad was good dad. Showed how to wait by ice hole, kill seal. Remember Dad giving water rides. Would hold onto Dad's neck/back, then Dad would swim around in water between Old Ice Kingdom and New Ice Kingdom. Didn't go to New Ice Kingdom, though, because Dad made frowny face and pointed paw at New Ice Kingdom, meaning: There not good. Old Ice Kingdom good. Though, now that in New Ice Kingdom? Not so bad. Except for hungry. Not good at killing seal in New Ice Kingdom.

Want Bud back, but Bud maybe not want back. Because messed up. Did bad thing, now Bud not happy. Wish own dad here so could show about being better dad for son. But Dad not here, so have to be better dad on own.

While thinking of Bud and own dad, smell seal breath. Hesitate. Seal go back down.

Sun go away. Thank Sun for day, thank Sun for Foxy. Dig small pit in ice, sleep.

Today, desperate. Hungry. Almost did bad thing.

When sun came, went to ice hole. Foxy in distance, waiting for seal bits. Waited, smelled seal breath, hesitated. Seal go back down.

Hungry.

Went to secret spot, dug up secret thing. This not good. Should not dig up secret thing. But hungry, so did. Secret thing still there, buried deep in snow. Still same as was: bite marks on head, but otherwise good condition. Very hungry,

but want to be good dad to Bud, so put back. This very hard to do, because of hungry, but did. Own dad was good dad; even though not here, taught me to be good dad, so did not eat secret thing. Put secret thing back in secret spot, went to ice hole.

Wait at ice hole, no seal breath. Foxy watch, then go away.

Sun go away. Thank Sun for day, thank Sun for Foxy, thank Sun for Dad who taught to be good and not eat secret thing. Dig small pit, sleep.

Today not good day. Hungry. Do not leave pit. Should probably go to ice hole with Foxy, but tired. Sun looking down like, "Why still in pit? Why not go to ice hole and try again?" But still not get up.

In pit, thinking of Old Ice Kingdom. Miss Old Ice Kingdom. Miss Bud. Remember being cub, Bud's age, playing ice hole game. So much fun, when cub. Would go with friend, find two ice holes near each other. Would dive into first ice hole, swim in water under ice until come out of second ice hole. Scary, because if couldn't find other ice hole. But always did, because smart. Learned ice hole game from Dad. Dad was good dad. Later, taught ice hole game to Bud, so good dad as well. Except ice hole game, though fun game, how bad thing happened. So maybe not good dad now?

Thinking about bad thing, feel bad for Maury. Although feel bad for self—because miss Bud—at least Bud still here. Maury's son not here. Because of bad thing.

Remember was waiting by ice hole in Old Ice Kingdom. This was before, when good at killing seal. Bud nearby, playing ice hole game with Maury's son. Bud and Maury's son best friends. Was waiting, then heard noise in ice hole, smelled breath. Did not hesitate. Reached down with paw, grabbed what thought was seal, bit head.

Not seal.

Thought was Bud for moment, very scary, but not Bud. Thank Sun. But, was Maury's son. Not good. Bud runs over, sees best friend with blood on head. Sees Dad with blood on mouth. Bud cry. This very bad. Bud runs off—scared of own dad? Not chase after. When Maury find out son dead, maybe Maury try and kill one who bites son's head. So, take Maury's son in mouth, run away. Swim across to New Ice Kingdom, bury Maury's son in secret spot. Not good dad like own dad.

Sun go away. Thank Sun for day, even though whole day in pit. Hungry. Bad thoughts.

Today good? Today bad? Hard to say.

Today good because when Sun comes, leave pit, make decision. Go over options: Since not good at killing seal in New Ice Kingdom, will die if stay in New Ice Kingdom. Because hungry. And since killed Maury's son with head bite, will die if go to Old Ice Kingdom. Because maybe Maury want revenge. So, stay in New Ice Kingdom and go to Old Ice Kingdom are same thing. Will die.

But, come up with plan: if go to Old Ice Kingdom, can bring secret thing. Dig up Maury's son from secret spot, bring to Old Ice Kingdom, then Maury

and Bud see: he dying because hungry, but he not eat Maury's son. Even though hungry, even though dying. Still not eat. So he good, he accident, he sorry. Maybe everything good?

Today bad because when go to secret spot, secret thing already dug up. See Foxy eating secret thing not far from secret spot. *Angry.* Chase Foxy. Foxy fast, but Foxy stop to throw up and then catch Foxy. Snap neck. Snap neck of only friend.

No Foxy and Bear. Just Bear. Today bad.

But, today good again because of new plan: even though hungry, not eat Foxy. Good decision. Foxy not Maury's son, but can still bring Foxy to Bud and Maury. Bring Foxy and show how did not eat thing that ate Maury's son. Even though hungry, even though dying. Plus killed thing that ate Maury's son. So he good. Can come back to Old Ice Kingdom, be with Bud. Miss Bud.

Hopefully, after Maury and Bud see dead Foxy, they let eat Foxy. Because hungry. But maybe should not eat friend, even though mad at friend for ruining first plan.

Walk long time, see Old Ice Kingdom on other side of water. Tired because hungry, but jump in water anyways. Make halfway across and drop Foxy. Foxy sink. Dive down because need Foxy for plan, but can't find. Also, can't find water surface. Plan not going well. Feels like Sun go away, even though Sun still there. Tired. Thank Sun for day, even though day not over. Where is Foxy. Close eyes, even though not in pit. In water. Not good.

Wake up: having water ride on Dad's back! Best feeling. Favourite thing in world is water ride on Dad's back. Then remember: Dad gone. So, not Dad. Someone else.

Sniff neck fur: Maury. Having water ride on Maury's back. Confused.

Remember swimming to Old Ice Kingdom. Remember dropping Foxy. Was drowning. Means Maury saw drowning, came to rescue. So Maury not want to kill? Because if want to kill, why rescue? So Maury forgive. This very good.

Holding on to Maury's neck/back, see Old Ice Kingdom shore. See Bud on shore. Maury swimming towards Bud. Bud not scared, because not running away. This very good. Maybe get to live in Old Ice Kingdom again, where good at killing seal. Where get to be with Bud. Will take Bud for water rides, which is fun for Bud—has good dad like own dad.

As ride to shore, thank Sun, but then remember Foxy. Foxy have son? Not know. Feel bad about Foxy. Best friend, now in boundary water.

Go back for Foxy later? Will go back for Foxy later. Will bury Foxy in secret spot, not dig up. Good plan. Thank Sun for plan. Thank Sun for Bud. Bud getting closer. Almost there.

Leonard Neufeldt

THE END OF PLATO

Either the wind or some animal's
distress. Even if one knew,
what difference would it make except to remind you
that too much knowing is earthbound,
that winter has come to live with you like a son
newly divorced, his life spread out in every room?
Numbness buoys you, but you still feel
the anger. It's here, you tell yourself,
relief from the damn night, although
you always chose your words more carefully
in your writings and with students,
"a style sweet as honey on the lips," they said,
"like Solon's lyrical verse but more eloquent,"
and less edgy than Socrates, the voices
rinsed free of bitterness like grape leaves
picked in the morning for the evening meal.
Nonetheless, no matter how innocent,
how slight, your errors may just ruin
everything you meant

Strips of clouds hang heavy between
the window shutters open as always,
and you hear the rain begin with an equilibrium
of soft sound. When the night maid leaves
and the young man arrives for the usual dictation,
he will bring more food and wine
and stronger medication for the night,
and he will ask again whether there is feeling
on the right side. Because he loves his ways
more than wisdom you will try to explain
yet again that any feeling on any side is for
the unfinished Dialogue, and you will search
for words he understands. Your voice
will be Socrates's asking if what is real
in a poem or politics or the wind-harp's wild hum
comes from this world moving in on all sides,
flush with feeling, comfortless
as your good side

That is what you fear
more than dying

A. Whitfield

THE GARDEN

"Whitfield."

I sit up, startled.

"What?"

The CO stands in front of the cell, his baton resting on the bars. "They want you in the lobby… now!"

I ease a warm, naked foot from under the covers and place it on the cold terrazzo floor.

"Hey," he says, "Better get a move on."

I look up. His eyes are dull and red and sore. His nose is covered in spidery purple veins. He curls a wafer-thin lip exposing a row of misaligned teeth, then evaporates into the morning.

My cell is on the third floor of honor block, a unit reserved for the better-behaved among us. The planners and builders of Attica never thought to include an honor block. In 1932, no one thought that men whose deeds warranted caging might deserve better cages. The remodeling and conversion occurred after the '71 riot. Somebody finally realized that even the bad sometimes need to escape the worst.

I was admitted so recently to the block that I haven't even unpacked my underwear and razor, and already my stay is in jeopardy. The day prior to my admission I received a minor institutional infraction that resulted in the loss of my job in the mess hall (I refused to serve a pan of chicken that had been dropped on the floor). I've had many jobs during my long incarceration: license plate maker, dishwasher, painter, janitor. All menial. All boring. None that I regretted losing, until now. An inmate must maintain a job or participate in an educational program to remain in honor block, so I feel compelled to accept the first job offer that comes my way: yard porter.

The honor block is very different from the other blocks in Attica. It offers a lot of freedom of movement whereas in general population an inmate stays locked in his cell much of the day. An inmate in honor block has opportunities to cook, use the telephone, play cards, or watch colour television in the dayroom. For many like myself, convicts who have been doing "hard time" for most of their bids, it's a real boon just to have access to running hot water and daily showers.

Working as a yard porter will be okay as long as it keeps me in the honor block.

The yard porter is responsible for the maintenance of the honor block recreation yard and the vocational building's evacuation yard directly opposite it. Although I've walked the corridor separating the two yards many times, I've

never actually seen the evacuation yard. Like many windows in the prison, those in the corridor are painted over with a thick layer of enamel. It creates a dark, ominous atmosphere and prevents prisoners from gazing in or out.

For three dollars a week I am expected to keep both yards free of trash, their walks and steps free of snow.

As the gate rattles open I gulp down the cool remains of a cup of instant coffee. It tastes more bitter than usual. Grabbing my coat and cap, I trudge down the company towards the stairs, passing cell after cell and the rhythmic breathing of sleeping men.

"Hey," whispers a voice. I stop. "You might need this." I reach for the crimson scarf, dangling in the murky light.

"Now get the hell outa here, it's freezin'." I watch as both head and hand slip turtle-like back under the covers. At the bottom of the stairs, I pause in the doorway waiting to be acknowledged by one of the lobby officers. One of the first lessons I learned after arriving at Attica is never to enter or exit an area of the prison without first receiving permission. In Attica, bright yellow lines on the concrete floor signal to prisoners where they must halt and await permission before continuing. You don't want to cross these lines.

The steam pipes hiss and sing above my head and I begin to sweat in the tight-fitting thermals.

"Report to Officer Kinski," commands an obese CO sitting toadlike behind a stack of pancakes and sausages. As I pass the desk I inhale the sweet aroma of maple syrup and fresh-brewed coffee. It reminds me that I should have placed my name on the morning chow list. And for a moment I consider asking if I can be added, but then the CO lets out a belch: "What, you waitin' for me to say, excuse me?" He jerks his head in the direction he wants me to go and reaches for another link.

Crossing the lobby to Officer Kinski's post, I wrap the borrowed scarf around my neck, zip my coat, and pull my brown knit cap down tightly over my head, making sure it covers my ears. I notice a new red-handled snow shovel propped against the wall by the evacuation yard door. After slipping my hands into a pair of new Thinsulate gloves—a recent gift from home—I reach for it. It feels strange, unfamiliar. Born and raised in Virginia Beach, I've seldom experienced any snowfall, and certainly none remotely comparable to western New York's.

The hall-captain, so called because he's the ranking officer in the block, approaches me as I wait for CO Kinski to finish his plate of pancakes. Most guards and a few inmates call him Mac, but his name is MacCleary, an old Irish drinker and brawler. He greets me with a solid punch to my upper arm.

"I got you this job, so don't let me down," he says.

Wrinkling his brow, he raises his fist, and I give an exaggerated flinch. He chuckles and slaps my shoulder with an open hand.

"See me when you get done and I'll get you a cup of coffee and a couple of pancakes."

This draws some cold stares from the guards gathered in the lobby. Shovel in hand, I wait. A cold draft creeps in under the door. With his sticky fingers CO Kinski fumbles through the ring of large brass keys. I stare through the lone,

slush-encrusted pane and watch a whirling snow devil spin wildly across the powdered landscape. I'm overcome with childish wonderment and I almost say, "Wow, look at that!" But one glance over my shoulder at the faces staring back at me from the lobby and I'm glad I didn't.

I step outside. My boots disappear into a drift. The wet cold of melting snow penetrates my socks. The door closes behind me. Its thunderous boom powders my cap and shoulders with a flurry of snow from the ledge above.

I stand motionless, ignoring the cold biting at my ankles. I listen. I can't recall the last time I experienced such quiet. I've lived in the din of angry, hating, screaming men for the past twenty-something years. I am unaccustomed to silence. I look about. All is still and white but for the sparrows perched in the leafless, snow-covered branches of an overgrown lilac.

Reluctantly, I press the black blade of the shovel into the snow and push. It makes a tinny, grating sound against the concrete steps. The little brown and gray mottled birds take flight.

Not long after I begin my shoveling I realize I have underestimated the tenacity of the snow. Years and years of pumping iron in the joint should have better prepared me. A novice at snow removal, I load as much onto the shovel as possible and toss it over my shoulder, creating my own blizzard. The sweat rolling down my face mixes with my breath and forms a salty matting of icicles on my mustache and beard. My arms begin to ache. My mouth becomes dry. Pain and stiffness unlike any I've ever experienced spread throughout my lower back. I continue. Mouth agape, chest heaving, and head pounding.

I've cleared very little snow and feel near exhaustion before I realize that all I need to do is push the snow from the steps. After a brief rest, during which I lean on the shovel and hungrily breathe in the sweet, crisp air, I easily clear the remaining snow. The quiet and the sparrows return. They look on as I speckle the frosted walk and steps with salt.

I sit on the cleared stoop. Tired, but not weary. It's like an athlete's exhaustion. The sun is bright and warm on my face. It radiates all around me, carving frosty shadows of loose papers and Styrofoam cups that dance and play in the breeze across what seems like an endless plain. Like glassy appointments to the building's shadowed facades, giant icicles hang in uniform display. Even the sharpened coils of the perimeter fence are lost in a clinging white mantle.

I begin to imagine what this yard might look like in the blush of spring. Gazing at the craggy, twisted limbs of an aged bush, I wonder what lies beneath its snow-covered bed. Who planted this old lilac? Was it a bird's dropping, or could it be a memorial, some long-forgotten con's attempt to venerate this place? I wonder how many prisoners have stood where I am standing, over how many winters, feeling the same emotions, thinking the same thoughts.

"Cold yet?" Asks CO Kinski as he inspects the steps.

From the lobby I hear a CO scream, "Shut the damned door!" Brushing away loose flakes from my cap and coat, I step inside. Only then do I feel a bone-chilling cold.

As the door bangs shut, hot, stagnant air rushes into my lungs; I can smell

smoked pork and stale cigarettes. Behind me the rattle of the turning key echoes down the vacant corridor.

Before entering the lobby, I remove my cap and gloves. Any forgetfulness, like not removing one's hat or gloves, gives the COs an opportunity to unleash a litany of invectives. Loosening my scarf I move slowly, deliberately, scanning for Mac. I don't see him. The same four guards remain in the lobby, folded into soft-cushioned chairs, legs crossed and extended, feet resting on the desks, their faces hidden behind newspapers. One's huge head lolls to the side, eyes closed and mouth gaping, emitting an occasional snort and sputter. I pass quietly, pausing at the entrance to the stairs. I steal a quick look at the coffee pot. Empty. I am relieved.

If there were any fresh coffee, I might be tempted enough to ask for some. And disturbing a sleeping CO, or one that's reading: that's asking for it.

I reach for the handrail and pull myself onto the gray stairs. Above, the door to the third-floor dayroom flies open and a blurry form scrambles out. The door is left ajar, allowing raucous chatter and blaring television to flood the narrow stairwell.

Ducking inside the dayroom, intent on making a dash for my cell, I find my way barred by a group of inmates waiting for the rec yard to open. They are in the middle of the Sunday afternoon football argument. "Motherfuck" this and "Motherfuck" that. I want to scream, "Why don't ya'll shut the fuck up?"

Unnoticed, or ignored, I move through the crowd, just another green-clad figure. The shift has changed and a new company officer is posted in front of his television. Steam billows from the company showers. Groups of prisoners gather around the cooking stations, slicing onions and stirring boiling pots. The sharp smell of cilantro permeates the air. Others are milling about, shouting conversations with those cleaning their cells. Radios and tape players are blasting, adding a street corner quality to the scene. I stop.

"Hey, here's your scarf. And thanks."

"Keep it. You'll need it again before long," says the first cheerful face I've seen all day. Ironic, we don't even know one another. Old cons have simpatico, something unknown to the new generation of prisoners.

Finally, in the relative warmth and quiet of my cell, I sit and stare through the bars and into the bank of little glass squares. Towering, cauliflower-like clouds chase the sun across a cobalt sky. A wisp of steam escapes the spout of my hot pot. I open the jar of Folgers, spoon a measure into my cup, and add the boiling water.

There are times when I gaze about the yard and recall that wintry day five years ago when I first was sent out here to shovel snow. I'm always amazed by the transformation—not only by the changes I've made to the yard, but also by the changes it's worked on me.

Briefly I watch a bumblebee move from flower to flower, sampling first a purple cone flower, then a shasta daisy, then over to the monarda. She eschews

the nectar, dedicating herself to the collection of pollen, passing it from forelegs to rear, where the fine, powdery yellow grains are packed onto great saddlebags for the return to the hive. The bee is a true socialist—nothing matters but the survival of the hive.

This yard has not always been a place of peace and beauty. In '71, it was used as one of the staging areas for state police and prison guards preparing to retake the prison. Where there are now rose bushes and apple trees, lilacs and iris, candy tuft and lilies, once lay the boot prints of vengeful men, driven to a religious fervor by fabricated stories of atrocities committed against hostages.

The linear brick and iron edifice of D-block's cell-house extends along the entire length of this narrow yard. In winter months it casts its long shadow over much of the garden. The roof, where the sparrows nest and a pair of crows frequently perch to heckle me with their crackling laughter, once served as the parapet from which a collection of New York State Police and prison guards fired rifles and shotguns into the mass of prisoners and hostages gathered in D-block yard. The governor had ordered that no prison guards were to be part of the attack, but a small number armed with their own hunting rifles took part in the slaughter. Explicit orders were given that only those inmates located on the catwalks were to be fired upon, but once the carnage got underway, the officers fired on everyone in the yard indiscriminately. The massacre ended the four-day standoff and established Attica's reputation as one of the most brutal prisons in America.

It's only 10:30. I have almost an hour to complete my circuit of the beds. I'm headed towards three apple trees. Each is surrounded by a small round bed of white, pale blue, or dark purple German bearded irises. It has taken me four years to segregate these three beds by colour. There are three more identical beds in this line, but with a rose rather than an apple in the center. One bed has a white and purple bi-coloured iris variety, but the other two beds have withstood my best efforts to isolate a single colour variety in each. The more than fifteen flowering beds contain hundreds of irises, and when in bloom they infuse the entire yard with their fragrance. Some say the scent reminds them of vanilla, some say citrus, and others describe it as spicy.

Once this kid pulled up on me, and said in a not too pleasant tone, "What's the smell out in that yard?"

"Iris," I said, "Why?"

"At night, like after it rains, the smell fills the whole company and keeps me from having to smell these motherfuckers."

"I'm glad," I said, meaning it and relieved that my iris's smell wasn't going to get me punched in the eye.

The next spring I move a section of the old lilac from the evacuation yard to the honor block yard to replace one that was uprooted and destroyed when new sewer pipes were installed. The lilac that was uprooted had served as a backdrop for prisoners' photographs taken during the spring and summer months. I asked

and received permission from the block sergeant prior to moving the bush.

It takes me and another con all day to dig up a section for transplanting, muscle it across the corridor, and get it planted in the honor block yard. For weeks it thrives in its new location. But then a few inmates come to me with concerns that the foliage is yellowing and dropping off. I tell them to water it more often, but it does no good. I take a look and notice that the trunk has been chewed or clawed at the base. Because groundhogs and skunks are prolific within the walls of the prison I assume one of them has attacked the bush. I get down on my hands and knees. After brushing away some dried leaves and dirt, I recognize hammer marks all along the trunk's base, and soon discover the heads of several copper nails pounded deeply into the wood. I can't believe it. Who the fuck... who could have driven nails into the bush? For what reason?

I ask Mac if he knows anything about it, and he seems as surprised as I, even coming to the yard and taking a look for himself. A few days later Mac pulls me aside and, in confidence, tells me that he learned CO Schultz is responsible. Schultz said the bush was an obstruction and that no one had asked his permission to move another bush into the yard. He brought the hammer and nails from home, knowing that when the copper reacted with the sap it would turn into copper sulfate, an acidic salt that kills trees and shrubs. Day after day I look on as the beautiful lilac withers and dies. I would gladly move it back to its original spot. But that wouldn't provide the satisfaction this hack is seeking.

It makes me recall the actions of those guards who snuck back into the institution in '71 with their own rifles and took their places on the wall with the State Troopers. As they fixed their scopes on the unarmed men in that yard and pulled the triggers, what type of satisfaction did they receive? The anger I feel comes less from compassion for the tree, or from bitterness for my wasted labor in moving it, but from a feeling of helplessness. Mac urges me to let it go. I want to make this hack accountable, to go to the block sergeant from whom I'd received permission to move the bush, but this would only put my life in as much danger as the lilac's. And it would still be dead.

On the street, as we say of the time before incarceration, I was an outlaw biker, an enforcer, a tattooist, a drug dealer, a criminal—but never a gardener. I never cut my own lawn. I never even bought flowers for my wife. As a matter of fact, I hated gardening as a boy. I lived with my parents in a middle-class neighborhood where the houses were all constructed on one or two ranch models. It was left to the individual owners to differentiate their homes. Some did it with garish paint schemes, some with fencing and statuary, and almost all with trees, shrubbery, and flowering plants. My parents planted azaleas, and by the time I was an adolescent they had grown into a hedge that encompassed the entire front of the house. You would have thought they planted crabgrass at the same time. The hot, humid days that Virginia Beach is known for are perfect for going swimming, or playing a game of ball, or tramping through the woods with the guys, but I would be seized by one of my parents and forced to spend my day

in a weed-infested azalea bed. I quickly learned to hate weeds and azaleas and eventually all botanicals. Though I garden now with a passion, I have never developed an affinity for azaleas.

The smell of freshly mown grass is buoyed across the yard by a cool summer breeze. When the wind rustles through the apple trees it exposes the pale undersides of their leaves, carrying me back to my childhood and the silver maple that stood outside the den of our house. When my younger brothers or I misbehaved my mother would make the errant son go to the tree and pull two switches from its limbs. Now that I reflect on it, it seems so cruel, making a child fashion his own scourge. We knew we'd better not return with unacceptably small switches or mother would retrieve her own, which looked as big as buggy whips.

I didn't get a lot of switchings, but those that I did get are memorable. I vividly remember the red welts, topped with fine silvery-green powder. Mother aimed for the backs of naked legs and woe to the willful child who attempted to block the blows with his arms and hands. Mother is a large woman, and seemed even larger those forty-some years ago, and an accomplished switcher. She would gather both of our arms under the vise-like grip of one of hers, and then go to town on our legs, always reciting the mantra, "Are you going to do it again?" Dancing to the music of the switch, we would sing out the same refrain with each sting: "No ma'am! No ma'am! No ma'am!"

Some of the side shoots on these apple trees would make for switches to her liking.

I realize that I probably caught a glimpse of this very spot almost forty years ago. I came running in from school or play to find my parents in our den, standing in front of the colour television my dad had won in a raffle at his fire station. They were watching a building burn. At first I thought it was more footage of Vietnam. (Mother always watched closely to see if she could identify my cousin.) She asked my father if that was the prison near his hometown in northern Pennsylvania. "No, that's the boy's prison in Elmira. This one is closer to Niagara Falls." That was 1971. The burning prison was Attica. I watched the helicopter view briefly and then went back outside.

I escape into the garden. It sometimes leads me back through the tunnel of time, to an underappreciated childhood. But more often than not, it carries me to that imaginary future, somewhere in Virginia, in that imaginary place that's my home, my yard, my garden. Sometimes I'm building a small greenhouse in my parents' backyard—sometimes I'm redesigning and landscaping the flowerbeds of my brother's newly purchased home. My grandchildren dance in the dewy grass nearby, asking me how the flowers feed the bees. I'm convinced I'll have a garden of my own when I go home—always when I go home. But with a life sentence, it's more if than when.

These are my proving grounds—it's here that I'll correct my mistakes, perfect my cultivation techniques. I'm working to atone for my mistakes, working to correct my behavior, planning to re-enter society able to flourish, to grow.

The garden is not a place where I delve into the mysteries of why I committed the crimes that led me here, or how I allowed myself to stray so far from the moral pathway that my parents placed me on. Those questions, seemingly relentless

and unanswerable enigmas, occupy the time when I'm not in the garden. That time and those thoughts are among the realities that I come to the garden to escape.

The unmistakable tapping of the CO's baton on the door pulls me from my musing. I gather my tools and prepare to leave my sanctuary, to move back into the small expanse of crowded humanity, back into my own crowded mind, back into the inescapable guilt, frustration, loneliness, anger, and despair that's Attica.

Over the years I've developed an intimacy with the garden that's difficult to explain. The whole yard has a soul, and a portion of it is my soul. I think that only those who have experienced it can understand. Much like prison.

During the time I've been in Attica I've earned two college degrees and completed many therapeutic programs, but my greatest learning experiences have come in this yard. I've learned things out here that can't be taught by books or in classrooms.

Few visitors ever venture into the garden without asking a host of questions. I found this discomforting at first. I've learned to cope. Some of my uneasiness results from the shame and guilt a prisoner must own. And I've lost the language of free people. Prison has a language of its own. Convicts become inured. It's how we learn to communicate experiences uniquely ours.

One of the questions I'm often asked is, "Did you do this before you came to prison?" Some ask from curiosity; some to break tension. But others, I believe, ask with a hopeful anticipation that I'll answer "No." They seek assurance that there is some rehabilitative value to the garden and my efforts in it, that beyond its appeal to the senses it holds some transforming power to relieve the suffering, remove the criminality, redirect the lost soul. Or maybe these are the reassurances I seek.

As much as I enjoy gardening, the quiet, the fresh air, the solitude, much of my pleasure is derived from walking about the beds with a welcomed visitor, answering questions, accepting praise and appreciation. I've come to realize that during these times my humanity is restored. The us/them evaporates, and it's just a couple of people breathing the same fragrant air.

Occasionally I'll catch that look, that quizzical expression of cognitive dissonance. This convict, the bearded, tattooed, behemoth with the shaved head, who looks so dangerous, so irredeemable, is talking about his fall crocus, his rose bushes, his apple trees. They're unsettled. I just don't fit their schemas of what a convict should be.

An explosion of rapid gunfire reverberates within the forty-foot concrete walls surrounding the prison, halting my mowing, ending my reflections. There's a firing range just outside the prison. How close, I don't know, but in such proximity that it gives the unwary a start when the volleys begin.

Listening, I think about what the explosion of gunfire must have sounded like on that September morning over forty years ago. The scene of "The Turkey Shoot" is less than fifty feet from where I stand. As the firing continues, enveloping

me in thunderous echoes, I imagine what it must have been like standing in that D-Block yard, looking up to those uniformed men covering the walls and roof. How terrifying it must have been to look into the face of your murderer as he trained his rifle on you, lined you up in the crosshairs, and pulled the trigger. It makes me consider how my victim must have felt. Damp grass has collected on the wheels and blades of the mower, making it difficult to push. As I'm freeing it of its grassy mat, the echoes fade, and my thoughts return to the garden.

"I don't have allergies."

More a plea than a statement.

The nurse looks at me across the desk, her hazel eyes and pursed lips fixed on me with a stern, reproving glare. "With the exception of the diarrhea, your symptoms would indicate you do have an allergy. You know," she continues, her look now softened, "people develop allergies as they age. I did. I'll put you in to see the doctor." She begins writing in my file. "Next."

For more than three weeks I've been experiencing a constant sore throat, burning eyes, and a runny nose. The diarrhea came and went. These symptoms are most severe after I spend the day in the garden. I can't imagine anything worse than being allergic to my flowers. Another con suggests I try Benadryl. It knocks me out for about three hours, but has no noticeable effect on my symptoms.

I am more concerned with problems in the garden than with a runny nose. Since I've returned to my daily work in the yard I've discovered what I believe to be a fungus, bacteria, or insect attacking the plants. Flowers are withering and foliage is becoming discoloured and falling off. I'm not having any luck finding out why. I go from cover to cover in the *Burpee's Complete Guide to Gardening*. I don't find any malady that resembles what is affecting my plants. Visitors can only commiserate.

With every passing day the crisis takes on greater urgency. Even if I can discover the cause of the problem, I have no access to pesticides or anti-fungals. The COs that I've gone to in the past for such things—I once had to combat an infestation of flea beetle—have retired. I recall an episode of PBS's "Victory Garden" in which a concoction of vegetable oil, dish soap, and water is sprayed on some plants to rid them of whitefly. I try it. Nothing. Each morning I just stand helplessly in the midst of the dying plants. One morning I'm met at the bottom of the stairs by the yard officer.

"Follow me," he says. He ushers me through the lobby as a director would a late arriving mourner to a funeral. Once out the door, he stops abruptly on the stoop. Sweeping an open palm before him, he says, "What happened to the flowers?"

I gaze past him to the botanical carnage that lies before us. Lilies, iris, roses, all are wet and wilted, dying or dead. Slack-jawed, I look at what's left of the plants and flowers, most of which I've cultivated from seeds my mother sent me and nurtured for many years.

I look back at the CO. My horror is mirrored in his expression. "What

happened!" He repeats. I can't answer. I'm numb.

I stumble down the steps and cross the narrow strip of grass to the closest flowerbed. I reach for the discoloured leaf of an oriental lily and rub it gently. A viscous, chemical-smelling liquid oozes onto my thumb and forefinger. I move to my iris, my daises, my roses. The same. Bed after bed. I turn to the CO who has followed me. "Why?" I ask.

I realize there is no fungus, no bacteria, no insects—for weeks someone has been poisoning my plants. The yard officer and I might never have known the plants were being sprayed if the CO responsible had not become so impatient. The satisfaction is not so much in killing all of the plants and flowers but in letting me know they are being destroyed intentionally.

For several days I try to wash the poison from the wounded and dying. The water gushes in a supple arc from the glistening hose, and with it a reservoir of hope. But they continue to perish. I often think about the destruction of the lilac. An all too familiar feeling of helplessness wells up inside me. Anger begins to mix with my grief.

Heedless of the warning Mac gave me when I thought to report the killing of the lilac, I act. I write to the Superintendent, and directly to the Inspector General's Office in Albany. It is bad enough that someone brought a herbicide into the prison and sprayed the flowers, but they did it without regard for the health of anyone who ventured into that yard. I think that surely some action will be taken to discover what chemicals we were exposed to, even if there is little concern to discover who introduced them into the facility.

I do not receive a response from the Inspector General's Office, nor do I hear directly from the Superintendent. But at his behest the block sergeant summons me to his office. He orders me to take a seat, then asks brusquely, "Did you forget where the fuck you are?" I sit silently and stare, more through him than at him. "This is Attica!" Pointing towards the door, he says, "Now get the fuck out... and that yard is now off limits to you." He returns to the papers on his desk. I return to my cell.

It's been over a year since we discovered how the plants were destroyed. I have not been back to the garden. I miss my time there. It was my refuge. But it's still there. It survived after all. Knowing it's being cared for by other men provides me with a great deal of satisfaction and some consolation. I knew that at some point I was going to have to leave the garden behind. I just wasn't prepared for it to be so soon or in such an unpleasant manner. Sometimes, when I pass through the corridor, the yard door is open. I catch a glimpse of the flowers or a whiff of their spicy fragrance. I don't despair. I take the scent along with me.

Garth Martens

DREAMTIME

He flew, yes really. He jumped from the unfinished parapets and flew, his hammer a weight he'd cut free of, shooting off like a helium balloon some kid let go, and then, like an arrow, scutting out of line, the construction site a clearing in the forest. For a moment, he wheeled in space, like an idea, dove head-first to the aspens, leaf edges sharpening his sight, and it was like angels, it was like a party, the raindrops a parachute or a cape, his hands grazing the leaves, the leaves tickling his palms, lift, lift, with the changing weather. On the veined cuticles he could smell diesel floating over from the skidsteer, dust the raindrops kindled as they hit, and the cooling heated temperature of a damn good pour coming on.

His brother says take the stairs, so he does. His dead brother, but that doesn't faze him. In the dark, he opens the steel door, turns onto the landing, and every time, its floor slithers away and he flops into the lull, speeding to the south side of the building so he can boom a cart of scaffolds. A green and yellow can of corn bounces up out of a trench and strikes him in the face. His driver's seat is a chair in the trailer and he's eating from that cold can three times a day. Then he's counting cabinets through four hundred rooms and the numbers blur on his sheet at the prod of a pencil, he has to count them again, what was he counting? Hinges? Glides? Knobs? He's under a sheet of poly in one of the rooms, a painter's brush and the paint walloping the plastic over his chest. Then he stirs in the elevator shaft, plummeting. He stirs, face under plastic, his body rigid from the free-fall.

With his earbuds jacked in he listens to the iPod. To keep from getting caught in the closet asleep he suspends a pair of pliers that will jar him when they fall. If he wears earplugs instead, he hears a great volume of space caving at either direction, parentheses or corridors pointing to the scent of vanilla, to the cleaning girl who vacuums furnished suites. When he found her sweater yesterday in the north-wing he brought it to his nose and inhaled. He last felt like that when he unplugged a water pump in the rain, the hum of it through his limbs. Clogged with perfume, he felt his neck and groin prickle, as they are doing now. He kisses her little wrists in the darkness, wrists he'd like to bite and taste marmalade. In her floral uniform, then her sweater, then undressed, she eases him to the ground, now a bed. Pears are tumbling out of her shirt, which becomes a gown, high-ridden. Together they swim, they sweat, along the corridor to the basement. She rocks violently over him, thighs like oiled fur, the curled ends of her hair brushing his chest. Sometimes she has charred stumps extending from her shoulders or she glistens not with sweat but an arid

nakedness. Then he sees she is not human at all, but first a river otter, carrying the river and fetid with fish, and then a silver bear with sick sad eyes. Now she is human, and from the taut line of her body, smoother than concrete, he meets the unguarded tremors of her face. As he comes clumsily, she tells him, It's okay. She says, Sleep.

EVERYTHING THAT'S YOURS

It comes from the highway to the house,
from the frost on the seeds
and the station and the dream.

It comes from the bus
and the strangers in their sleep,
aspens like wicks in a flame.

It comes from the bird and the bird's chain.

*

It comes from a country singer's voice,
ashes in the air.

Are they ashes, moths?
You can't say.

Everything that's yours,
a jar of receipts, the yellow ceiling,
a scale that counts your weight.

*

It comes from oil on your plate,
a streak of gristle you cut
away and cut and cut.

*

It comes from your son's mute steps
through the house.

From the neighbour's truck
and the cuffs of his eyes.
From the window overnight.

*

It comes from the purge
at the sink.

Ceramic tiles, the next drink.

*

It comes from the chattering needle
of a sewing-machine.

The radio at the prompt.

Does your hand roll in
like a snailshell? Like a sickle?

*

It comes from the bath and the candle,
the woman and the cloth,
steam as it curls from her skin.

It comes before a question.

Are her eyes made-up
or what?

Is it you we're talking about?

It comes from someone else's hand,
the drugs that let her sleep,
just go to sleep.

*

It comes from the understory of a ring,
the name on a knife,
from the horse in the yard and the horse before light.

Is it a tool for digging? A freewheeling hinge?

It comes from God in the oven,
panic in the sky.

*

It comes from the horse asking, When?
From spokes of a wheel, cigarette filters,
your son or the window asking.

It doesn't come from you,
it can never come from you,
the trees are burning
and the other hand, reluctantly,
takes the weight.

THE CLEANING GIRL

The vacuum's suck and crackle
drew his ear across the dingy corridor.
He carried a tray of paint, a fresh
brush for a touch-up on the door-frame.

"Hey-o," he said, knuckle at the pine.
"Careful of the frame, eh?"
She nodded. Glanced, charcoal dark,
noted his mud-caked tread.

*

Sometimes his face was just a routine
tremor solidly held, his eye's
twitch a tell he was nervous,
closed in with weariness.

Broom aslant on his shoulder he entered
uncarpeted corridors loud and echoey
with a welder's torch, the shunt of a drill's
give-out and the requisite swearing.

"How's she going?" the Foreman pressed.
"Round and round," he said. The stairwell
wavered like a watery pool, reflective,
underlit, by the gleet of a distant bulb.

*

At second coffee he laughed with the rest
as the Pentecostal Cape Bretoner
weighed-in on Fort Mac, "City's
full of lego ladies, man.

Fake hair, fake lips, from tit to the tail.
You wake with a greased
peg-legged midget, breath of a goat.
Not some smoke-show like your girl."

Whetted, they traded doubtful tales
of this or that girl, harelipped settled-fors
or trophied encounters with a boss's daughter.
What mattered was polish. Sweep in the telling.

*

They went quiet when she walked by,
dressed, not in the usual pastel
uniform, but in street clothes
above the neckline, milk-pink, hale,

a trailing daub of perfume trim
belt about the ribs a jacket
neatly awning her waist,
discreet, impervious to the bait.

"Have a nice night," he said,
overlapped by the Cape Bretoner,
"You too," she said, chrome-clean,
hastily legging it to the parkade.

Soon, the back-and-forth of who it was
she said words to. Proud grubbing.
Private image made public sleeves
flared tightly at the wrists, the play

of hands in tresses she unfastened by a pin
interpretations of fractional
contact a keenness in the crotch
as they clipped their belts, went back to it.

W. Mark Giles

A MAN WILL SET FOOT ON THE MOON

1.

Once upon a time, Dwight is ten years old. A stick in his hand. A half-strip of shiplap prised from the side of the house with a hatchet his brother Darryl left buried in the stump. Go out and play, his mother says. She sits in the front room with Laugh Jack, the barber. They are planning Dwight's father's funeral. In the front room, where a clean square on the bare pine-board floor marks the absence of the rug that has been taken up and—and what? Where is it? Where is the carpet my father bled to death on? Rolled up, taken away. To the dump? Where coyotes and strays from across the tracks can nose at it, tear it, suck my father's blood? Dwight sits in the middle of the clean square but doesn't ask these questions. Go and play, his mother says. He goes outside to the waiting hatchet. He takes the hatchet from the stump, hefts it. The day is grey. A porridge of clouds is drawn across the sky, trapping the summer heat, obscuring the mountains, flattening the light into sticky, shadowless blankness. Somewhere up beyond the clouds, beyond atmosphere, across a light-second of space, three men in a spacecraft prepare to orbit the moon. Dwight paces off ten steps; with each footfall grasshoppers bound away with the clack of carapace. He throws the hatchet, attempting to send it end-for-end the way Darryl and his friends can, a flick of the wrist, a flashing arc, occasionally the satisfying thock! of blade fixing into the soft meat of the cottonwood. Dwight's throw skews and skids to a stop three feet short and a foot wide. He fetches the hatchet and walks to the back door.

He listens through the screen to the cadence of Laugh Jack's tenor voice—he can't hear the words, only scissored speech patterns. Then his mother—voice raised. I don't care, she says. It's my decision. Then softer, words lost.

He strikes the hatchet into a seam of wood cladding just to the right of the door. It holds fast. He wiggles the handle, then torques it down with steady pressure. The crack widens and he torques it some more. With a sharp snap the board splits. From inside the house: Is that you Dwight? Yes, mom, he calls. He drops the hatchet. I told you to go and play, she calls. Yes, mom, he says. He pulls at the strip of wood. It comes away in his hand. Are you still there, she calls again. No, mom, he says. He has a stick. Go and play.

He goes. He walks towards the river, lopping the heads off brown-eyed susans that grow in the ditches beside the road. Father's dead, he says as he swings at each flower with the stick. Father is dead. His esophagus ruptured. Esophagus, he says out loud. He swallows spit so he can feel his own esophagus. Three days ago he wasn't sure what an esophagus was. Dwight slinks through the hole in the fence around the generating station, scrambles down to the river and stands below the control room building. He watches water churn from the spillway of

the dam. He follows a rough path downstream along the brow of the bluff until it peters out. He climbs to where bare rock slants toward water, then drops off in a twenty-five foot cliff. This is where Darryl and the older boys come to jump. The river is deep here, not too swift, gathering its volume in a lazy sweep before it enters the sluice to the lower dam. He stands on the rim of rock, where he has never ventured before. He spits into the river, then pisses into the river, holding his penis in his right hand while he waves his stick back and forth in the stream of his own water. My father is dead, he calls to the river, and he is suddenly very scared and he takes a step back, which causes him to stipple his pants and shoes with urine. Funeral shoes. They drove into the city earlier that day and got a pair of new shoes. He turns and makes his way back to town, eschewing the path.

He swings his stick like a machete at the bracken of willow and scrub alder. Crows caw. Jays screech. He comes out of the bush onto the service road that leads from the plant to the lower dam. A company truck bumps past. The man in the passenger seat looks over. When he sees Dwight, the smile on his face dissolves into a grim expression, and he touches the peak of his hat as if in salute. From the direction of town, a small dog skews toward him at a canter, its rear end not quite aligned with its front. That girl's dog, Amy's. A Heinz 57, terrier and other things. Hello, dog, Dwight says. My father is dead. The dog bows. His esophagus ruptured. I don't feel like crying. The dog's tail swishes back and forth, back and forth, and it barks, once, twice. We're going to have a funeral. The dog falls in beside him, snapping at the grasshoppers that rise from Dwight's feet. You can't come, Dwight says. Mother says no one can come to the funeral. Just us. Dwight walks. The porridge sky thick across the roof of the world.

Dwight and the dog arrive at the baseball diamond. The foul lines radiate from home plate, the lime mostly erased between home and first and third bases, smudged from half-a-summer's play. Dwight toes the rubber on pitcher's mound with his new shoes. I live here, he says to the dog. His shoes are scuffed and marked with dirt. Over there. He aims the stick beyond the concession shack behind the bleachers. The dog tenses, alert, expecting the stick to be thrown. As Dwight waves the stick, Darryl steps from around the side of the shack, as if conjured by a wand. Darryl points at Dwight. I found you, Darryl yells. I always find you.

2.

Somewhere in the world, a clean square on a bare pine-board marks the absence of a rug. Somewhere in the world a red-drenched rug marks the absence of blood in a body. Somewhere in the world a pale body marks the absence of a father. Once upon a time Darryl stands in front of his younger brother Dwight in the middle of the field, flexing the fingers on his too-large-for-a-teenage-boy hands, already calloused and nicotine-stained, hands transforming from turtled fists to open-fingered butterflies, butterflies to turtles, turtles to butterflies. The dog trots between them and around them. One of the butterflies flies forth and wraps itself around the shiplap stick; with a deft flick Darryl tears it from Dwight's grasp. He cuts the air between them, once, twice, then taps Dwight on one shoulder, then the next, like a duke be-knighting a squire on the plain of battle. It's my stick,

Dwight says. Why did you want to find me?

Darryl points the stick over his head, examines its length as if checking its plumb. Where'd you get the dog, Darryl says. Dwight shrugs. It's nobody's dog. That Amy girl's, maybe, Darryl says. He raps Dwight on the thigh, just enough to make him jump. The dog bows, wags its tail, growls, barks. Follow me, Darryl says to his brother and the dog, and they do.

Behind the concession, Darryl points to a patch of ground where the grass has been beaten down. Sit, he says. Dwight sits and settles against the wall. The plywood is warping, drawing the nails from a corner. When he looks up, he sees Darryl haloed by the porridge sky. The dog snuffles in the dirt where a small animal has excavated a hole to burrow under the shack. Darryl swings the stick and claps the earth next to the dog's snout.

I'm the man of the house now, Darryl says. Without letting go of the shiplap, he pulls a package of cigarettes from the front pocket of his pants. Buckingham's. Filterless. Father's brand. One-handed, he manoeuvres a smoke into his lips and re-stows the package. From his shirt pocket, he digs out a wooden match and uses the edge of his thumbnail to spark it. He puffs the cigarette alight, then holds the match head down so the sliver of wood burns brightly. He tosses it into the grass at Dwight's feet. A few stalks on a tussock flame briefly before fading. Darryl takes a drag of the cigarette, then taps Dwight on his shoe. You're gonna have to do what I tell you. To show your loyalty. No matter what. Dwight scans the dirt for hot spots in the blackened grass. He reaches for the dog, but it skips away. He pulls the palm of his hand over the plywood, brushing flakes of alligatored paint. Darryl picks a piece of tobacco from his lower lip. The three of them are like subjects in a Norman Rockwell painting on their day off. Darryl sucking on a smoke purloined from his dead father. Dwight sunk in the dust, stripping paint from a wall. The stray dog pissing on the corner of the building. Under a sky not blue.

Darryl squats on his haunches as easily as settling on a stool. Does Mom know you stole them smokes, Dwight says, looking up. I won't tell.

The old man don't need them now he's dead, Darryl says. I'm in charge now. You can't tell anybody anything. It's you and me.

Darryl flicks his cigarette into another patch of grass. He chops with the scimitar shiplap—then cracks it across Dwight's shins, arms, head. Somewhere on earth, a teenage boy rains blows on his brother, smacking the stick against flesh. I won't tell, Dwight says in a whisper. The dog runs to and fro and barks. After a spell, Darryl stops hitting Dwight. He leans against the wall of the shack. A thin sheen of sweat dapples his upper lip among a suggestion of whiskers. He breathes hard through his nose and Dwight does too. Dwight lowers his arms. The dog stills and approaches the boys. That's a stupid dog, Darryl says. He spits at the dog, but his mouth is cotton-dry, and the small bolt of spittle falls short and rests dull in the blackened wad of burned grass. Come here, you stupid dog, Darryl says. Come on over, I got something for you. Grab that dog, Darryl says and nudges Dwight with his foot. Dwight scrambles to the dog and holds out his hand. The dog sidles over and Dwight skritches the wiry fur. The dog licks the salt in his palm. See Spot run, Darryl says. Run, Spot, run. A slice, a thump,

a whimper. The dog skips toward the bleachers, then comes loping back.

Can we go home, Dwight says. He stands up and dusts off his pants.

C'mon, stupid dog, Darryl says. Come here. He slips a match from his shirt and holds it in the tips of his fingers. He mimes nibbling at it then holds it out. The dog ambles forward—stops—edges back—inches closer. Darryl begins to sing, matching his Jim Morrison t-shirt in a lullaby voice: This is the end, beautiful friend, this is the end, my only friend, the end. The dog comes over.

Darryl grabs the scruff of its neck and clubs it between the eyes with the stick.

Darryl, Dwight says. What'd you do that for. Darryl hits the dog again. Dwight runs at his brother but the older boy is bigger and stronger. Darryl sidesteps the lunge and uses Dwight's own momentum to drive him to the ground.

Watch this, Darryl says. He arcs the stick high over his head brings it down in the middle of the dog's back. The sound of a large bone snapping. He lets go of the dog. See Spot run, he says. The dog's back is broken. It struggles to its forefeet, drags itself a step, stumbles. Blood drips from its lips. Other than laboured breathing, it doesn't make a sound.

Dwight is crying. Get up, Darryl says. When he gets to his feet, Darryl thrusts the stick at him. Your turn, Darryl says.

No, Dwight says. He wheels but before he can get away Darryl grabs him by the back of his pants. He delivers a tap to the top of Dwight's head.

I'm in charge now, Darryl says. You have to show your loyalty.

I won't tell, Dwight says.

Take the fucking stick, Darryl says. He has Dwight by the front of his shirt now, and shakes him. The dog has managed to drag itself a few yards away, but is stopped again. It coughs. Pink bubbles froth from its nose. Dwight has the stick in his hand. Hit the stupid dog, Darryl says. Dwight closes his eyes and turns his head and flails the stick, cutting the air. Darryl slaps his face with an open hand. Do it, he says.

Dwight shuffles to the dog. He hits the dog in the hindquarters, a glancing blow. The dog grunts, but doesn't yelp. It has no feeling below the point where its spinal cord is severed. Harder, Darryl says.

I'm sorry, Dwight says. He slams the stick into the dog. I'm sorry. He lifts his arm high. As he beats the dog to death, he cries. I'm sorry. Stupid dog, Dwight says. Stupid stupid dog. Somewhere beyond the atmosphere, three men in a spacecraft. Somewhere in the world, a clean square. Somewhere in the world, a boy rains blows on a dog. Fuck dog fucking stupid, Dwight says. He stops when his arm tires, when he pants for breath, when his tears dry. The dog is bleeding and broken. Yet still its rib cage rises and falls. Die, you stupid dog, Dwight says. Do it, Darryl says. He stands, leaning slightly forward on the balls of his feet. His mien is glum, his brow furrowed, like a construction foreman watching a labourer dig ditches. His hands: turtles to butterflies, butterflies to turtles, turtles to butterflies.

Dwight grips the stick in both hands, draws it high and swings with all his

might to crush the dog's skull. The dog twitches then goes still, a hidebound bag of meat and blood and bones. Dwight doubles over and throws up in the dirt. His funeral shoes now splattered with gore and vomitus. Dog's blood speckles his trousers.

Darryl hasn't moved, his stare transfixed on the dog. Dwight swings the stick, still in both hands, from his crouch. He connects squarely with the side of Darryl's head. Darryl falls from the knees, going all the way down face first, raising a cloud of dust as his chest thumps the ground. He shakes himself to all fours. With one hand on the wall of the shack, he wavers to his feet.

OK, Darryl says. I won't tell. He probes at his temple. The curl of his ear is bleeding. I don't think you cracked my skull, Darryl says. I got a hard fucking head. Remember that the next time you pole-axe me.

Darryl smokes a cigarette. He offers one to Dwight, who declines. They pile grass and twigs and Darryl puts the dog on top and then lights the pyre, but the flames won't catch and Darryl finally runs out of matches. They work in silence. Darryl takes off his treasured Jim Morrison t-shirt and ties up the sleeves. By the time they stuff the dog's corpse into the makeshift sack, blood has streaked Darryl's torso. They kick at the dirt to obliterate the stain on the ground. Then they retrace the route Dwight has taken earlier that day, down the service road. The same truck passes them, this time going from the town to the lower dam, and the same man tips his hat in salute. If he notices the boys are carrying a dead dog wrapped in a shirt he doesn't let on. They use the stick to crash through the scrub until they arrive at the cliff. They piss into the river. Darryl picks up the shrouded corpse. One tough dog, Darryl says. He heaves the dog, and they watch as it describes its parabola through the air, cartwheeling end over end, up to the crest of its apogee then falling to the water below. The current slides it away around the bend. Won't it get stuck in the turbine, Dwight says. No, Darryl says. Dwight makes to throw the stick but Darryl stops him. Keep it, he says.

They scramble down the rocky ledge, heading upstream away from the dog. At the river's edge they stop to clean up. Darryl splashes water on his torso and laves his ear. Dwight cleans his shoes. They wash their hands, using the coarse river silt to rub their hands until they are red and cold.

They crawl through the hole in the fence. They go to their house where their mother will have already gone upstairs to lie down.

3.

Tomorrow they will attend a funeral for their father at a funeral home in Caxton. Only Dwight, Darryl, and their mother will be there. Laugh Jack will drive them in the station wagon, but will stay outside. The boys will discover their father has been cremated. Back home, all of them—Dwight, Darryl, mother, and Laugh Jack—will follow the bushwhacked trail to the cliff. Mother will take the lid from the simple white ceramic urn. Laugh Jack will doff his hat, and mother will say, Oh for God's sake, Jack, leave the damn thing on. It will be a windy, sunny afternoon, the porridge sky having given way to the blue dome. Mother will shake the ashes from the urn and the wind will take them and flatten them

and spread them into the river. Dwight will notice that some of the ashes are fine and blow a long way, while other bits are bigger and fall like pebbles. Then she will smash the urn on the rock. No one will cry. Back at the house they will eat sandwiches carved from the ham that some of the ladies have brought over. They will sit in the front room by a clean square on a bare pine-board floor. On television, they will watch a signal from up beyond the blue dome now gloaming in the dusk, where a man will set foot on the moon.

Years will pass. Dwight and Darryl will tell no one.

Judy LeBlanc

EXPOSURE

Fiona watched the Jap emerge from the Willard building. Her dad said Matsubuchi thought he was better than any white man and here was the proof: his photography studio three floors above the dust and clamour of the street, a fedora topping his head, and a bow tie springing from the neck of a white shirt that puffed between the lapels of a black jacket. Above polished shoes, his trousers folded into neat cuffs. Any man without coal stained into the seams of his hand was a dandy, according to her dad, and an Oriental who put on airs was worse than a dandy. Fiona didn't have a quarrel with Matsubuchi on the basis of his racial origin or because he was a sharp dresser with clean hands, as most of the white men in Cumberland could do with a little tidying up. No, her issue with him was that he had stolen her grief; at least that's how she'd come to think of it. How he'd managed such a thing seemed a supernatural act and fear that he was a conjurer of a kind made her hesitant about approaching him.

One year ago to the day, she'd stood in her steamy kitchen squeezing Charlie's dungarees through the ringer washer, cursing the ground her husband walked on because he'd gone off to work with the tobacco. She had been looking forward to sitting on the stoop with a cigarette in the misty February morning after she'd finished the washing. Though the company forbade smoking in the mines, Charlie liked a smoke before going down and after coming up the shaft. She didn't worry about him because she had married him for what she considered his indestructible nature. So when the sound of the bell calling for the draegarmen clobbered the morning's peace, and the hairs rose on her arms and a chill went through her body, she thought not of Charlie but of her dad. She pulled the plug on the washer, grabbed her coat and joined the women in the street where word had spread that the explosion was a bad one.

Later that day, the fire bosses hauled Charlie and many others from the nether regions of Mine Number Four. She didn't recognize the charred body, with skin ragged and hanging off it, as the tall hard-muscled man who'd been sleeping next to her in her dad's house for a year and a half. In the following days and months she sometimes set three places at the dinner table for her husband, her dad, and herself, half-expecting Charlie to come banging in the back stoop, black-faced and cocky with a smoke dangling from his mouth. Sometimes when she couldn't sleep, wild thoughts swam in her head, like that Charlie was still alive, down deep in the ruined mine and not coming out because he loved that dark place better than he loved her.

Now a year from the accident it had come to this—watching the Jap from the opposite side of the street. He hesitated, adjusted his hat, and sniffed like an animal taking a measure of his surroundings. Keeping her head down so he wouldn't notice, she continued on Third and followed him along Dunsmuir

until he turned into the bank. His foreign looks and gentleman airs frightened her, as if the distance between them were not a street but a chasm, strange and dangerous.

At the grocers, she picked up corned beef and a can of peas, and then walked on to the government liquor store. She spotted Jimmy, her dad's old friend, shuffling in her direction. The stoop in his back forced him to crane his neck and he caught her eye before she could sneak past. He'd been the bartender at the Cumberland since an accident in the mine some fifteen years before. He tipped his hat and asked after her dad, exposing the dark hole of his mouth and a solitary pair of yellow teeth.

"It's like he's got knives clanging in his lungs," she said.

Jimmy shook his head. He'd lost many a good customer to Black Lung. As he spoke, his moustache bounced above his chin. "You might take him up to the hospital. They can ease the pain a little with a special breathing apparatus they got."

"I know about it and when the time comes I'll do it, but it's nowhere near time. Meanwhile he could at least leave the whiskey alone."

"Let a dying man have his pleasure, Fiona." His smile intensified the veins in his cheeks.

"It's taking food off the table, Jimmy."

He shrugged as if the liquor itself were life sustaining. He and some of the other men gave money to her dad and her now and then. They looked after one another that way, though there would be nothing for the widows or the kids once the men died. She turned without a word and stepped into the liquor store.

"Say hello to the old feller," Jimmy called after her.

On the way home, she felt embarrassed at how she'd stalked Matsubuchi down Dunsmuir. It was best to forget about him and besides, how could she rely on her memory from that day. The whole city had gone crazy with women wailing and sobbing in the streets—thirty-two of their men gone in one afternoon. It was like the Great War all over again, only a different kind of savagery on their very own soil. She'd left the undertaker's office in a daze, the same state she'd seen many times in other women: the stagger in the gait and the eyes as buggy as the old miners. She wouldn't have anyone around her—that hadn't changed in a year—and she didn't remember walking, how she'd gotten to the Willard Block. Her body crumbling against the building, her back braced by its cold bricks. Tears finally—rising inside of her with such force it seemed they might unhinge her very organs.

Then there had been a sound, a soft and barely audible explosion of air, which brought her back to herself and the awful scene she was making in public. When she wiped her tears, she faced a small box with a round glass window like an eye. A gentleman dressed in a black suit and shiny black shoes held the camera in his hands. He lowered his small brown eyes and bowed, and before she could say anything he disappeared around the corner of the building. It happened so quickly it might have been a dream, the kind in which a stranger sees you in your nakedness. After that day her tears dried up and ever since a steely-eyed resolve pressed like stone against her days. She found it best not to

think of the days gone or of those to come, only to move doggedly through the day at hand.

She walked the few blocks home through the spitting rain, opened the door to the cottage and her father's voice. "Where you been? The stove's out and I'm freezing."

He conserved his words and when he strung together more than two or three she felt bad for his suffering. He'd never been much of a talker except when he and Charlie drank and then they'd rant about the company and the union. They'd forget Fiona was even there, though sometimes when her dad wasn't looking, Charlie would slide his hand under her dress and circle her knee with his palm. If she let him, his hand would creep a little higher spreading his warmth on her skin.

It was likely a blessing Fiona's mom never met Charlie. She died when Fiona was twelve and she would have objected to his uncouth manners: chewing with his mouth open, burping after every meal. Her mom, who had not married one herself, had wanted a gentleman for her daughter. She, who'd come from England, couldn't have seen that what drew Fiona to Charlie was how he would have one day taken her to his home in Ireland, away from Cumberland and back across the sea.

Fiona hung her coat at the door. "Ran into Jimmy," she said to her dad.

"Did you get the drink?" The house stank of her dad and liquor, a trace of sulphur from the stove, and the mould that grew around the windows every winter with the heavy rains.

"I'll make your dinner," she said. He was like a baby, helpless and sucking on Mama's nipple; she handed him the bottle on her way into the kitchen. She'd accepted that it would likely kill the both of them if he quit now. As uncivilized as such honesty looked, she and her father no longer pretended anything. He unscrewed the cap and swigged from the bottle's mouth.

In the kitchen, she shook out the ash in the stove, snapped some twigs, stuffed them through the opening, and struck a match. It wasn't like her to let the stove go out. She'd been distracted today. If her dad remembered the date, he didn't let on and she wasn't about to bring it up. She'd come to despise the cloud of black dust that rose in her face when she poured the coal into the belly of the stove, and how the flames sprung at her like prongs on the devil's fork and resolved into a slow burn that left the lingering stink of rotten eggs. When she complained, her dad would tell her to be grateful, that coal put food on her table, that if it weren't for coal's magical properties she wouldn't have her fancy stoves and washing machine, her phonograph player. He said this as if they were living the high life, her and her old dad in this rotting shack with its peeling linoleum, a motherless home with the ghost of one man lost to the mine, and another with his shredded lungs and crippled back, rhapsodizing about coal as if it were the second coming of Christ.

She fed her dad and helped him to bed, knowing she should have washed him first, but not having the energy, not tonight. She shut the door to his room, ignoring the coughing that tore out of his chest.

While she did the dishes, Charlie came into her mind, pushing her to notice him, wanting to dance like they used to after her father was in bed. He was a good dancer, taught her the steps to the foxtrot. He liked the new fast jazzy music, but she liked the sad stuff about longing and loneliness and heartbreak and how it made suffering an elegant thing. He knew that and on one of his trips into Courtenay, he brought her back some Marion Harris:

Take Me to the Land of Jazz.
There is music in each breeze
Even trombones grow on trees

The words came back to her and she hugged herself and spun on her heels, imagining such a place. Dropping into a chair, she regretted that she'd sold the Victrola only a few weeks before. She'd put the money aside, told her father she'd spent it on food.

Out on the stoop in the dark, she had her last cigarette of the day. She tried to make out the shadowy shapes in the impenetrable night: the tall evergreens across the street, the house next door with a low light that pushed through a blind in a front room window. If there were any pleasure in her life, this is what it had come down to: the taste of smoke on her tongue and her mind lulled into a warmish bleak swamp. And, of course, the knowledge of a little money put aside.

Later in the tiny bedroom she'd shared with Charlie, she stood naked, shivering in front of the mirror. She had lost weight since Charlie had died. Her hipbones jutted out and her breasts were even smaller. "All a man needs is a cupful," Charlie would say. "My milk maid," he would call her, and once he said, "You're skin, it's like moonlight." He'd run his hands through her fine white-blonde hair. When they made love, his blue eyes, like a miner's lamp, would bore into hers and, afterwards, he would trace his fingers over the contours of her body as if he were drawing a sketch.

By spring, her father didn't get out of bed. The women brought casseroles, and to ease his bedsores the men came and helped turn him over. His pals sat by him and chatted idly—sometimes her father smiled between dozing—or they sat wordless, the thing they waited for hanging between them. Fiona took advantage of these times to leave the house.

One day she walked to Japtown and from the road watched the women preparing the ground for a garden. They were strong women—she often saw them hauling bags of cabbage and potatoes to the grocers—smooth-skinned, and they looked as pleased with the spring sunshine as she was herself. One of them had a sling with a baby in it looped over her shoulders. She nodded her head at Fiona and Fiona smiled. She thought the woman might be the photographer's wife, but the Orientals looked alike to her. She told herself it was the spring flowers that grew along the roadside that made her walk in that direction: lupins, goldenrod, fireweed, and yet she found herself looking for the photographer, as if she might catch him without his fine suit and with his hands

in the soil. Somehow, she felt that if she could see him like that she'd concern herself less with the photograph she was certain he was coveting.

The day after her walk to Japtown, Fiona spotted an ad in the weekly posted by the photographer in which he requested a model. He specified that she must be white. He was known throughout the city for his photographs of the Orientals, and as he was the only photographer in town and, all agreed, a good one at that, he photographed the weddings of those whites who could afford him. The women speculated in hushed tones why he wanted a "white woman," and what sort of loose woman would respond to the ad.

No matter how much Fiona cleaned around her father the stink from his room hung between the walls of the house, and at night he would call out for her mother with a voice that was not a human sound. She couldn't bring herself to go to him. During the day when she walked to the grocery store, the buildings stood in sharp relief against a violent blue sky. It was as though all her senses were amplified while the normal order of her life was about to collapse. She felt panicky with a sense of urgency that couldn't be reconciled. She believed she was capable of doing any foolish thing. Fiona was the only woman in Cumberland who responded to the photographer's ad.

She wore a skirt that she had bought on her last trip to Nanaimo with Charlie. It came to her knees and clung to her hips and thighs in the new style. She remembered Charlie telling her she looked "smarty." Now, as she'd lost so much weight, it hung off her, but it felt good to get out of her mother's flowery house dresses. Her friend Irene cut her hair to just above the nape of her neck.

"You look smashing, honey, but I don't know why you're doing it," said Irene referring not to the haircut, but to the photographer's ad.

On her way to Matsubuchi's studio, Fiona imagined the photographer looking at her through the small window of his camera, what he might see, how it would feel to have a man's eyes on her again.

She walked up three dim and stuffy flights of stairs and through a door into a room washed with so much light it gave the wooden floors a golden hue. Photographs lined the walls. Families, mostly Oriental, stood in clusters before the camera, or sat upright. She knew these to be hard working people, like the women she'd seen in the garden, most with little money, and yet they were like aristocrats before the camera, their chins up and wearing the finest clothing. She'd heard that the photographs were sent home as evidence of the good life they were leading in their new country. Closer scrutiny hinted at otherwise: the slight tilt of a head as if there were a heaviness there, the light touch on a shoulder or arm as if to reassure the other that they were not alone.

She sensed that someone had stepped quietly behind her and felt the Jap's eyes on her back. She looked over her shoulder and he shifted into her line of vision. It was the first time she had seen him without his hat. Flattened against his head his black hair shone. His skin was smooth with a shade of amber, like the women in the garden. He did not wear a coat and the sleeves on his white shirt were rolled up to his elbows.

"May I help you?" No sign of recognition, his mannerisms stiff and polite.

"I've come about the ad."

He smiled. "I thought no one would come." His eyes washed quickly over her. He spoke a precise, educated English.

"I need the money." She held out her hand and he took it. "I am Mrs. Braithwaite."

"I am Mr. Matsubuchi. I can explain my requirements to you, if you will be seated." He gestured toward a desk and two chairs. He settled into a chair behind the desk and waited for her to sit down. "I am perhaps an overly-ambitious man and I may be faulted from learning from the coal barons. I am held in almost the same contempt, though for different reasons." He laughed and looked out the window into the sun. "But I am also an artist."

"I know nothing about art." She dug in her bag for a cigarette, but when he made no gesture of supplying her with a light or an ashtray, she thought better of it.

"It's not important." He leaned his elbow on the desk, his chin in his hand. "I only want you to model for me. It may involve two or three sittings and you must sit very still. I assume you have not modeled before."

"No. I care for a dying father and I was briefly a wife. I've not been employed otherwise."

He nodded.

"Why," she said, reaching again for a cigarette and a match, this time lighting up, "do you specify a white woman?"

"Because I know Japanese women too well and I have photographed them many times." He observed her inhaling the smoke as if he found this action interesting. His eye followed the rising smoke from the tip of her cigarette.

"Are white women so different?"

"On the surface, of course they are. The rest I will discover." He stood up. "There is a practical reason, too. I would like to submit my work to magazines or galleries—some are taking photography now—and they are not interested in Oriental women. Take off your hat."

Her father was right—he put on airs. An artist, indeed. Still, she removed her hat slowly, shook out her new haircut. He walked around the desk, around her chair, and then with a thick finger brushed a strand back from her face. She pulled away at his touch. How dare he? Indifferent to her reaction, he crouched to examine her face and neck.

She returned the next day in the early afternoon when he said the light would be best. Immediately upon her arrival, he handed her a long string of pearls and a shift of slippery pale yellow chiffon with a plunging neckline and split at the sides, so as to reveal her legs. It was a style not seen in Cumberland but seen rather on likes of those in the Ziegfeld Follies. Charlie had promised that one day they would go to New York to see them live, though she'd never believed it.

"A little risqué," she said with a laugh.

"If you'd rather not, Mrs. Braithwaite."

She sighed and went behind a curtain, where she slid the dress over her head and draped the pearls around her neck. When she returned to the room,

he directed her to sit on the edge of a small table facing a larger camera than the one she remembered. Perched on a tripod, it was a strange creature with a huge eye fixed on her. She sat still with the back of her head held steady in a headrest, hands folded in her lap, as though she were at peace. For each photograph—he took half a dozen—he slid a square sheet of glass in and out of the camera. Between shots, he asked her to turn her head this way and then that, to lean with her hands behind her and her front thrust forward, to smile a little but not too much. She held a mirror, and then a comb, a cigarette. She revealed a thigh, her cleavage. The light flowed into the room, and she found herself mumbling—he admonished her if she became at all animated and at times forbade her to speak—about her mother's death, her life with her father, and finally about Charlie and about how much she hated the mines, the town. She supposed what made it easy for her to talk was that he said little and yet she could feel his desire to know.

On the last day, he had her sit on a bench surrounded by pillows. She wore the same dress, but this time he'd told her to leave off the pearls. The air was cool in the studio and she shivered. He handed her a shawl, but stopped her from putting it around her shoulders. He stood close enough to her that she could smell his skin's muskiness. His eyes were hard black stones off which light refracted. He leaned close to her face and she felt that he didn't look at her but through her. She blushed and leaned away from him. He reached for the thin straps of the dress, slid them off her shoulders. He turned his back to her and went to fiddle with his glass plates.

"You have lost weight, Mrs. Braithwaite, and you are very pale. You look as if you could break in the wind. We should ask my wife to make you *nuka* and salted salmon." He spoke with his back to her.

"How would you know that I have lost weight?"

"Because of the photograph I took of you right after the mine disaster." He turned to look at her.

She pulled up the straps of her dress. "Tell me how you had the gall to take my photograph without my permission." She flushed with a long-held rage.

He bowed slightly in the manner she'd seen him do with the other businessmen in town. "It was wrong and I apologize." He sat next to her and pulled the shawl around her shoulders. "Of the few photographs I was able to get that day, it was the one of you that told the real story of the disaster. The anguish in your face, Mrs. Braithwaite. It was art."

"Art? I lost my husband. You could never understand how that feels." She got to her feet and looked down at him. "Give me my photograph now. What have you done with it? Why isn't it on the walls with your pretty families?"

"They are cowards, unlike you." She felt the weight of his hands on her shoulders. "You will see in the finished plates."

"Did you destroy the photograph?"

"I have kept it. Like a story, it was unfinished." He turned her around to face him. He eased her on to the bench, pulled the shawl off her shoulders and looped his fingers through the straps of her dress, dropped them down. His eyes

traveled over the folds of her dress to her lap and he tugged the fabric slowly up her thighs.

At first she thought to slap his hand away, but she hesitated. Next to her skin, his was golden-hued and it revived in her body an old want. His eyes would not meet hers. He dropped his hand and returned to his camera.

At the end of the afternoon, she went home to an empty house except for Jimmy.

"He's at the hospital, Fiona. You should go, quickly."

Jimmy's face was redder than usual, his eyes puffy. He left her alone in the house for the first time in many years. She would go to the hospital in the morning. She rolled the ringer washer to the sink, washed her father's linens and hung them on the line. She opened the doors and windows, scrubbed the walls, the linoleum, and the cupboards with lye. Coal dust turned the water black and lye bleached the walls white. When she finished, beyond the tiny yard and street the sun dropped behind the mountain in a fury of oranges and yellows. She smoked four cigarettes.

The next morning Fiona tidied up after breakfast and went directly to Matsubuchi's studio, where Matsubuchi's wife greeted her. She was not the woman Fiona had seen in the potato patch. She was older and a small-boned woman, her ebony hair flipped into tiny curls at her cheekbones. She had a quick cool smile and the trace of an accent. A shift of silk clung to her tiny body with the hem gathered at her knees. They spoke of the fair weather and the coming summer.

"Will you visit our little teahouse on the lake?" Mrs. Matsubuchi said.

Two summers ago, Fiona and Irene had walked past the mines and into the trees to the Japanese teahouse on the lakeshore. There, they had sat in a makeshift pagoda with cushions on the floor beside low tables and been served by heavily made-up women in ornate kimonos with their hair piled high on their heads. The two friends had giggled at the prospect of doing housework in such get-ups. They had eaten sour pickles and dainty slices of salmon beneath paper lanterns, and sipped from tiny china cups. The women had bowed to them and Fiona saw now that it was the photographer's wife who had taken their money.

"Possibly," said Fiona, fiddling with a bracelet on her arm and glancing at her feet.

The woman turned toward Matsubuchi, who came out from his darkroom smiling and speaking in Japanese. He and his wife exchanged a few words and both laughed. Mrs. Matsubchi picked up a small handbag, bowed to Fiona and left through the door. The sound of her footsteps retreated down the stairs.

"Good morning, Mrs. Braithwaite. I am more than pleased with the plates, and I'm sure you will be, too."

He laid them out on the long table in a row.

The first one was of a woman folded into herself against a brick wall, a pretty, blond woman with her face buried in her hands. She realized with a start that it was herself; the photograph that she had imbued with so much meaning for over a year, and yet it was an image only, a mere point in time. She laughed out loud. She did not understand what Matsubuchi saw in it.

He directed her attention to the one at the end of the row. "This one is the best," he said. In it, the body was relaxed; the eyes crinkled much like her mother's. The lips were not exactly smiling and yet they suggested a feeling of pleasure. The face was full of light and this surprised her. "She's a pretty girl, whoever she is," she said with a smile.

He nodded, watching her.

"You've tampered with it."

"A little," he said. "It doesn't mean it isn't you. It's the photographer's art to manipulate light. I would like to make one a gift to you."

She went back to the first photograph, the one of her against the wall, and examined each one. She saw that he had placed them deliberately in a sequence. The grief was there, as he had said it would be, and yet in each photo it seemed less. "I think you must be something of a conjurer after all," she said. She tried to explain to him how looking at her own image was somehow healing and he scoffed.

"I am a photographer, not a healer, Mrs. Braithwaite."

"Keep them all," she said. "This real self is burdensome enough."

She went home with her pay in her purse and added it to the money she'd received for the Victrola. She sat for a long time and smoked the last of her cigarettes. If she went to the hospital, she might lose her nerve. She gathered most of her belongings into a single trunk and she was on the late train to Union Bay, where she had booked a hotel room for one night. What else was she to do? In a few hours her father would be dead if he wasn't already, and all of her known family gone. She came from parents who went elsewhere and she suspected it was in her blood to do the same. At 4:00 a.m. the following day she embarked on the S.S. Princess Mary for Victoria. On the deck, she filled her lungs with the sea's clean-flowing breezes and with her eyes followed the sun's sparkle on the water's wide surface. A hazy line in the distance marked the horizon. She felt for the first time what it might be like to be a miner—at the end of the day rising from the dark into the light.

She had never been to Victoria though her mother had spoken fondly of it: said it was a fanciful place with streets lined in flowers and all manner of dandies. In reality, she was certain it was a place like any other with its dirt and its meanness, but one in which she might at least imagine herself into a finer life.

April Bulmer

Selected from the series "Violet Littlejohn"

THE RISEN CHRIST

Wayne's tongue like a root in the dark hole of my mouth. My heart a bloom. Tuesday night, we waltz in the parish hall.

Imagine Jesus, *his* heart a full moon waxes in his chest: light; skull.

He holds the sexton's broom to his swollen breast: graceful.

Barefoot, his white soles despite dust. Small miracles at St. Michael and All Angels.

WAXING POETIC

My poems in a leather bound book. Wayne and me. My heart, a stone in winter, warms for I dream of sweet cups of coffee, loaves of soft bread and a jar of strawberry preserves in a bag.

But Wayne's truck in snow moves like a black nag. A mechanical beast slow on gasoline. The broken barn. The Holy Ghost blows. Wayne, my red hand in his, remembers communion. The host now a shadow. Solstice. The memory of light. Pyjamas are curtains drawn against the night. Wayne, pious, on his knees, speaks to a candle: so fat and white.

MOMENTS IN TIME

The winter solstice. A full-moon lunar eclipse.

Outside, I imagine angels pace like cow dogs: a pack of animals, blood on their lips. Dumb in the dark. But heart, snow and breath.

Morning, my belly shrouded in bed. Wayne lifts the white blanket: a cloud shifts.

I bathe in pomegranate and fig. A thin blue soap wanes slowly in my fist.

DADDY CHARLES

He wears a white tassel cap and dirty buck boots.

Eggs over easy at Jimmy's Lunch.

The shell of his mind broke as a boy. I imagine the hat, now perched like a gull on the fragile egg, warms the wounds.

The men at the diner listen to Daddy as he talks. Mostly about money and how much things cost. Women: a burden of bone and blood. The only daughter, not a son.

My father, the soft toque, his strange squawk. Perhaps I desire an angel, his smooth dark coif. His wings so wide and heavy with feather, they brush the dust from his shoes. His tongue a beautiful red fish in the bowl of his mouth. How silent it moves.

BLESSINGS

Wayne, a burlap bag of seed.

The sun crawls on his soft, bruised knees. Perhaps he gives thanks for the wind, the way it wipes his brow, as though with damp rag.

My man sows and I bear a bucket of water: communion to the Earth. She opens her dry lips and receives.

My hands tremble with the weight of the sacrament. Clumsy, I pour and bless and bless my dusty feet.

HYMN

Wayne, his eyes bloodshot with drink. His mother has passed. Her hair so frail and white I imagine it will rise, too, like a wildflower gone to seed.

We pray and weep. We remember her before the cane: kneeling before a cow, her buckets of warm milk, or the saviour, his cups of sweet wine.

Wayne, his heart a red bird, beats in the dark, knowing flight will come to him, too. The blood, the wings, the song.

CHRISTMAS DINNER

Wayne tears flesh from the bird. A knife in his steady hand. Bowls of warm potato, squash and turnip.

I nurse Chuck, his soft mouth on my breast. The blue milk like a vein.

My nipple a shade of blood. A little red bloom. Tender and moist.

Outside, a cold winter rain. The sun a memory: a morning moon. It waxes like a woman who has made love in the dark. Or Mary: a slow grace, a swollen womb.

CONTRIBUTORS

April Bulmer's newest book, *Women of the Cloth*, will be released this fall from Black Moss Press and will be available at Chapters and other bookstores. She holds Master's degrees in creative writing, religious studies, and theological studies and often writes about feminist spirituality. The poems in this issue of *PRISM international* are excerpts from a small series called "Violet Littlejohn." It focuses on themes of paganism and Christianity. April lives in Cambridge, Ontario where she writes a column on spirituality and religion in *The Cambridge Citizen*, an alternative newspaper. Contact her at aprilb@golden.net.

Sarah de Leeuw is a creative writer and human geographer. A two-time recipient of a CBC Literary Prize for Creative Non-Fiction, she is the author of three books including *Geographies of a Lover* which, in 2013, won the Dorothy Livesay Award, a BC Book Prize granted annually to best book of poetry by a BC author. With a PhD in cultural-historical geography from Queen's University, de Leeuw is an associate professor in the Northern Medical Program at UNBC and the Faculty of Medicine at UBC, where she teaches and undertakes research in the areas of medical humanities and health inequalities. Her literary and academic work appears widely in journals, anthologies, and textbooks. She lives in Prince George, British Columbia.

Eric Freeze is the author of *Dominant Traits* (stories, Oberon, 2011) and the forthcoming *Hemingway on a Bike* (essays, University of Nebraska Press, 2014). He has published in a variety of periodicals including *Boston Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Harvard Review*, and *Prairie Fire*. An Albertan, he currently teaches creative writing at Wabash College in Indiana.

W. Mark Giles writes fiction and poetry. His book *Knucklehead* was awarded the W.O. Mitchell City of Calgary Book Award. His work has appeared in many journals in Canada. He splits his time between Calgary and Halifax. "A Man Will Set Foot on the Moon" is excerpted from a novel, *Seep*.

Peter Härtling (b. 1933) is a versatile and prolific German author best known to English-language readers for his accounts of his own life experiences and his creative biographies of cultural figures such as Robert Schumann, Franz Schubert, and the poet Hölderlin. A freelance writer since 1974, he has roughly ninety published volumes of prose, poetry, essays, dramas, and children's literature to his credit. His many literary prizes and other honours include the prestigious German Book Prize (Deutscher Bücherpreis), which he received in 2003.

Judy LeBlanc was longlisted for the 2013 CBC short story prize and placed first in the 2012 *Antigonish Review* short story contest. Her work has appeared in *Grain*, *Antigonish Review*, *Other Voices*, and *The Coastal Spectator*. She lives on Vancouver Island and her website is judyleblanc.com.

Garth Martens won The Bronwen Wallace Award in 2011. His work is published or forthcoming in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Vallum*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Grain*, and *The Malahat Review*. For the past eight years he has worked in large-scale commercial construction. His first book will appear with House of Anansi in 2014. He lives in Victoria, British Columbia.

Leonard Neufeldt's work has appeared in a dozen anthologies, in many creative writing magazines, and literary journals in Canada and the U.S. His poems have been read on the CBC, National Public Radio, and the Public Broadcasting System, and some of his short lyrics have been set to music by several notable composers. Born and raised in immigrant Yarrow, BC, he currently resides in Gig Harbor with his wife Mera. His seventh volume of poems *Trees Partly of Wood* is currently under editorial review.

Sam Shelstad is from London, Ontario, and is completing an MFA at the University of Victoria. His short fiction has appeared in *The New Quarterly*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Feathertale*, *Keep This Bag Away From Children*, and *The Rusty Toque*.

Mallory Tater is a third-year creative writing student at the University of Victoria, originally from Ottawa, Ontario. She has been writing from a young age and her work has appeared in *Island Writer*, *Bywords*, *The Danforth Review*, and *Ascent Aspirations Magazine*. She is also a poetry editor for *This Side of West* literary journal in Victoria.

Susan Thorne has translated German fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and historical documents, including travel literature excerpts of Jurek Becker and Wolfgang Koeppen, among others, for four volumes of Oxygen Press's CityPick series. Her translation for Jossey-Bass/John Wiley of *The Manager and the Monk: A Discourse on Prayer, Profit, and Principles* appeared in April 2013. For her translation of the Markus Orths short story "Small World" ("Kleine Welt") see the *Two Lines* website: catranslation.org/blogpost/two-lines-online-july-2012. Resident in Kingston, ON, Canada, she also transposes and translates documents in Old German Script.

A. Whitfield was born in Tidewater, Virginia, became involved in an outlaw motorcycle gang at a young age, and has been incarcerated in Virginia and New York for almost thirty years. He has earned undergraduate degrees from Canisius College of Buffalo and Indiana University. His essays have appeared in *The Minnesota Review*, *Stone Canoe*, *Central New York Magazine*, *The Good Men Project* website and will soon appear in the book *Fourth City: The Prison in America*, edited by Doran Larson, PhD.

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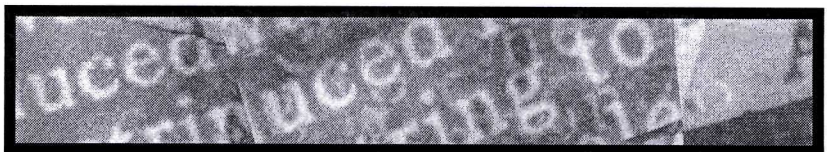

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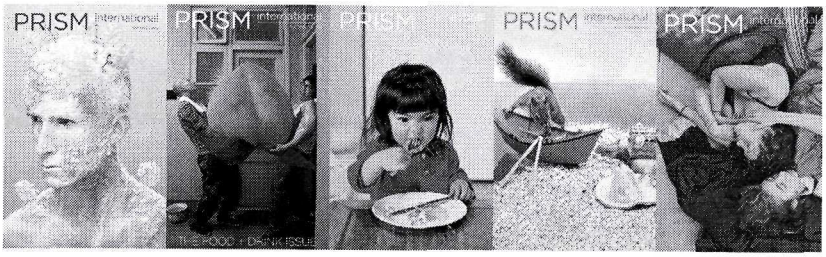

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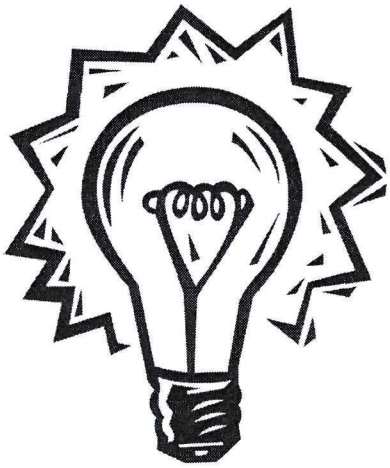

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