PRISM international

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Contemporary Writing from Canada and around the World

PRISM international

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Leanne Boschman-Epp

Prince Rupert Rain Journal: night rain

scent of it drifts
in from damp mountains
trees are ready grass is ready moss is ready fish are ready
sidewalks ready windowsills ready
then comes wind's sharp sigh *wind's sigh*
pierces winter night *pierces night*
sssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii
an open sky sky opens and
down falls down falls down falls
downfalls downfalls downfalls downfalls
drops of glass liquid trinkets liquid glass drops of trinkets
drops of blossoms drops of blue liquid blossoms drops of blue
liquid silk drops of turquoise drops of silk liquid turquoise
drops of darkness liquid darkness drops of moon liquid rumours
liquid moans drops of arrows liquid bones drops of sins
drops of cold liquid atonement drops of jabber liquid chatter
drops of longing liquid glances liquid dancing
liquid swells drops of petals liquid murmurs
liquid notes
liquid stop ping
notes stop notes stop
notes stop
notes
stop
o p o p
o p
o

William Metcalfe

Nice Big Car, Rap Music Coming Out The Window

Some people were camped under those stairs between the streets where all that graffiti and garbage is. I was watching them and the cops came, two cops. They were taking down a tarp the campers had there. There was two guys and a girl—those hippie kind of people with dreads and drums and old worn-out clothes. The two guys were saying hey this is our human rights here man why don't you just let us live in peace instead of oppressing the poor hey watch out for my sleeping bag and stuff where are you going to take it? The cop says I wouldn't have to take it anyplace if you guys would just leave when I ask you. Well we were just sleeping here man what's the big crime—that was the big guy said that. There was one little serious guy and one big happy one. The big one's hair was really long like almost down to his waist and he smiled at the cops. The girl had a kind of scarf wrapped around her head, long red skirt to the ground. She kept moving around, walking around almost like she was a dancer. I got embarrassed thinking maybe I stared at her too much because she looked back at me like what are you looking at, and then she sort of smiled at me. Sometimes I just go different places and watch stuff. I do that all the time. This town is on a lake and you can't smell the ocean.

The little angry guy, he got really mad all of a sudden. He threw a sleeping bag at one of the cops. The bag went right across the face of the cop and tangled around him. The cop grabbed it like fighting it off. This is bullshit man says the little angry guy we were just sleeping we were just stepping lightly on the earth trying not to use up the earth we are pilgrims we are the children of the creator not like you messengers of death the death of the planet.... The guy tells the cop stuff like that for a while. He is shouting, standing with his legs apart like he is trying to keep his balance, like on my uncle's fish boat. My uncle, his name is Ronald, he took me out on that boat at Prince Rupert when my mom died. My mom was a white woman married to my dad but she was pretty much like an Indian and they adopted her. My uncle told me he was the family member going to look after me now. I went to his place on the reserve at Port McKenzie

and I lived there with all his kids. They were all younger than me. I went on the fish boat to help him. Sometimes he got drunk and didn't go out, that was before he got saved by God. On the fish boat I liked it. I worked pretty hard and I got some muscles. My uncle teased me about that—you look like a boxer pretty soon he said. My uncle liked boxing. He taught me some punches. I like it when you are out there fishing and then you come back and when you are getting close to land you can smell the trees. Smells like cedar. I liked that. He paid me some money. I bought a Discman with it and sometimes when we were fishing I listened to rap music on it but I ran out of batteries and then I lost the Discman someplace, I don't know where.

Me and my uncle were at the wharf at Rupert one day and I saw this guy, a white man—he had a suit on—walking around. Just walking around like, looking at the boats. He walked up to my uncle and he says, brother I recognize you. What, my uncle says. I recognize you as a fellow child of God, says the guy. Child, my uncle says, do I look like a child and he laughs at the guy a bit, but not a nice laugh, like not friendly, he is hung over. Hallelujah says the guy. My uncle just walks away and me too. The guy comes along with us. I recognize you in the name of God he says. I know that you want to receive the word of the Lord and be free for eternity I know that you want to bow down and kiss the holy feet of Jesus I know you are wracked in your soul I know you suffer the burden of the world the burden of doubt not knowing which way to go how to live a righteous life. His suit is pressed, like ironed really good. The suit jacket is the same colour as the cop's uniform, I mean the cop who is listening to the guy who threw the sleeping bag at him. The guy is still talking, like we are the pure ones who will stop the raping of the earth and that's why we just sleep under here it's how we keep our sacred connection to the earth. He looks so angry but the big one, his friend there, apologizes to the cop about the sleeping bag. He tells the other guy come on let's get going, and the girl smiles at me again like to tell me something, but I didn't know what.

And how old is this young lady here says the cop. The little angry one says she's my sister. I am not your sister she says, and that's the first time she talked. Do you have any ID says the cop and the little guy says we do not recognize ID we threw it all away we live like the flowers on the earth do they need ID do the clouds need ID? People need ID says the cop, specially young girls under age hangin around with guys like you. How old are you he says to the girl. Fifteen she says. She's ageless says the little guy she is an ancient soul and we do not recognize age it is linear thinking which destroys the earth. Ok says the cop to her, where are your parents. I have no parents, she says. The big guy the one with the long hair laughs

and says she was born of immaculate conception like Jesus and Buddha and Bill Gates and he laughs again, mouth wide open. I have no parents because I have been reborn as a child of mother earth she says. What are you talking about says the cop. The girl is smiling like she thinks he's going to get it, like understand everything any second, but he doesn't. Then she smiles at me again and she points at me and says ancient wisdom the first peoples are the ones who should be deciding who needs ID and who can sleep under here because they are ones with the land. They all look at me. The preacher guy looks at me and my uncle and he says, you are the father of this young lad here and you probably have other children how many children do you have it is a burden to have to look after a family and go fishing every day and the lord was a fisherman too a fisher of men. My uncle is still ignoring the guy and we are walking up toward the cars at the road.

I recognize you, the man says to my uncle again. God works through me to recognize lost souls crying to be born to be reborn in this instant not later on not tomorrow not next week not next month not next year not in the everlasting kingdom of heaven or in the dark depths of hell but now my brother now. My uncle stopped. He had tears in his eyes. I stared at him. I looked at the preacher guy. He was crying too. A police car came up with the lights flashing. A cop got out and grabbed the preacher guy by the arm and says OK Delbert we need to talk to you. The preacher didn't notice at all, he was just looking at my uncle. The cop pulls his elbow and the preacher says to my uncle I have to go now but I'll come back and see you. OK says my uncle. The preacher gets in the car and they turn off the flashing lights. I watch them in the car, they are talking to the preacher guy and one of the cops points at me. The girl is still pointing at me and talking about ancient wisdom of the land. She says we are trying to make it unfold again my friends and I we are trying to get closer to the earth. One of the cops was talking on his phone about a big car accident on the highway and then he says OK we have to leave just move along you can't sleep here maybe we'll charge you with assaulting a police officer. The other cop says we gotta quit wasting our time here let's go. Right on to that says the big guy you gotta keep your priorities straight as a police officer I guess, and he smiled at the cops. I thought I heard seagulls then but I looked around in the sky and there weren't any. This town is a long way from the ocean. I wished I could see my uncle coming down the stairs but I was alone, like every other day.

Next day I went by those stairs again and there was no one camping there but the girl was there, the one from the day before, the one that looked like a dancer and talked about ancient wisdom. She was sitting there eating an

orange. Peeling it pretty slow and looking at it. I walked up there and stopped at the bottom of the steps because I didn't know what to do. She looked at me. She was wearing a black thing around her hair, and her hair was pulled back under it, and went down long at the back like before. She had that same long skirt. I saw some dancers once at K'san. My uncle took me there. This girl eating an orange moved her arms and hand when she talked the same as one of them dancers with the drums. My uncle told me these are different Indians, like they do different dances and they have different drums and stuff and a different language but they are still Indians like us, so we should respect them and that's why I am taking you to this place. We slept in his camper that night. That's still the Skeena, he said, just like at Rupert. The Bulkley River comes in there but that is not its Indian name. I watched the dancers. There was mostly white people there watching but they liked the dancers too. It smelled like wood, the dance was like trees dancing, like the forest talking to me. But I did not tell my uncle that. I kept that to myself because I have no mother and father no more so I have to wait. That's what I think. So they drove away with that Delbert, the preacher guy.

I went to my uncle's house next day. Delbert was there standing in the yard and my uncle was saying you better leave my place and never come back you better get outa here I don't want to see you again and he was yelling and standing firm in the yard saying this is my family here and this is where I live and you got no right coming around talking like that, and the preacher guy, Delbert, he says but Ronald it is only a matter of time and I will be around ready when it happens you will maybe need me to help you and because I am a messenger of God and your fate is to sit at God's table I will stick around for when you need me. Then he got into a little car he had there, a little old green Datsun, and drove away slowly in the mud. It was raining. Next day I come home and Delbert is sitting at the table with my uncle. They did not hear me or see me because I am usually pretty quiet, like I never slam doors or walk noisy or talk much. They were sitting there and my uncle was crying again. There was little kids, Jackson and Severin, out in the living room but they were just little and didn't notice—they were watching TV. They are my cousins. Delbert is saying, Ronald the Lord is here now. My uncle was trying to talk but he was crying so much he couldn't. Delbert says this is the Lord entering your life actually he was always there but you are just recognizing him now let it happen it will bring you joy. So I listened to them for a while and my uncle fell down on the floor off his chair and layed there on the floor like a little baby and cried. Delbert said your sins will be lifted off you and you can stand up a new man stand up a new man Ronald. Those kids Jackson and Severin didn't even notice this because they was watching TV. Delbert got

up and went around to my uncle and put his hand down and my uncle took it. Delbert helped him stand up—he stood up like one of them dancers slow and like he's wondering if he's gonna make it, except after this my uncle would not take me to the dancers again, all he wanted was for me to go to church but I didn't want to. The girl stood up like one of them dancers. She said my name is Heartsong. She smiled at me. First time anybody smiled at me for a while.

You want an orange? I said sure, and I took one and peeled it. She looked right at me. Her face was very clean. I'm just walkin around down here I said, and she said maybe you came to see me. I didn't know you were gonna be here, I said and she said yes you did. Where is your home she asked me. Well it's here, this is where I'm stayin these days, I said. No I mean were you born here? No, I was born in Prince Rupert. Can you speak your native language? I said no. What's it called she said and I told her I don't know, my uncle can speak it though. Can I meet your uncle and I said no he's in Rupert or someplace. Do you know any shamans there? I said no. I didn't know what a shaman is but I didn't say nothing about that. What's your name she says and I told her and she told me she changed her name to Heartsong last week. What did it used to be I said. It does not matter now the old me is dead and I have started a new life. Where's your mom and dad I said and she said that doesn't matter either, my mother is the moon now and my father is the sun. She smiled at me.

Heartsong took me up into the forest where somebody had put big rocks in a circle. She said this is a sacred space me and my friends made it but you are a First Nations person and I need your blessing we need your permission to have this sacred space here and talk to our ancestors and to the people in the future would you like to smoke some weed it's like a spiritual thing not like partying. I said OK. We smoked it and sat down. We were in the forest and no one was there and it smelled like cedar and spruce. She opened her shirt so I could see her. She came close and she smelled like wood smoke and sweat and something else like maybe incense. I had my hands on them smooth as water when there's no ripples on the ocean and she said I want to feel how hard you are and she put both hands there and then she pulled her skirt up. She was above me slippery and wet and I guess I was pretty high because I was burning like the fire in the middle of the floor at K'san when my uncle and I saw the dancers there. I could see that fire and feel it inside the girl. When me and my uncle were in K'san it was fall time and the trees around there are all poplars and birches so the leaves were yellow and falling. Outside that K'san building it smelled like rotting wood and wet leaves—that was before my uncle started praying all the time and he started it when Delbert

lifted him up off the floor that day.

Delbert lifted him up. He was crying with no sound. He had his eyes closed. I forgive you he said. I forgive you I forgive you. I don't know who he was forgiving and I never found out but I know he was not talking about Delbert, it was somebody else. You can forgive anyone said Delbert because the Lord forgives you. Then my uncle fell down again but he landed in the chair, sitting there like almost falling on the floor. I forgive you and God forgives me, he says, and starts to laugh. He laughs for a long time, like when you are a kid and get the giggles and can't stop. My cousin Severin comes to the kitchen door and looks in at my uncle for a minute, then he goes back into the other room. Daddy is laughing at a real big joke says Severin to Jackson, and then they watch TV again.

My uncle wanted me to go to church—it was Delbert's church and it was in somebody's house on the reserve that Delbert was using. My uncle told me the cops had some problem with Delbert and they were always talking to him but my uncle didn't tell me what it was. Maybe he didn't know. He was very quiet and kind but he never taught me any more boxing and he didn't tell me the Indian names for things any more, like the names of rivers. He said praise the Lord sometimes when we was fishing. At K'san there's this one place there where the dancers have a fire, a really hot fire in the dancing place. I had a steady hot fire in my body lying there with that girl. When I looked up at her and she looked at me, we both knew the same things. Her face was so clean and she smiled at me. One of your ancestors was a shaman she said I can feel him in you and maybe you will be a shaman too. I was still in her but we were just relaxing now and I just laughed. I was lying there on my back with the girl still above me, and I looked up like behind me and there was another girl standing there. You two were beautiful she said, so beautiful. I layed there and watched her upside down when she talked. She said she was watching us the whole time and that she was studying a book. I forget what she called it but it was a book about how to live a good life by eating just some green things and water, like clean out your body. My body is pretty cleaned out already right now I said and they both laughed, that girl Heartsong still lying on top of me. They talked about the book and the purity of pure water from mountain springs and the chemicals the society puts in the drinking water. She was lyin on me like she wanted to stay there. I didn't mind, she was light and friendly and she smelled like a fire, like there was still heat coming off her. We went to sleep there. I don't know what happened to the other girl—I never did see her right side up. I had a dream then and it was about a fire burnin down the house Delbert was staying in. I woke up and saw it was a dream, I felt the girl on me asleep and I could see the spruces

swaying and a chipmunk running up a log. I stayed awake like that for a while and watched the chipmunk who ran around so quick. All of a sudden I got homesick for the Skeena and the ocean and I had sort of a half dream—I thought the girl on me was a boat and I was the Skeena and she was crossing the river. Ok, I figured, if that's what's happening here, cool. My uncle used to have a boat with an outboard and we'd run it up the Skeena sometimes in the fall.

When my uncle started going to church he quit drinking for good this time, and all he cared about was church and fixin up his fish boat. He worked pretty hard. One day the house that was Delbert's church burned down. My uncle was in there sleeping and he died. Delbert died too and some other people that were my cousins. I saw that fire roaring way up in the air. Lots of people was watching—it was early in the morning just getting light, and we were all standing out there looking and not saying nothing, everybody cold with no jackets on but we could feel the heat. I was standing by an old guy, and he said I seen lots of houses burn down and this one here is the fastest and the biggest flames and the noisiest. Then he didn't talk no more, he just watched the fire.

I'm out here hitchhiking on the road now. That girl wanted me to do shaman stuff with her but I didn't want to do that, I couldn't figure it out. I guess I have to get some kind of job and there's none in this town so I need to go to a bigger city maybe. I never had a job except fishing, don't know what I could do. My uncle told me to work. Heartsong told me I should come back and see her and I might do that someday. Most people do crazy things, but I'm not going to, no way, I'm waiting. That's why I left home. That guy slowed down but he's not gonna stop, too bad, nice big car, rap music coming out the window.

Bernadette Higgins

Short Wave

Late at night
when the long waves,
searing too brightly,
have ebbed,
we try to tune into England
from Christmas Canada,

discover a castaway
midwest farmer
broadcasting winter seed,
chattering about
crop rotations
and the price of grain—

but he is swept away
by a tidal wave
of tangled Italian,
brushing against
someone muttering
in the next room,

then country music,
a march of German meter
and the slow cadence
of midnight mass
in some language
I do not recognize.

Marlene Cookshaw

Dial

Long before we had time in hand,
this much was clear: possession is never

fulfillment of want. Want trumpets
its own declaration. Before breath is drawn

the lungs erect their own cathedraled ribs.
Double-edged and variable, want

so awes us that the thing desired
stands in for it, the way a whiff of latakia

lifts you, old man, in its arms,
or a tune not heard for years revives

the voice that was a wife.
The clock repeats that error

in each numbered slice. Its face
encapsulates a want so huge

it blinds us to ourselves. We need
to own what's missed: we have forgotten

that the index is our keen revolving earth.
We think the numbers signifying stars

eclipse its scale. They don't. Earth
is the spinning heart that leans

in their direction. Over time, we transfer
more than our allegiance. Meanwhile,

the invention of zero. Meanwhile, the ozone
unbuttons its coat.

Pocketwatch

Thought constructs itself in the world of material objects....
Consciousness itself was made possible, linguists suggest, only when language constructed a metaphorical "space" in which it could live.

—Jane Hirshfield, *The Question of Originality*

Hatchling of the Nuremberg egg,
the pocketwatch pecks free from etymology:
It wakes no one, for naught, and sleeps
in a vest pocket, though the odd one plays a tune
or winds its mechanism by the strides and gestures
of the man who flaunts it. In this way
it distinguishes, each from the other: encased
in horn or sharkskin or enamelled with a minuet
or inlaid with the family crest in shell.

From weight to coiled spring: in one transition
we're disconnected from the common
calling to assembly, mass, or work. We beg to differ
about which of us approaches the true
solar noon. Freed from the village clock,
then from the mantel of the family, now
we have time in hand; we think we manage it.

Meanwhile, time, suspended, draws as near as
our own skin. We believe this means it is at our
disposal, a laughable error carried across
centuries. The further we withdraw from flux
the closer we clutch its measure, investing the intricate
works with sapphires, rubies, buying time, coining
privacy, inventing dislocation.

Lauro Palomba

Salesmanship

It's damn amazing how much goodwill hooey you can get away with at Christmas. Get people in that mood and you can really clean up. Spread it out over twelve months and you know what that would do to sales? To commissions? Man, I could flog snowmobiles in January from a beach chair in Miami. Makes me just want to shake my head.

I know this stuff. Cars, life insurance, houses, I'm your man. Been doing it all my life. I'm a people kind of guy. Now I'm selling Christmas for a few weeks. Housing market dries right up this time of year. Nobody's looking. Either you've got a roof or you don't. Everybody stays put. Away in a manger, no place for a bed. That sort of thing.

I'm good at this gig because—don't kid yourself—Santa Claus is just another salesman. It's full-bore capitalism and what's the point of capitalism without advertising and salesmen? They're the flip side of the coin. Without them, it'd be like, well, like a hooker without a street corner. People have to know what's out there and where to get it.

I've been Santa at Goldenview Mall for six years. Why they call me back is simple. Ever notice salesmen when they're making their pitch? They've got the hunger of wild dogs. Then the moment comes when they realize you're not buying. Hey, it happens to the best of us. But when that moment lands on them, their whole attitude changes. No more light in their eyes. Mouths droop. The air goes out of them and they have a hard time just staying polite. That's what the fly-by-night types don't understand and the professionals do: you have to guard against the fall-off; you have to keep punching till the client's out of sight. You have to stay in character because that client'll be in the market again.

That's not the only reason I do this stint. It's a relief to forget about adults and their suspicions for a while. Somebody's burned them and they're a bitch to win over. I'm thirty-nine, a little jaded, a little faded, but these kids believe you right off. Nothing wrong with the hugs either.

Let me lay it out for you. Think of a leggy babe, a pin-up in a really flashy outfit. She's walking by, say, a military barracks on a hot summer day. Don't ask why, just lock on that for a minute. Leave out the whistles and the yapping and just narrow in on those boys' eyes. They're eating her up. She's vacuuming attention like those machines scooping up dead leaves in the fall.

That's my red suit to the kids. They squirm around on their father's arm; they look over their shoulders and drag on their mother's hand; they scream for Santa or they just shut up and stare. You can't beat it and I give it back in spades. That's why I jiggle those sleigh bells from the minute I step onto the mall floor until the admin office door closes behind me again.

But there's often a new wrinkle. Like yesterday.

It's two days before Christmas and everybody is just about soaked through with all that joy to the world and 'tis the season to be jolly, fa la la. I mean, the orgy is peaking on cue, right?

It's forty, forty-five minutes before my afternoon shift. I'm downstairs in Kooky Kiddies Klothes where every item with a famous logo slapped on it has had the prices jacked up. I'm buying a sweater for my nephew, my kid sister's boy. An animated animal from the movies is stitched on the front. No idea who this cutie is because he wasn't around when I watched cartoons. But if my nephew doesn't have this sweater, you can cancel Christmas.

He's a great kid though. Your typical five-year-old. Drives me nuts. I've got a pool and he was a diaper ducky or whatever they're called. Went from floating in his mother's embryonic sac to his uncle's pool without skipping a stroke. Swims like a torpedo. He loves his uncle. I'm the only one he's got. He's the only one I got too.

After the pool, he lives for yogurt so I stock the fridge when I know he's coming. He starts with orange juice. Doesn't finish it. He wants Coke. Doesn't finish it. He butchers a bun and feeds most of it to the cardinals and blue jays. He terrorizes the squirrels to protect the birds. The kid has a big heart.

I give him his favourite blueberry yogurt. He says it tastes like apple. Doesn't finish it. My old man would've smacked me. That's another story. Good thing he's not around to straighten out his grandson. So we give strawberry a go. No, tastes like grape. Doesn't finish it. I check the expiry dates. They're fresh. Pretty soon, yogurt containers everywhere: beside the bathroom toilet bowl, under the patio table, on the diving board. He gets the sweater anyway. Hope it makes the old man even hotter where he is.

In Kiddies Klothes, I'm behind this fruitcake who's paying at the cash. Her purchase, purse, wallet and car keys are laid out. She's marking her territory. In a transparent plastic bag she has a diet and exercise book she's bought from All About Words next door. The size of her coat alone tells me she needs to watch her weight. Could've been a looker ten years ago. But that went with her original hair colour.

The guy at the cash looks university. Head full of education, doesn't know what it's for. He's stripped down: no earrings anywhere on his face. Snappy rainbow tie.

He rings up the sale and then, as an afterthought, points to a box and asks if she'd like to contribute to a fund for needy families.

"All right," she says but can't be bothered as she hands him her credit card. "Add fifty cents."

University's out of his league. Couldn't sell oxygen to the asthmatic. It doesn't occur to him to ask for the fifty cents in change. He has to call the manager to void the receipt. I look at my watch as other customers pull up at my shoulder. The manager scribbles his initials on the slip, thanks Fruitcake and disappears. University punches up the register and the new total flashes up: $93.38. He slides her credit card through the gizmo.

From nowhere, she says, "Is there tax on that fifty cents?"

"It's not a tax, it's a charity." University sounds sure of himself. Might be the first time ever.

"But there's sales tax on the total."

"Well, yes, I guess so."

"I don't want that. Take it off."

I look at my watch again. There are six customers at my back. I want to say to hell with it and forget the sweater but it's a hot seller and there were only two left. By the time I'm through Santa Clausing, I'll be out of luck.

I do the math for the sales tax on fifty cents. University's terrified. He knows the customer's always right, and this one's nasty to boot, but he's embarrassed and trying to get the manager's attention again. You can't train regular staff to handle stupidity much less Christmas help.

"Look," I say to Fruitcake, "we're all in a hurry. I'll kick in the eight-cent sales tax."

She barely twists her head. "You can keep your money." Snarky. Full of herself. She picks up momentum and really hammers University. "I want that off."

"Look how many people you're holding up." I'm about to blow. I want to spin her around. She's not my customer and I don't have to kiss her ass. "This is an excellent time and place to make your political stand. Here's a dime." I whack the coin down beside her keys. "I'd like to reward your principles."

On short notice, it's short on sting. I'm out of practice. Sarcasm isn't exactly a winning technique in closing a deal.

She's stuck it to University and from her profile I see she's crowbarring the boy right into the tiles. His brain's flailing away and he's just mush. He backs out to find the manager.

"Merry Christmas to you too." Not much venom there either. I hate wasting sarcasm when I get the chance.

"It's not your business."

No glance back. I've got this homicidal craziness to tear a hunk from her blubbery neck. Get her in a wrestling hammerlock, run her through

the mall and up against a pillar. Or just tackle her like a football-blocking dummy and ram her into the 4-6x section.

"Goddamn right it is." I'm sizzling. "Look at this line-up. For a couple of goddamn pennies."

You can't shame her. Nobody else joins in. That's par. If the others piped up, we'd get her with numbers. Numbers would do it. But they don't. When we get a client in the showroom and you have him sitting in the cubicle, you gang up. I soften him up, then the next guy higher takes over and finally the sales manager arrives to finish him off. He makes a big deal of knocking off another $200 from the invoice price, like it'll put his family in the poorhouse; the client's breaking down and he caves. But these shoppers won't gang up.

The manager takes over. He doesn't apologize. To her, to me, to us. He doesn't tell anybody off. His only worry is $93.38 minus the fifty cents which isn't even his. But he doesn't look anybody in the eye either. He's quiet and explains to University how to void the credit card receipt. Then he hightails it again.

The woman eventually signs, packs up her thousand items, no urgency at all. Tripping her crosses my mind as she's leaving.

I throw the dime into the box. University and me avoid eye contact during the transaction. I practically run out of Kooky Kiddies Klothes.

Fifty goddamn cents. I was ten or eleven. I'd made some extra money doing something and it was Christmas Eve. The year before I'd given cards to my parents and this year it didn't feel enough. It kept bugging me. My old man was always going on about expenses. I wanted shiny silver dollars but the bank was out and now, with everything closed, I was stuck with cards again and a buck in change. I put two quarters per card, went downstairs and gave them to my mother and the old man. My mother kissed me. When the old man opened his, the quarters fell out. One rolled under the sofa and there went the fancy splash I'd wanted to make.

Then the old man hands me a fiver. Five bucks for fifty cents is a steal. But it's too quick, like we've done a trade. I'm thinking how many hockey cards and licorice and comic books five bucks will buy but I'm feeling humiliated too, like I've been outbid, like he's shown me up.

I'm so steamed zigzagging past the people on the up escalator I know if I spot Fruitcake I'll barrel into her.

When I get to the upper level, the steam runs out. It's a poshy mall and everything sparkles: poinsettia wreaths and candy canes, garlands and glass ornaments, pine cones and velvet bows. Gigantic tinsels with green and red balls drop from the ceiling. Upscale mall, upscale image. The mall's like a cathedral—high ceilings, lots of glass and lights, whitish stone—and they're saying Mass in every aisle and nook. Yeah, you might say that.

Cathedrals where everybody comes to pay. The crowds loaded down

with parcels. Parcels bigger than mortal sins.

Midway along the concourse, there's usually a sunken fountain. It's shut off now and has been replaced with the sleigh stuffed with presents. All stage props except for the high-backed seat where Mrs. Claus and I sit to receive the kids. There's an entrance, an exit and in between a red carpet leading to us.

I head down a side corridor and through the doors of the mall's admin offices. Molly's alone because the receptionist hasn't come back from lunch. Molly's Goldenview is marketing director and the quota I'd like to fill.

"How you doing, funseeker?"

"You're running late."

Six years I've been giving them their money's worth and you'd think she could pass up the warning. But I say she's a cactus—once past the needles you'd find a soft core.

A reporter did a puff piece on us last Christmas. She told him the Santa and Mrs. Claus promotion "merely" paid for itself. It was a customer service and not a money-making venture. It didn't fool me.

She kind of took me for granted and praised Mrs. Claus who's only been in the act half as long. She said Hillary, who plays Mrs. Claus, was added to promote the family aspect of Christmas and because the Mrs. calms down the smaller kids who are frightened by Santa. Till then, I hadn't cottoned on that I'd been playing the Hunchback of Notre Dame.

Mrs. Claus got credit for increasing mall business. The only pat for me was when she said the two of us put on a good show. And then, get this line: "It's important to keep the magic alive for children. I've seen Santa and Mrs. Claus turn eight and nine-year-old non-believers into believers." Thank you very much. Salesmanship. The difference between rape and rapture.

It was a backhand compliment and when the reporter asked why I've kept at it, I said, "Ho ho ho, the money, for God's sake." The pay's fine but it's hot and a back killer lifting and lowering hundreds of kids. By the end of the shift, I can feel each greasy gram of burgers and fries they've been cramming.

I let it go because Molly moves my testosterone. Mid-thirties, A1 condition. Made for Goldenview. Classy. Classical. She's had this Cleopatra cut for a week: black hair falling down her cheeks, squared across the forehead. Man, I just wanna cruise up her Nile. Sit on her bed like the Sphinx. The receptionist thinks the Egyptian look is to boost her spirits this Christmas but ten-to-one says she's back in the game. She's open to offers.

Molly's holding a glass of fizzy water with an ice cube. I'd like to joke that an ice cube is just water with a hard-on but that's forcing it. I don't want to rush by like some lackey either. I'll decide how long it takes me to

dress. I can fit in some patter. So I'm offhand.

"How's the divorce coming along?"

"It's going to be our Christmas gift to each other."

Boy, she's tough. Her Christmas gift to me if I don't haul ass.

"Know the difference between a tornado and your ex in a separation?" She has a sip. What a mouth. If she smoked, she'd blow perfect smoke rings. As she tilts the glass, the ice cube slides up and down. Then it clicks on the side. Oh baby.

"No difference. They both take the house."

Zip reaction but it's always too soon to quit. You have to be bold but not too eager.

"You're a liberated woman now. How about a couple of tumblers and, later, a couple of tumbles?"

It's throwaway, off the cuff, a craving disguised, something for her to nibble at. And if she doesn't, then I wasn't really serious, right? But it's a mistake too because I'm giving her a choice instead of steering her.

She's looking at me, shaking her head.

"You. And me?"

Meaning pigs would have to fly first. I'd try flattery, the fox and the crow, but I'm sure she knows the fable inside out and nothing'll slip from that juicy beak.

"I could ask the elves to join us if they're free and you're up to it."

"You've already got somebody."

It'll take some doing to pry open this clam but if I'm reading her right, somebody else isn't an obstacle. Objections are clues to what the buyer really needs. Objections signal interest. Keep control and you can still nail that sale.

"She's wonderful, like Hillary, and believes in sharing."

Less than zip. But salesmen are smart cookies. We don't have psychology degrees because we don't need them.

"Where's your daughter?"

"The sitter will bring her around later. This commotion upsets her. I'll come by when it quietens down."

"Want me to ask anything particular?" I'll pump that sweetie and get the goods on her mom. Kids, God bless them, give everything away. Believe, make-believe, it's all one to them.

"She's been moping. It's her first Christmas without her father. See what she'd like. She won't tell me."

"Then let's agree to this." 'Let's' is a good, cooperative word. "Your daughter coughs it up and we have a drink. Deal?"

"Mine's better. Cough, splutter, blurt, if she's not happier afterwards, you've earned yourself a vacation next Christmas."

"Ah, Moll, you're bruising this tender soul."

"I'll order you another. Suit up, Santa. And scrub those thoughts before you handle the boys and girls."

How does this woman resist? Really. It's not just ego. I do OK with others. Not all the time, but everybody has dry spells. It can't be because after six years I need less padding under the Santa suit than I did. I've met her ex. He's no greyhound either. I'll admit I'm crossing that border where you go from looking great to just looking great for your age. That's still a ways from touching up this and fine tuning that. Let me have a handful of Molly's sweet skin and you can keep those wonder pills from the pharmacist.

In the backroom, Hillary's already decked out in her red flannel nightgown, white apron and bonnet. She's sitting on a chair by the bathroom, reading the mall's advertising flyer.

"Morning, partner. Any last-minute specials under a thousand?"

"I'm always looking for a good stocking stuffer."

I like Hillary. She's just plain nice without being sticky. So nice you know sweaty sex hadn't been invented when she was in her prime. Straight arrow. Going grey and not hiding it. A greeting card grandmother. The Mrs. Claus get-up is the only thing she puts on. When the reporter asked, she gave her age as sixty-two and three-quarters. She said the kids got a kick out of Mrs. Claus because she's always at the North Pole and seldom seen.

When she started three years ago, I thought I'd be paired with a honey but Molly had already been advised by the clientele that my assistant shouldn't be a bimbo. I'm grateful. There'd be a lot more stress rubbing bodies with a bimbo for a month. Mrs. Claus said the hardest part of the job was the constant smiling. I watched her pucker her lips into a fish mouth and suck in her cheeks. That's her exercise for tightening facial muscles gone slack from smiling. My beard saves me from most of that grief but I repeat her exercise ten times before each shift. Sometimes, we do it together.

As I'm changing in the bathroom, I rehash my scrap with Fruitcake. The moral of my story is that people like her ruin Christmas. Hillary corrects me: they don't ruin Christmas; they make it necessary. That's Mrs. Claus.

At noon on the button, we step out. We join the main concourse. I jingle the bells and ho ho ho my head off. Mrs. C's role is a bit more dignified. The photographer—the teenaged daughter of one of Molly's friends—the automated camera, the cash register are ready and pointed at our empty sleigh seat.

We settle in. They've done a good job of set design. Behind our fake sleigh and fake presents, the fir trees are sprinkled with fake snow. There are wads of cotton on the ground to simulate the heavy snowfall of a

traditional winter. There aren't any trees at the North Pole but what do the kids know. My view is, Santa's meeting them in the bush and there'd better not be any condoms on the cotton. Around us are metal skeletons of reindeer, lit along the head, spine and legs. They're in different poses to suggest Santa's unharnessed them and they're being playful.

The usual suspects begin walking up to us. If they want their picture taken, they've dressed up. The rest have come right out of their living rooms in T-shirts, jeans and sneakers. The first kid is wearing paper reindeer horns. The older ones stand in front of us and fidget. Some give Santa a hard time because they've outgrown the fat man but their parents haven't. A few parents listen to Santa more than their kids do. Many of the smaller ones on our knees just sit awed. Some arrive with their mouths open, never speak and leave. The hours pass. Me and Mrs. Claus shoot the breeze.

There are always those that stand out. Taylor's been to see me several times. He wants to wear my cap. Mrs. C and I call him the rechargeable human battery because he constantly scoots through the mall. Another asks us to say happy birthday to God. One wants a high-five and a low-five and so I slap his hands with my white-gloved ones. Others ask for world peace but most have a wish list of presents longer than a hangover.

The hit animated Christmas movie this season features a ladybug. It's in all the toy departments. A smartass fellow tries to stump Santa and make him out to be a moron. Are there boy ladybugs? Are they called boybugs? How do they tell each other apart? I want to catapult the troublemaker off my knee.

The Thai girl makes up for him. She's seven, eight, new to the country and doesn't really understand the routine. After I figure out her accent and rhythm, I realize she doesn't have any demands. She wants to talk about snow falling. She's seen snow on mountaintops in Thailand but she didn't know how it got there.

I understand her very well. At about the same age, I was laid up with a fever one winter. The old man kept hinting I was "snowing" him to stay out of school, but I was really sick. He was in construction and in the fall I'd heard him talking to the neighbour and mentioning alabaster, trying to get him to sign on to home renovations. For once, the old man had explained something. Alabaster. So, during my time at home, I'd watch the snow flocking from an alabaster sky and filling the trees. Late in the afternoon, a swirling wind rose up and emptied them, pitching the snow from the branches in clumps like a lunatic throwing junk out of an attic. Other times, the snowflakes fell so slowly you could count them. They looked so miserable and lost, I wanted to go out and guide them to the ground.

About fifteen minutes before our supper break, I see Molly and her daughter join the line. Mrs. C goes out to talk to her beforehand and when she finally comes up to me, Hillary's still working the group. I'm tired but

she's about five and doesn't weigh anything. She's dolled up in violet and white, a swatch of fair hair tied together on top of her head like a sheaf of cornstalks. You have to admire a mother who prides herself in her kid that way.

"What's your name?"

She's shy, she won't look up, but there's something more. Yes, she's moping for sure, but she seems embarrassed to have a name. The way only a prized doll gets a name. She's unworthy.

"Don't you want to tell Santa your name?"

"Mia."

"Mia? That's a pretty name. Is that your mommy over there?"

"Yes."

"She's a very pretty lady just like you."

Mia's still a little overcome and distant. Maybe she's already seen too many Santas everywhere this season. We'll have a chitchat before I bring in Molly.

"Have you been a good girl, Mia?"

"I don't think so."

That's a bit jarring. I mean, kids will speak their minds but they don't usually take it out on themselves.

"Ho ho ho. Did you write a letter to Santa?"

"Yes."

"Did Mommy help you?"

"Yes."

She's still looking away and she hasn't sparked much but she's not fighting the questions.

"Then you must've been a good girl."

"I don't think so."

Some kids just need extra buttering. "That's a very pretty dress you have, Mia. Who gave you that?"

"My daddy."

"Your daddy? Ho ho ho. Then for sure you've been a very good girl."

"I don't think so."

I've heard that in courtroom interrogations, a clever lawyer never asks for an answer that he doesn't already know. Last year, I set myself up—first time for everything—and another tyke bowled me over. But I bite anyway.

"Why don't you think so?"

What Mia answers—and the thing is, it rolls out without any punch but very clear, polished—just wrong-foots me.

Mia whispers: "I don't belong to my daddy anymore."

Let me tell you, little girl, little boys like me have known all about that too.

The beard, the wig and the cap make it easy to look away without being

seen. Molly is beside the photographer who's waiting for Mia to raise her head and for me to get a smile out of her. Molly hasn't noticed that something's wrong.

In a minute, Santa Claus will tell Mia it's not true about her daddy. For all the good it'll do because this feathery creature on my lap, staring at my enormous boots, feels it right down to her tiny toes. She'll be a tough sell and she's caught me a little off guard here but I'll work on her.

In the line, a mother is adjusting her boy's hair. Mrs. Claus is still warming up the youngsters for me. A few are wrapped like Christmas presents; one girl even has a red bow. Next year, I'm asking for danger pay because when you pull on those bows and ribbons, awful things spill out.

Brian Swann

Birdnesting

I

The crow's black wings blat, to outlast
    bleakness, find sustenance there, while
I walk out again into anonymous snow
    thinking of names, foot in my foot,

in the deepest drifts I can remember,
    in steps that each time sink further
where there is no bottom. I am not yet
    used to people gone. There is no wind,

as if someone's holding it back. Not
    a needle moves.

II

                In my room
the only movement is my reflection in
    the window that passes through everything,

or everything passes through it. So it's not
    exactly nothing; here's everything I need.
But hooks are blunted, lines and flows
    frozen, everything inside and out reverted

to opposites in black and white. The eyes hurt,
looking for a story, or at least a plot
other than the one I've grown used to where,
having finally buried my father I'm waiting

for my mother's death in another country.
She's propped up on a pillow, packed in linen,
fragile and complaining. Lonely, she rejects
company. Hungry, she rejects food.

If I returned there, I'd take an axe
and chop the house down, everything
in it.

III

A rooster from the lopsided
house across the valley reaches into

my ears, stirring the memory of a kid
sticking a pin into the ends of eggs,
blowing out generations of songbirds,
linnet and thrush, chaffinch and yellowhammer,

saving the hollowed shells to hoard,
as if beauty could live privately,
as if what I loved could contain nothing.

Susan McCaslin

The Practice of Walking

Man was made for Joy & woe;
And when this we rightly know
Thro' the world we safely go,
Joy & woe woven fine,
A clothing for the Soul divine...

—William Blake, "Auguries of Innocence"

Past the gate, mental projects swarm.
Papers and plans and plots

arrange their tight trajectories,
books and print swirling around.

One—the President of Concern:
a family matter involving loss.

Down the lane, lodgepole pines
interrupt this brain chatter.

A bumblebee and a monarch butterfly
visit the same purple-mouthed thistle,

one flirting, one sucking deep.
Pace supplies the wandering mind.

Suddenly, then,
you are without reason—

outside of yourself—
burnt fragrance of Cariboo air

filling the muscles of your thighs,
carrying your dusty veins up and over

the first hill past a second curve of road.
Ochre thought tugs at what wants resolution.

Three hills later, through a poplar grove,
space divides.

Two startled grouse, brown and white ruffs,
melt into the salal.

Imperfect, perfect world—two-fold,
holding us inside as we fasten eyes to rim.

Mind intent on sifting the same hard stuff,
unfolds and sails it away like a paper plate,

peels it down to a white rod, divining
joy and woe in herbicide-bitten foliage.

Back, past Parker on his all-terrain-vehicle,
big German shepherd trotting beside

you enter the enclosure of cabin.
Spills of words stain a page—

silences woven fine.
Mind stitches again.

Only a slight shift has occurred
in the interior landscape.

Know
your life will not improve.

Things will not be perfect
except as you will these four walls

willed for you,
loving whatever comes as it comes.

Joy and woe woven fine—
love, sweet love

cornering you here.

Jeanne Levy-Hinte

Small

Kaufman was hard to detect. I could barely make out his head: a small bubble floating above the dining table. I looked at my illuminated watch. It was four in the morning. There was a blizzard outside. I shook the snow off my shoulders. The insides of my high heel boots were wet as hell. I slipped them off. Kaufy was farting: the harmonica-like sound was the only loudness left in his tiny body.

Kaufy—as I started calling him after three affection-filled years of marriage—was sitting on the pale wood dining table, his thin legs floating in the dark air like two pieces of thread. As I got closer to the table I saw the familiar blonde head, the two specks of blue above his nose, the white lashes, the pale sickly cheeks.

I had just met an enormous guy at the Sanctuary bar downtown. The guy's name was Michael Oh. I thought about Oh as I put my pinky on Kaufy's indented cheek. I'd seen Oh before, waiting on tables at his parents' Chinese restaurant. He was six-foot-seven. "I'm the largest Chinese guy in the world," he whispered in my ear. Oh's face was flat, a table of a face; when we spoke I felt like putting my drink on it.

Kaufy was sliding his thumb up and down his lips. "Did you have some of that cheesecake?" I asked in a low voice, fearful that any loud sound would blow him off the table. I unbuttoned my skin-tight leopard miniskirt and I let out a sigh of relief. I had Oh's phone number in my hand. Maybe I'd call him tomorrow. Or maybe I'd just throw the number in the garbage with the rotting apples and the black chicken bones.

Kaufy and I stopped having sex months ago. He had become tiny, a stick with testicles. I was afraid I might roll over and crush him. Besides, he'd taken up residence in the upstairs bathroom. He had all his things there: his blanket and pillows, his pads and pens, his underwear, a small hot plate and a coffee maker.

***

My mother met Kaufy at the A&P around the corner from her apartment. Ma made it her business to know the male employees at the A&P; she particularly liked the maintenance guys. "Those guys think with their fingers. They're like mini-architects."

She went into detail about Kaufy, the maintenance guy she liked the most. "He's huge," she said, thrusting her hand into the air above my head.

"A giant, really. But he doesn't stand tall. He slumps. I think he has problems," she said, pointing to her own forehead.

Ma got to know Kaufy slowly. She'd stand around the meat section and talk with him about colours. A lot of the higher-ups at the A&P wanted the meat section to be painted white. Kaufy wanted to paint it green. He explained the whole thing to Ma. "The cows are out there looking at the grass. What else is there for cows?" Ma said she liked to listen to him speak. She'd sit on the edge of the meat cooler and listen.

Ma and Kaufy became good friends. She'd worry about him. She said his hands were always cold; she said he had a rash on his neck. She took him to a dermatologist in New York. The guy gave him some brown gel for his neck rash. Ma was always talking about his skin. "His skin's delicate," she'd say, looking at me as if I had already done something to it. I was getting annoyed with Ma. I felt she was keeping this guy from me.

One day we were shopping at the A&P. "There he is," she said, pointing her finger straight up in the air. "See him? The big guy on the ladder?" Kaufy's head was practically touching the fluorescent lights. He was wearing white painters' pants and dark green army boots. His legs were as thick as the beams on the A&P ceiling. Big lumps bulged from his arms; they danced under his shirt like excited children. "Stop gawking," Ma said, pinching my waist. "You might make him fall or something."

Ma suggested I introduce Kaufy to some friends, but I could tell she was pretty nervous about the idea. She was biting down on her cigarette. "He's ready for a social life, I guess. I'll organize something. It's the right thing to do," she said, relaxing her thin lips. The cigarette fell onto the floor. When Ma bent down to pick it up, I could see her light blue panties. It pissed me off the way a woman Ma's age was still wearing short skirts.

Ma decided to have a party for Kaufy. "It'll be like a coming-out party. He'll get a social life, a girl maybe," Ma said, looking at me out of the corner of her eye.

We went to Loehmans together to buy outfits for the party. Ma liked the dressing rooms in Loehmans; she liked to look around at the other women. "Compare and contrast," she'd say. One woman got pissed off at Ma and complained to the manager. Ma explained the whole thing to a Mr. Oval. "I don't mean to stare. But I can't help myself. The dressing room is like a figure drawing class," Ma said, giving Mr. Oval a pat on the shoulder with her knuckle.

Ma invited Kaufy, the cashier from the A&P, my girlfriend Joan and the super in Ma's building, Mr. Rodriquez, over for dinner. It was a festive night. Ma was gliding around her small living room in a bright pink miniskirt. She was holding a platter of crackers with chopped liver, her little lace apron flying about. Her hair was pinned back. She had on a very powerful push-up bra. I got the feeling Ma wanted some attention, but

everyone's eyes were on Kaufy. Everyone wanted to know stuff about him. Joan couldn't stop using the word "big" when she looked at him. "I'm impressed with his size," she whispered in my ear.

Kaufy didn't mind talking about himself. He spoke in a deep voice, like a radio announcer, giving us little clips about his life. "My parents are dead," he said, letting his hand swoop down. "They were in this small jet flying to the Caribbean. I was eight, an only child. I had to get tough quick. No dad." He bit his thick top lip. "I started lifting weights when I was nine. By the time I was ten I had big muscles. Life's been a bitch, but I have strength. I have that," he said, looking from side to side at his own arms. "I lived with my Aunt Milly and my Uncle Alex after the accident.... I felt they didn't love me.... No one kissed me in the morning before school." I could see tears in Joan's eyes. Everyone was staring. I felt strangely blank, cut off, as if I was watching a movie.

Kaufy went out with Joan for a while. She was thrilled at first. "Oh God, I can't believe it. And I feel so much for him, what a tough life. I'm going to help him, hug him, smother him with kisses. That's what he needs." After a few months I met Joan for coffee. Joan looked nervous. She was biting her nails. "I'm not sure what to do?" she moaned. "Even though we're always having a ball I get this sad feeling right here," she said, pointing to her pelvic area. "To be honest I feel too sad to have sex with him. I get this throb in the right spot, but it's a throb of pain, not pleasure," she whispered, looking down at her knees.

"Who needs that shit?" I said to her. "Better find another guy. A guy who makes you happy. A guy you can really fuck."

Joan broke up with Kaufy. She told him to get a more empathetic girlfriend. According to Ma, Kaufy was devastated. He stood in Ma's living room and wept. "It's Joan. It's the world. Even the A&P isn't working out," he moaned. It turns out the higher-ups at the A&P had dug in their heels and insisted Kaufy paint the meat section white.

"He shouldn't be left alone," Ma said. Soon Kaufy was having dinner at her place every night. She made him soup. She roasted him chickens. She took him to some acupuncturist—"For his nerves. They stick pins in his head. It could work." She went with him to the gym. "I hate for him to lift such heavy weights but he says it makes him feel good," she said, picking at her long nails.

One night the heat in my apartment went dead. I was cold as hell. I called Joan but she was out. I didn't want to interrupt Ma and Kaufy. Ma said he needed time to heal before he saw people. I put on a couple of sweaters and waited till ten o'clock. Then I dropped by Ma's apartment. I figured Kaufy would be gone by then.

I could hear the clip clip of Ma's slippers. The door swung open. "Oh God! It's the daughter!" she shouted. She took my hand and pulled me

behind her like an animal. I lowered my eyes when I saw Kaufy sitting at the kitchen table. I could tell Ma was a little drunk. Kaufy's eyes were all puffed up like he'd been crying. Ma kept pointing at me. "Just look at her, my beautiful daughter. She's kind-hearted, that's what she is," Ma said, reaching across the small, round table and grabbing my wrist. As she stretched her torso in my direction I noticed that she was wearing her favourite pink push-up bra.

Later that night we all went to my place. Ma said she wanted to show Kaufy where I lived. I told Ma it was too cold but she insisted. She pulled an old electric heater from her closet. It took us a half an hour in the freezing cold to reach my apartment. Kaufy carried the heater on his back. As soon as we got to my place I turned on all the lights. I lit a few candles too. I gave my guests hot tea and blankets. Then I played this big band music. Kaufy and Ma got up and danced around the room. When I put on my Cat Stevens album, Ma left. "You guys are the young ones," she said, hesitantly, as she closed the door.

After Ma was gone Kaufy threw his blanket on the floor. I was standing near the record player. He planted himself in front of me, his white, cotton shirt engulfing my whole face. "It's beautiful for two people to sleep together," he said. "Just to hear each other breathe." I sat down on the couch. He sank onto the floor by my feet and put his head on my lap. I stroked his enormous back with my fingers. After a while my legs got numb from the weight of my future husband. I whispered the word "move" into his ear. He slid his body over so that his nose was touching the edge of my thigh, and then we both fell into a deep sleep.

Kaufy called me every day. He'd come over in the afternoon and we'd listen to music together. He'd talk to me about his difficulties at the A&P: "I feel like shit about the meat section. It's got to be green." I'd stroke his gigantic face. I'd tell him about exotic candies. (I manage a candy store in Brooklyn.) I'd get all excited about the large chocolate basketballs, the enormous candycane buses, the whole towns made out of marzipan. My body shook as I spoke. I wasn't sure all this attraction was the best thing for me.

I was still sleeping with a few of the customers from the candy store. I wasn't deeply interested in any of them. I liked this one's arm, that one's leg, but I had developed a regular friendship with Teddy. Teddy was a small black man, a former Black Muslim. He was interested in candy. He had a squeaky voice. He used to be good friends with Malcolm X and the honourable Elijah Muhammad. He had a good job as an assistant to some big cheese at the NAACP. I told Teddy all about Kaufy. "He sounds great-looking...for a white guy," Teddy said.

I introduced Teddy to Kaufman. It calmed me down to be with the two of them. We all had dinner at Oh's Chinese restaurant. Michael Oh served

us that night. I remember having fleeting thoughts about Michael's enormous arms as I ate my Pork Lo Mein. But I was all involved with Kaufy. His gigantic pinky was tapping the top of my hand as I ate my dinner.

The three of us sat at a round table. It felt like we were in group therapy. Kaufy kept staring at Teddy. Teddy got all weepy. He told Kaufy he was an orphan, too. "My parents were killed by some honky pig," he said. "They died when I was ten: beat up, cut up, shot dead. No one ever told me. I didn't get to go to the funeral." Kaufy took Teddy's hand and rubbed it.

I have to admit, I wasn't as good a listener as Kaufy. His body distracted me. Everything seemed so dinky next to it, even the new twelve-foot-long chocolate train at the candy store. When we finally slept together I screamed with joy. "Come on down big boy!" I shouted. Kaufy looked tired at the end. He put his head on my shoulder. It felt like a whole building was resting on my bones.

***

Our marriage was working out well. Kaufy quit the A&P. It was a big moment. We sat by the weight rack in the basement of our house and drank champagne. Teddy got Kaufy a maintenance job at NAACP headquarters. The administration let him paint all the bathrooms mint green. I was doing fine at the candy store; the enormous white chocolate strawberries I had ordered were a big hit. I'd bring Kaufy items that weren't selling well, like the chocolate-covered bumblebees. Kaufy gave the bees to Teddy. He said insects were fine, but the chocolate was terrible for his physique. He was serious about his diet: chicken, steak, milk, eggs. "Protein's the key to everything," he'd say, pointing to his thick neck.

At night we'd go down to the basement of our little house and he'd lift weights. I'd sit on a low stool and watch as he went through his routine. It felt so marvelous to look up at him, my own private giant. He seemed to be getting bigger every day, even his tongue. "It's as big as a hand," I told my mother.

"I'm so happy you found the right one. I'm so happy you didn't end up with a guy like your father," Ma said, twisting her blue hair between her fingers. "Your father was nice, but he was always brooding." Tears welled up in Ma's eyes. "If I had to do it over, I'd have married that Johnson." Ma put her hands over her eyes. "I'd see him at the bakery: a tall man. He'd wear these beautiful round glasses. He loved angel food cake. He had a lovely body, trim as a twelve-year-old. I knew he was the one, but I never pursued it. Even when your father moved up to Woodstock..." I put my hand on Ma's shoulder and I rubbed her sharp little bones. I had heard her talk about Mr. Johnson when I was a kid. Once I crept into her bed in the middle of the night. She was moaning, calling out his name: "Phillip, Phillip, Phillip."

***

I had a strange dream about Kaufy. It was November. A cold day. Ma and Joan were out of town. Teddy was in Detroit. I had no one to call. I had fallen asleep at the breakfast table. When I woke up I was shaking. I had dreamt that Kaufy was stuck inside my throat. He was telling me something important. My head was made out of Silly Putty so I was able to place my ear on my throat. I felt hopeful that in that position I'd be able to hear his voice. But all I heard were the sounds of the cash registers at the A&P.

Around this time Kaufy started receiving strange phone calls. "Some pervert," he said. "It'll stop pretty soon." The calls stopped after a few weeks but Kaufy seemed off kilter. He said his stomach was upset. "Maybe I'm getting an ulcer?" He stopped eating steak as well as all dairy products. He started going to bed early. He complained of depression. "I can't waste time on my body anymore," he moaned. "I had a terrible childhood. You can't just forget about that. This person keeps telling me I need to find myself."

"What person?" I asked, feeling a sharp pain in my hip.

"It's no one you know. No one really."

Kaufy stopped going to work. He'd just sit on the couch all day and pick his nails. He'd stare at the wall. "I want to stay home, paint pictures. I want to feel things," he'd say. One night I stood on the bed. "What's wrong with the good old days," I shouted. "What's better than a schedule? Get up, drink coffee, and go get 'em, go paint the world green." I kicked Kaufy in the ribs. I laughed. I was hoping he'd see the fun in his previous life, not take things so seriously. But he just lay there like a dead man.

"This is what I want," he said in a low voice. "Women get to stay home. Mothers. Old people. Why not me?"

Kaufy stacked his weights in a damp corner of the basement. He said he was no longer interested in the burn. "It distracts me from what I want to do. I want to paint." He started painting pictures of fat, old women lying together in hammocks. Sometimes there were three or four women all piled up on some enormous hammock. He said he was painting whatever came into his head. "It's curative. Who knows what thoughts a parentless child might have?" he mumbled, as he ate his daily bowl of organic kidney beans.

Kaufy's muscles shrank at a rapid pace. His thick arms and legs started to look scrawny. His stomach was no longer hard. Even his hands seemed to lose muscle tone. I started to feel panicky. He didn't look like the man I'd married. One night, when he was asleep, I got out my measuring tape from the sewing box and I measured his arms, his legs, his head. I calculated that by Christmas he'd be no bigger than a speck of dust. I started to pray every evening. "Oh, dear God, give me back my husband, make him big again."

After a few weeks Kaufy declared he didn't want to see anyone. He said he didn't have the energy to communicate. He asked me to call Teddy and Ma and tell them that he was going away for a few months. I didn't feel comfortable lying, but I called Teddy. Teddy was pissed off. "You can never count on a white guy," he said.

"I lied to Teddy, but forget lying to Ma," I told my husband. "That's too much for me."

When Ma came over Kaufy would hide out in the upstairs bathroom. He'd stay in that bathroom for hours. He said it was warm. He had me go buy him a hot plate so he could heat up his beloved kidney beans. "I have everything I need here."

Ma used to cry when she came over. "Where is he? I miss him, those big arms. He doesn't love me anymore. We used to be so close." It annoyed me the way she said "so close," as if it was a sure thing, as if their closeness was an object.

After a few months Kaufy was spending all his time in the bathroom. At night he'd usually sleep in the tub. He said he loved the tub. "My skin against the hard porcelain—it feels so beautiful." I felt relieved he wasn't sleeping with me. When he quit his job he started doing strange things in bed. In the middle of the night he'd lick me. He'd crawl on top of me and lick my chest and my face. I found the whole thing disgusting. "Stop with the tongue stuff," I shouted one night. He rolled over and covered his face with his shrinking hands. "Why are you doing that licking stuff? It's not like you. It makes me scared."

"You'd like everything to stay the same," he snapped.

Kaufy was right. I missed the good old days. My body ached for the old Kaufy. Back then he felt so good to me, like the armoire my mother used to have in her bedroom. When I was a kid I used to imagine that armoire was on top of me. I'd pretend it was kissing me, saying stuff like: "I love you," and "You're my honey pie."

I started wondering how large someone had to be to legally be considered a husband. I thought of seeing a lawyer. If he really shrunk so much that you couldn't see him without a magnifying glass, then what? Maybe I wouldn't have to go through the trauma and expense of a divorce.

Soon I was tired of marriage. I wanted to have some fun. I started going to body-building gyms, bars (I liked those giant bouncers,) shipyards, karate clubs—anywhere I thought large men might go. Ma was against the idea. "Kaufy needs help," she mumbled as she stuck one cigarette after another into her mouth. "He needs a shrink or something. You should get him out of that bathroom. He's a great kid, so kind, so good-looking." It was annoying me the way Ma would talk about Kaufy's looks. What did she care if he was good-looking or not? Besides, she was living on air. She hadn't seen Kaufy in months.

Ma started coming over more frequently. She'd sit on my orange corduroy couch and smoke her head off. "I'm worried sick about Kaufy. He's been in that bathroom so long. I bet he's hungry." She'd bring him these large pieces of cheesecake and containers of organic milk. "Maybe he needs some dairy," she'd tell me, her long fingers shaking as she handed me the items. "He's just like your dad, you know. Your dad was emotional too; and he was nice, so, so nice," Ma said, flicking the ashes off her cigarette.

"Really, Ma? Was he really nice?"

"He was a hell of a nice guy in the beginning. He tried to please me every which way. It got to be pretty tough though—in bed, that is. I have to admit it. I was frustrated," she said, firmly crossing her long legs. "I finally bought myself one of those mechanical devices. I took charge of things." She looked down at her knees. "Those first years were OK. He'd tell me my breasts were like flying saucers. I loved all that stuff. Then he started brooding. He'd sit on the couch and stare at the wall. After a couple of years it all became empty between us, like a pot with no water."

"Then he found her, that Nancy Stillmatter. It happened quick." Ma snapped her fingers. "You were only three or four. Who remembers exactly? They moved up to Woodstock, those two. I met her a couple of times. She wasn't bad-looking, not at all. She had quite a behind. She always wore these skin tight blue pants. I couldn't stop thinking of the two of them. I'd imagine your father pulling off those pants. I could picture his fat, hairy fingers against the blue. It made me feel excited. One day I drove up there. I don't know what I wanted. I was having trouble concentrating. Maybe I needed to talk to someone. I had some very specific fantasies, I guess," Ma said, looking down like a guilty kid as she adjusted the strap on her bra.

"Well, you know all about the car crash. I told you about it when you were a kid."

"Who remembers stuff?" I said, feeling disorientated. She lit a cigarette, blowing the smoke right into her coffee cup.

"I think that Nancy Stillmatter was giving him a you-know-what, and that's how she survived. He had quite a pouch by then. The way I envision it her head was cushioned. His head took the brunt of it. He died instantly. That's what that Nancy said. That Nancy's fine and dandy now. She gained some weight after your father passed. We keep in touch. No hard feelings."

The ash on Ma's cigarette was so long by the end of the story that it looked like a person bending over.

"So what does all this have to do with Kaufy, all this talk about Dad?" Ma uncrossed her legs. The long ash fell onto the carpet.

"It's just, well, I want you to have a happy marriage." Ma bit her lip. "And now with Kaufy in the bathroom all the time—really living there, I

guess—it's hard for me to see how you're getting your happiness" I felt grateful to Ma for thinking of my happiness. I put my toe on her toe. We smiled at each other.

"So did Dad really leave you for that Stillmatter woman?" I blurted out.

"Oh no, nothing like that," Ma said, crossing her legs again. "Your father and I just didn't get along. He wanted to live in the country. He wanted peace and quiet. That was it. I'm a city gal, you know that," my mother said, looking down at her lap. We sat there listening to the sounds of the floor creaking.

"You look so young now, younger than when I was a kid," I said, feeling compelled to give Ma a compliment.

"You really think so?" Ma looked up at me nervously. She spread her legs apart slightly.

"You want something to eat, Ma? Some of that cheesecake or something?"

"No, I'm OK. I'm not eating so much myself these days." I looked at Ma's skinny fingers as they crawled across her lap. "Is he inviting you into that bathroom at least? I mean are you two spending any time together? Jesus, I feel so guilty. I don't know what to do?"

"Guilty about what?"

"I don't know. I just don't see how you can be happy. I felt so hopeful in the beginning. Kaufy had a rough childhood, that's true. But I thought together you could both.... Besides, he's so marvelous-looking. There's nothing like coming home to a marvelous-looking man." Ma rubbed her cheek, and then she put her hand back down on her lap. "Your dad started out fine, but then after a couple of years he began to look like a monster: his chest was strange; his nipples were big—one bigger than the other. His neck was the worst of it all. The hair grew all the way up to his chin. It was thick, black, awful hair. It looked like some sort of fungus. I used to dread seeing his neck. To be honest your father was just like Kaufy in the beginning, but then he changed. I told him so."

"Told who so?"

"Kaufy. I told him he'd always be appealing to you."

"When did you do that?"

"Oh, I used to call him once in a while—friendly calls, like a mother-in-law might make to her son-in-law."

Ma's hands started shaking. "I was calling him is all. I didn't say much. I told him he was a wonderful guy. I wanted to make him feel good. Oh, we got to talking on the phone, that's true. I feel a little strange about it now. I wanted to make sure everything was OK between you two." Ma ran her long fingers through her blue hair. "Kaufy being so big, I was worried he might hurt you or something. I told him he'd better watch out with

those weights, better cut down on the old steak, all the dairy. I mean he's a big man, a sort of giant and you're, you're my little baby." Ma looked right at me as if she'd never seen me before. Her long silver eyebrows seemed to fall inside her large blue eyes like two tired fish.

"I was so worried about things," Ma continued. "Maybe I asked too many questions. Then I just stopped calling. I mean he told me to stop. He told me he couldn't take it. Maybe I went too far?" Ma lit a cigarette. She held it up in the air like it was a stick. Then she brought it down to her mouth and inhaled, taking in as much smoke as possible. "I just wanted to know about you two physically, that's all."

I looked at Ma for a minute. Her blue hair was all over her face. I could feel sweat pouring down my legs. I ran into the kitchen. I opened the fridge. I didn't want any of Ma's things in my fridge. I grabbed the cheesecake and the organic milk and I dumped them in a bag. I walked back out to the living room and I handed her the bag.

"Jeez, I made a mess of things," she mumbled as she took the bag from me and put on her coat.

After Ma left I went up to the bathroom. Kaufy never locked the door, so I just walked in unannounced. He was sitting on the toilet. He had a pad on his lap and a pencil in his hand.

"I'm thinking about writing poetry," he said.

"I hate poetry. I've read a few poems and I hated them. They're boring—poems that is," I said, placing my hand on the towel rack. "I thought you were painting!"

"I don't know what I'm doing exactly, " Kaufy said.

"You spoke to Ma privately."

Kaufy looked down at the pad. A bit of saliva was dripping from his lips onto his chin.

"Yeah, I did."

"You told her about us, about our sex life."

"She was worried about you. It was all out of good intentions, but then it went a bit too far. I told her too much. I didn't really want to, but she kept asking. I told her stuff. It wasn't good of me, but I was upset," Kaufy said, rubbing his eyes. I told her I felt like that armoire you were always moaning about when you came. When I told her about that armoire it made me sick. I wanted to hang up on her. She kept telling me to stick it out. She said it takes time to spread your true self out in front of someone. She said we had to be patient with each other since we both lost our dads when we were kids."

Kaufman let out a huge sigh. "Shit," he said, taking the pad off of his lap and putting it on the floor. "She came upstairs one day when you were at the candy store. I didn't open the door. I was afraid. I don't think she expected me to anyway. She kneeled by the door. I could just picture her

knees. We talked about you. She told me you were a lonely kid. You missed your dad, she said. Sometimes you'd go inside that armoire for hours. You'd just sit in there. She felt guilty because in those days she was preoccupied with some architect. She understood you were unhappy. She said she even thought of sending you to a shrink. I thought that was the end of the conversation. But then, out of the blue, she said: 'Kaufman, you and my daughter are the saddest people I know.' That's what she said." Kaufy put his head in his hands. I could see the tears fall through his fingers which were criss-crossed like the weave on a basket.

"I don't even want my body anymore. It never did anything for us. I want it to go away. I told her that. That's the last thing I said to her. The truth is I'm disappearing. I know I am. Soon I'll just be a memory."

Kaufy picked up the pad and started writing something as if I wasn't even there. I lifted my hand off the towel rack and I tiptoed out of the bathroom, closing the door behind me.

I walked down the stairs slowly, each foot moving like a small, sick animal. I figured I'd sit in the living room for a while, get my bearings. Then I'd head over to this bar downtown, the Sanctuary. It was snowing like crazy outside but I didn't care. I sat on the couch and I put on these high heel boots I had bought with Joan at a little boutique in Great Neck. I took a few deep breaths. I was restless. I thought I'd give Teddy a call, but what was there to tell him? I walked around the living room for a while. Then I went into the kitchen. I opened the fridge. A whiff of cold air hit my face. I blinked. And then I saw them: the cheesecake and the organic milk on the second shelf. There was a note on the milk carton. It said: "Don't hate me." I felt strangely excited. I imagined Ma and Kaufy talking on the phone; Ma's thin lips pressed against the black plastic receiver; Kaufy listening to her voice, his eyes shut. I ran upstairs. For a second I had the urge to be near my husband. I opened the bathroom door. Kaufy was peeing. He looked up at me. There were tears in his little blue eyes. "I have to go out," I said. " just have to is all. There's that cheesecake in the fridge if you want it."

Esther Mazakian

Ravish Me in Jackets Red Hyacinth White Your Small Hands of Rain

Flowers with itineraries, tulips
bring spring in to her
whether or not she's conscious.
Erect and stalwart,

sexcups
that later fall open, un-tulip-like, they expose their inner
machinations,
stamens outstretched and headed
like the body of a man
she loved.
Sweet, unspeakable absence
underground that peeled her away and back, slowly,

surely, a radicular strip-
tease, tuberous ecstasy in his comings like frail fingers raining over her
thin
petal-paper skin—a yellow talc dusted her shins
and she trembled then I
gave up the discourse
of love, please

don't, she told the falls swooning at her gate, wasn't love's

eupohria
another buried spasm,
the same anxiety that erupts in murder, ushers in lush springtime amnesias?

Her Seminal Texts

This smell. Semen. Tapioca white on her palms, her stomach,
her breasts rising to meet him
in this almost lost fermata of memory—
urgent first drafts
on cool amethyst mornings,
the duduk's snake-charming
autumn's apricot chrysanthemums from their
annular sphincters;
Dora then Cixous in quick succession,
timely ovulation, Medea crashing onstage again under
pitting pocks of scarring
hard rain;
Kurt Cobain;
spying pristine shoots of iris while abiding
a tenacious abstinence
in his absence. Medaglio d'Oro on the stove, hours-
old ferrous tar dense as the roving
pavement of new sex sinking into her bones,
her breath hooking a curl of glucose dipping
into the pillows and the sheets, linen coves of privacy,
wrapping dead daughters in this desire—

it hunted her like a debt; haunted her
like his bed; this age-old on-the-brink suck-in cure-all of lyrical brine;
it was life's fluid and it was viscous and it took.
Her first book.

Harvey Sutlive

The Generator Shack

"Everybody knows about Pavlov's dog—why is that?" said Claire. She waved a full glass of ice and scotch to her mouth, took a long sip, and looked at Reverend Evans. She thumped him on the shoulder.

"The name Pavlov is...so unusual," he said.

"My DUI guy—the counsellor—asked me."

"What did you tell him?"

They sat on Reverend Evans' new back porch, in lawn chairs. There was a good view of the Sweetfield power dam.

"I said Look Mr. Alcohol, you and me have to do this. Ok, I did get a DUI, but do not expect me to change my life. Because I'm not changing my life."

Claire propped her feet on top of Reverend Evans' beer cooler. His feet were also propped on the beer cooler. She rocked her shoe heels back and forth sideways.

River water spilled, barely, over the top of the old Sweetfield power dam. Water leaked through cracks in the rockwork in a hundred places. The dam had been out of commission for fifty years.

Reverend Evans had a good view of the silted-over water reservoir behind the top of the dam, and of the dam spillway, and of the pond at the bottom of the dam spillway as well. His sturdy little brick home, flat-roofed, was the power dam's generator shack, once upon a time.

"He kept talking about family-family-family. I told him Uh-uh buddy, it's about identity. It's not about family," said Claire. She fished a piece of ice out of her drink and pitched it into the pond at the bottom of the dam spillway.

It was a cloudy, early fall day; no leaves had fallen off any trees yet. Reverend Evans watched river water fall down the dam. The steep bank opposite was solid with trees and undergrowth. Trees heavily shaded the generator shack. Tumbling river water made the air cool.

Reverend Evans had recently re-roofed and repaired a hay barn for his cattle farmer employer, Mr. Owen Bell. For doing an extra-good job on the hay barn, Mr. Bell gave Reverend Evans a sheet of plywood, some used poles, and several scrap oak boards left over from the project. Reverend Evans built the new porch on the back of the generator shack with these

materials. It was an intimate space, the size of the one piece of plywood, without any railing.

"Inside any family you're going to have casualties," Claire was saying. "I'm just glad I was the one. I mean, besides Mama and Daddy. Everybody else in my family is great—I mean, considering." She was a pretty girl, her face all cheeks and cheekbones, with deep-set blue eyes and curly hair and worry lines on her forehead.

Reverend Evans was watching...the river, upstream of the dam. That water, still-seeming and dark to the top of the mossy, battered rockwork, then white and tumbling fast through the spillway to the rocky pool below. There were deep places in that pool. Fishermen caught giant catfish in the churning water.

"If I had stayed home, I never would have been anybody," said Claire.

Reverend Evans sat still and sipped his drink. His parents were first cousins and he had that refined look that a little, (but not too much,) inbreeding often gives people.

"I mean, what is identity anyway? How you deal with people? *Fuck that.*" Claire thumped Reverend Evans on the shoulder again.

"Lord have mercy," said Reverend Evans. Identity, as far as he had ever thought about it, was *exactly* how you deal with people. What else could it be?

"Look at all this water. I like to hold my tongue under cold tap water for a few minutes," said Claire. "A river...is like...what is a river anyway? What's...a *river?*"

"It's water...running in a low place," said Reverend Evans.

"Mmmmm," said Claire.

She yanked her feet off Reverend Evans' cooler, pushed his feet off too, popped the cooler open and swiped inside for some ice. She grabbed under her lawn chair for a bottle of scotch, unscrewed the top, and made herself a fresh ice and scotch.

"Uh?" she said to Reverend Evans. She pointed to his glass.

He raised his eyebrows yes.

"But not so much as that," he said. He pointed to Claire's drink. They snuggled on the porch. They watched the water.

"Jesus, identity. What was that city? I loved it so much," said Claire. "When I was nineteen, I was there with these two Irish brothers—they had a van."

An unexpected flutter of an image of Claire and two brothers travelling in a van made Reverend Evans flinch.

"I must be drunk, I can't think of the name of it. The big city in France. God."

Another little flutter from inside Reverend Evans' memory. "That's Paris," he said. Once, he had wanted to go there.

"Jesus, yes, Paris. Anyway you could not tell these two guys apart. All they did was tell each other *fook-yoo.* And send their mom postcards."

"Part of that city...is on an island in the middle of a river," said Reverend Evans. "Did you see that part?"

"I don't think so," said Claire. She took a piece of ice out of her drink, tossed it in the air, and caught it in her mouth. "We slept in the van all day. At night we went to bars."

"Hmm," said Reverend Evans. He and Claire drank scotch and watched river water run down the dam spillway.

"Sometimes I'm hopeful and sometimes I'm paranoid," said Claire.

"I know what you mean," confessed Reverend Evans.

Mr. Bell, his employer, who was also Claire's uncle, owned a half a mile of pasture and woodland up and down both sides of the old Sweetfield Company power dam. He let Reverend Evans live in the generator shack without paying rent. If Mr. Bell learned that Reverend Evans was sleeping with his niece, he would fire Reverend Evans immediately.

Reverend Evans took the last big sip from the bottom of his drink. He liked the end so much when melting ice mixed sweetly with the last taste of the whiskey.

"We ought to smoke some pot," he suggested.

"Great idea!" said Claire. She went inside the generator shack for her purse. She returned to the back porch and sat in her lawn chair and deftly rolled a medium-sized cigaretteful of dope, lit it, and drew a deep lungful of smoke.

She passed the joint to Reverend Evans. He took a hit, kissed Claire, burrowed his face in her chest, and licked one of her breasts. She grasped his head in both hands and squeezed it.

"This is so special to me," she said.

Claire and Reverend Evans normally saw each other at night. She lived up on the hard surface road by Noon Shoals Church. She walked or rode her bicycle down to the river after dark. But on this fall day her uncle and aunt were out of town—on a drive up to the mountains to buy apples and see relatives—so she'd decided to take a chance and come by and see her lover.

Reverend Edwards was fond of Claire. He respected her for being a nice person and he liked her body a lot.

Still squeezing Reverend Evans' head gently in her hands, Claire leaned away from him just a little, bent her head, and kissed him on the mouth. "I love you," she said.

Claire's unusual and risky daytime visit, the lingering thought of her in the van with the two Irish brothers, and hearing I love you said straight to his face, all combined upon Reverend Evans and threw him off balance, and made him fall in love with Claire in that moment so deeply he didn't

realize it had happened to him.

Claire pushed Reverend Evans back into his lawn chair. She dug another piece of ice out of the bottom of her drink and threw it and hit him on the forehead. She leaned back in her own chair and set her feet back on the beer cooler. She grabbed the joint out of Reverend Evans' hand and took a big hit. They watched the river.

Reverend Evans heard the bass sound of the water spilling over the dam and it seemed he could hear the treble, too, of all the thousands of trickles from the leaks in the rockwork. All that water seeping and trickling and gurgling and sluicing down to the pond—the deep pond at the base where the giant catfish lived. Reverend Evans was afraid of those catfish...he'd dreamed about them....

"We've got our BONES inside us!" Claire was saying. "Bones—isn't that weird?"

We do have bones, Reverend Evans said to himself. That thought shocked him. "Were you...with those Irish boys?" he asked Claire humbly.

"Who?"

"The two...boys in the van."

"Huh? No. Do you mean—was I fucking them? No."

"Uh," he said casually.

"Jesus Christ, you've got a dirty mind—no I wasn't fucking either one of them.

Still Reverend Evans felt...jealousy. That distinct trickle. "We didn't even know each other then," he mumbled.

"No kidding," said Claire. She took a big hit of pot. She tipped up some ice out of her scotch glass into her mouth and crunched it with her back teeth.

Water roiled in the pond at the bottom of the dam. It would be...another month at least before Reverend Evans realized how much he loved Claire.

"Every time something bad happens to me, I just blink my eyes; then my heart beats. It feels like it cleanses me," Claire said. Involuntarily, Reverend Evans put his feet up on the beer cooler again.

Claire threw her leg over Reverend Evans' leg. "Know what I mean?" she said. She thumped Reverend Evans on the shoulder.

He tried to say something neutral and sensible but his thinking process locked up on him. Claire was watching—he had to look at her. There was no other place for him to look.

"I...never thought about it," he finally choked out.

There was love and confidence in Claire's eyes. "Oh, come on," she said. "What's it like for you then?"

"I don't know," he croaked.

"I like us too much together to believe that." She handed him the joint.

"No no no," said Reverend Evans. "I'm fine."

Claire stared at Reverend Evans. She loved him and trusted him and suddenly something was telling her strongly and in a new way that everything was going to be all right between them. "If you're fine I'm fine," she said.

"Oh, I'm fine," said Reverend Evans.

"I'm happy and you're getting used to being happy too. That's what's happening," Claire decided.

"Maybe...so," said Reverend Evans weakly. He knew he shouldn't feel this disoriented. Claire was taking one last big hit on the joint. She snuffed it out on the armrest of her lawn chair. She smiled at Reverend Evans. She thought he was great. She thought he was wonderful.

"We'll deal with the rest of this later," she said softly. "Let's go inside."

"Lord have mercy," said Reverend Evans automatically. He had no idea what he was talking about.

Four Poems translated from the Chinese by Ouyang Yu

Li Bai (701–762)

Thoughts on a Quiet Night

bright moonlight in my bed
like frost on the floor
i raise my head to look at the moon
and, lowering my head, i miss my home

Li Shangyin (ca.813–ca.858)

Letter to the North on a Rainy Night

you ask me when i shall come home but i really do not know
except that the bashan night rain in the autumn pond starts to overflow
when shall we trim off the snuff together again at the west window
all i can say is we've got night rain in the bashan mountain now

Zhang Ji (776–ca.829)

Night Mooring at Maple Bridge

the moon down, crows are croaking under a frosty sky
river maples and fishing fires all asleep in sorrow
outside gusu city at cold mountain temple
a midnight boat arrives with the ringing of a bell

He Zhizhang (Tang Dynasty)

A Casual Poem Composed After My Return to My Hometown

i left home young and come home old
my accent remains the same, although my hair is grey
when kids see me they do not know who i am
and they ask with a smile: where are you from?

Robert Parker

Snow

"I can't get over it," Brenda kept saying. "There are so *few people.* There used to be an absolute *crush.*..."

"That's good," I said. "You don't want to stand in lines."

"It's good, but...I just *can't* get over it...."

We were at World ShowPlace. Twelve pavilions, each representing a different land, were set along an esplanade following the shoreline of a man-made lagoon. We were outside the Norwegian pavilion. We'd just finished riding the Maelstrom, a five-minute boat trip through a thousand years of Norway's history.

"These pavilions are great," my brother-in-law was telling me. "They really give you a taste of places you may never get to visit."

"Taste!" Brenda said. "Teddy, all you can think of is food."

"All we had were those dateshakes for breakfast," he said.

But I remembered he'd bought popcorn at Canada from a girl in a checked shirt standing beside a totem pole. For some reason, she'd removed her eyebrows and replaced them with two thin, sienna semi-circles. "Is this truly Canada?" I'd asked, trying to be clever.

"It's Disney's version. The eastern provinces aren't too happy." Her answer was without illusions.

I tried again. "This must be quite a change in temperature for you."

"I'm from Vancouver. Vancouver has mild winters."

And Teddy had wanted a taco at Mexico, but he'd decided the line was too long. He'd wanted to eat a full meal at the Biergarten in Germany, but it was too early for dinner.

"OK." Brenda decided. She took a left, past a reproduction of a stave church, turned into a town square, and took another left into the Kringla Bakeri og Kafe.

"We're not going to eat here," Teddy protested.

"It's OK. This is a snack," Brenda told him.

Teddy relaxed. He liked meat. Last night we'd eaten ribs and sausage and beef stew and shredded pork at the Wilderness Lodge. "The German food you'll get tonight is great," he told me. "It's an all-you-can-eat buffet. And they have this oom-pah-pah band that really makes it festive. You'll see."

We studied the pastries while two large women in flowered sheaths

made their purchases. When they were done, Brenda pointed to a tray of round, cream-centered raised rolls frosted with powdered sugar. "One," she said. ("It's called 'School' bread, but it's really '*Skole*' bread," she informed us, reading a sign.) Spontaneously, on the way to the cash register, she pointed to an uncooked dough, spread with cream and cinnamon, rolled like a tortilla and sprinkled with granulated sugar. She had the clerk, a girl in native apron and kerchief, cut both into three.

We sat on a bench in front of the pavilion and ate our allotted portions.

"It's so *subtle*," Brenda kept saying. "Ooh, I love it. It's not sweet at all." Her voice seemed to have a touch of hysteria in it, as if her enthusiasm hid a deeper disappointment. She looked at her watch and stood up. "It's time for the Dragon Legend Acrobats. They're at the Chinese pavilion next door."

But I'd seen a sign on the reproduction of the stave church in front of me that read, "Gallery Entrance." I like art. "I'll meet you at China in ten minutes," I said.

The place was empty. The room was circular, its ceiling, a cone. The wood frame and planking were clearly visible. In display cases around the perimeter were small photographs of wooden churches constructed of sturdy components placed atop one another. Urnes, Borgund, Gol—these tiny wooden structures rose unintimidated against high mountain backdrops, alongside deep fiords. There was a replica of a carving from the portal of Urnes, an example of shakes from Lom, and a reproduction of a pre-Reformation altar cross that villagers had kept hidden for three hundred years.

A recording of liturgical music added its texture to those of the wood and the objects.

I wanted to stay, but I didn't want to lose Teddy and Brenda. I found them outside the Temple of Heaven. "They're not performing," Brenda said, pushing her lips into a pout. She looked at her watch. "We were here at the right time."

"I want to go back."

"To the gallery?"

"Yeah."

"What's in it?"

"Oh...pictures of churches...stuff like that."

"Oh. Teddy's done very well, but he's definitely ready to eat. I think we're heading to Germany."

"I'll be quick. I'll meet you there."

Some of the churches had been photographed in winter. The ancient tarred wood contrasted with the new white snow.

Snow is beautiful, I thought. Why do they hate it here? "Stop shovel-

ling, warm up your bones, and soak up some sun," read the welcoming sign Brenda had taped to the guestroom door. I'd chuckled at her foolishness. That night we'd watched a news report showing tractor-trailers overturned on icy expressways outside Chicago. It looked bad. Everywhere, people talked about the terrors of snow....

I thought of the Coke-sponsored exhibit—Colas of the World—we'd visited this morning. We'd entered a tunnel, dim and chilly and claustrophobic. Grey drifts of what was meant to be snow lay in corners. Behind glass openings in the walls were dioramas of Cro-Magnon men frozen to death in advancing glaciers. "See—aren't you glad you're not back in New Hampshire?" Brenda had said.

I got caught up too. "Hey, that's me in my apartment!" I'd joked as we passed one of the more grotesque dioramas. Then we entered the room where we could sample eighteen flavours of cola. Through the exit doors were palm trees and sun.

Here, the dim light was soothing. I calmly studied the photographs and a cutaway model of typical stave construction. Was it my imagination or did the space *smell* like wood?

But then the room filled with loud and restless people. I went outside, but I didn't want to leave Norway. I went into the gift shop and wandered through a series of cozy spaces—past perfumes, pewter, dishes painted with colourful flowers, Viking helmets, troll dolls, Christmas ornaments, children's books....

The last space was a large room filled with Scandinavian sweaters and outdoor clothing.

The clerk, a boy also in native dress—white blouse and knee breeches and vest—was talking to a stubby man wearing mouse ears. They were negotiating the reduction of the sale price of an elegant windbreaker.

The boy turned. Tall and slender and very blonde, his tan accented the blondeness. He seemed perfect. I was startled by how perfect he was.

Everything about him was serene and cleanly designed.

The outer shells were bright yellows and reds; the inner garments were softer tones of rock and fir.

I was excited. I wanted to speak to him.

After the stubby man left, I went to the boy. "These clothing manufacturers—do they have websites?" I said.

"Oh, certainly."

"They must be easy to find."

"I can write them down for you."

"Thank you. I'd like that. Do they have other outlets in the U.S.?"

He thought. "I don't think so. We're the only outlet." He'd cut a piece of paper from a cash register roll and was writing down the addresses. "But you could order online and they would send the order to us and we would

send it to you."

"These are beautiful clothes," I said as he wrote. "I live in New Hampshire, in the northern part of the country. I'm outdoors a lot. These clothes seem sensible."

"They are. I just bought one of the jackets myself. It has a waistband that doesn't allow snow to get up under it. You fasten it first, then zip up the front."

I paused. I couldn't quite picture myself in a situation in which that feature would be needed. "I happen to enjoy the snow," I said.

He lifted his head from his work. He stared, as if he hadn't heard correctly. "You *like* the snow?"

"Yes. I miss it."

"So do I." The boy seemed to relax. "I miss it very much." The voice was soft, but firm. He handed me the paper. The two addresses were written in evenly spaced, carefully constructed capital letters. "Do you ski?" he asked.

I thought of the skis in my closet. I hadn't used them all winter. Or last winter either. "I do some cross-country," I said.

"I also do cross-country. I used to do the biathlon."

I wasn't quite sure of its rules, but I knew it involved skiing to targets and firing a rifle. I looked at him carefully. His face was deeply and evenly tanned and there was a blush of pink on his cheeks, as if he had just come in from a cold frosty run. "Wow," I said.

"Do you do downhill?"

I'd lied enough. "Not really," I admitted. "But I'm not far from mountains. I hike in summer. Actually, the thing I do most is swim."

My answer seemed to satisfy him. "I also go to the mountains. I telemark ski. Do you know that?"

"Of course." I was suddenly inspired. "Have you heard of teleboarding?" I asked.

"Teleboarding...." He looked puzzled. "No...."

"You've heard of snowboarding."

"Yes."

"This is snowboarding, but on a board the size of a telemark ski."

He seemed to be quietly fitting the facts I'd given into a coherent picture.

"There are two telemark bindings on one telemark ski," I said. "Your heels aren't locked down and your weight presses onto the waist of the board, not onto opposing sides of the waist, like in snowboarding. This makes it easier to arc."

He continued to process the information. "You'd need very good balance," he finally said. He was serious.

"Yes, but because your heels aren't locked down, you have a wide range

of motion. It has the grace and power of snowboarding and the nimbleness and turning speed of skis." A combination of Steve's talk in the locker room and the promotional phrases on the website continued to pour out. "It combines the very best of both skiing and snowboarding. The inventor lives in New Hampshire. Uniboard, Inc.—I can give you the company website."

"I'd like that."

He seemed surprised that a conversation here would have taken this turn, but I felt he was interested.

I scribbled the address on the bottom of the slip of paper he'd given me and tore it off. As I handed it to him, I saw that he'd opened the drawer and had got out scissors. I was touched. He was going to cut the paper—in a clean perfect line. I felt coarse and uncivilized.

"Thank you," he said. "It sounds cool."

Cool. Of course. He was just an ordinary kid. Why shouldn't he be? But the use of the word somehow diminished him.

"Good luck," I said.

Chicken soup, Weiner schnitzel, veal, roast pork, sausage, potato dumplings—all with lots of gravy, pickled beans and beets and carrots, red and green sauerkraut, beer and hard rolls and thick slices of bread. The waitress took our plates as we emptied them—"It's Florida law," Brenda said—and, as the band continued to churn out polkas and drinking songs, we continued to go back to the food tables for clean plates and refills.

The waitress was English, but blonde and hearty: "I've been here since '86," she said. "I have three cats, two dogs, and an ex-husband. I've lived the American Dream."

"I'll bet she makes good tips," Brenda said.

Beside the stage—framed in stucco and surrounded by a village of half-timber houses—was a large artificial tree covered with red leaves. As I ate, I wondered if leaves in Bavaria change colour in October the way the ones in New Hampshire do.

We ate a lot. The band was singing "Happy Birthday" in German for the third time when Teddy, Brenda, and I filled fresh plates with apple strudel. "You can't have a German meal without strudel," Teddy said.

"I can't believe it," Brenda was saying. "We usually need reservations. There wasn't a line. The tables aren't even filled. There's usually a combo playing in the street."

When we left, two middle-aged women were dancing a slow polka to a beat of their own on the dance floor in front of the stage. Outside, along the esplanade, different music—a loud and repetitive rhythm that you could not avoid—was blaring from speakers. The big halogen streetlights were on, and attendants used small flashlights to motion for people to

move to the sidewalks. "We're just in time for the Tapestry of Dreams," Teddy said.

I realized we'd been eating for nearly two hours.

"This parade celebrates Children, Dreams, and the Legacy of Walt Disney," Brenda told me. "This is a dream made visible, in which ideas, images, and emotions are evoked through puppets and music."

"She knows her stuff," Teddy said.

"She memorized the script," I said.

"I *love* this parade," Brenda said, ignoring me. "It's one of my favourite things." She was very excited. "Look—it's beginning."

Above the crowd, I could see fantastic figures. As they came closer, I realized they were puppets fastened to people's backs. Their appendages—heads, arms, legs, wings—were operated by means of thin rods attached to the person's head, hands and feet.

"These are the Dream Seekers," Brenda said. "Usually they dance alongside a Dream Catcher, but they don't have a Dream Catcher here tonight."

A large revolving wheel mounted on a motorized platform followed the bending and twirling figures. Drums of different sizes were mounted on the wheel. A figure—vaguely Aztec...or was he Persian—stood on a platform and moved and drummed to the music blaring from the speakers around us. "Is that the Dream Catcher?" I asked.

"No." My lack of savvy seemed to irritate her. "That's a Circular Clock Drum. Dream Catchers are much more fantastic."

More puppets followed. Some were reminiscent of Hopi kachina figures; others seemed like Arthur Rackham illustrations. There was a lot of transparent fabric and complicated headdresses and arbitrary shiny decoration. Nothing quite made sense—nothing seemed quite itself. I wasn't sure if the feathers were really feathers, if the shiny objects were really metal, or if the flowing material was genuinely cloth. Here, apparently, dreams had no logic.

Brenda clapped loudly, her hands above her head, as each puppet passed. I'd never seen her act like this. Sometimes the people turned and dipped the heads of their puppets to acknowledge her enthusiasm. Occasionally the music would stop and the voice of Walt Disney would come over the speakers, telling us to follow our chosen paths, no matter how rocky the road. I thought it was eerie. Brenda was crying.

At the end of the parade, the crowd followed. Some people carried small pieces of cardboard with slogans like "Follow Your Dream" or "Dreams CAN Come True".

"Walt followed his dream," Brenda said, wiping her eyes.

"Walt was a great man," Teddy added.

We wandered along the boulevard of pavilions. We were looking for the

best place from which to view the day's finale—Illuminations—a laser and fireworks display over the surface of the lagoon. "We need a spot with no trees or structures in the way," Teddy was saying. "We want a completely unobstructed view."

There were plenty of possibilities, but all had flaws.

"I can't believe that there are so few people," Brenda kept saying, but mostly to herself by now. "Usually there's an absolute *crush.* You have to fight for a place to stand."

Teddy finally chose a wall along a small stage across from the Moroccan pavilion. "This is good," Teddy told us. "There are no obstructions and the wall is the right height so you can lean against it when you look out across the water."

We complimented him on his choice, but the display wouldn't start for half an hour. There seemed to be no one else around. "I can't get over it," Brenda said. "Normally you'd have to *fight* just to see."

I wanted to return to Norway. I didn't know why, but I needed to visit the outdoor clothing department again. "I'll be back," I told them. "I haven't seen the Zen Garden at the Japanese Pavilion yet."

"We'll be here," Brenda said.

I left Morocco. I moved quickly, with purpose. I strode past the spotlit towers and gables and spires—the Toji Temple, the Torii gate, Independence Hall, the bell tower at San Marco—rising above the dark tropical foliage edging the boulevard. The crowd was thicker and seemed to be moving against me. I passed Germany, the tropical Outpost.... Why was I going to Norway? To check prices? To make a list? I couldn't think clearly. I'd become part of the hysteria. At the Temple of Heaven, I stopped. All I wanted was to see the boy.

He might remember me, but he'd seen hundreds of customers. He'd answer a few questions. He'd be curious as to why I'd come back. He wouldn't quite understand. If he did, he'd be polite. He certainly wouldn't reciprocate.

Still, I wanted to see him...just *see.* I stood, wavering. Families with children dreaming in strollers, women in wheelchairs on their vacations of a lifetime, grinning middle-aged men wearing illuminated wizard hats, skipping girls in Cinderella dresses, high school groups from upstate New York, retired British couples carrying umbrellas and sweaters.... I stood quietly and let the world push by.

I could envision the boy—gentle and manly as snow. Then I decided: I shouldn't go back. He needed an image as well. I would leave him with mine: of a quiet snow-loving man from New Hampshire.

"Sir."

I started.

"Sir, are you all right?" It was the girl from Vancouver. The sienna

semi-circles were invisible in the halogen light. "Are you OK?" she asked.

"I'm fine," I said. "Thank you."

"You didn't seem to be moving."

"I wasn't."

"I wanted to make sure you were all right."

"Thank you."

After she left, I stood a bit longer, but I couldn't make the scene reappear. So I wandered back toward Teddy and Brenda, waiting at the edge of Morocco for the next extravaganza.

matt robinson

why we wrap our wrists the same each time

you'll do anything to beat it, the scoreboard-clockishly familiar
script: this sophomore jinx. that much, you know. nothing is
beyond you and your sweat-desperate, wet-dog's shaking nonsense—that

furious denial of what it is you've leapt the boards for and charged
willingly right into. most anything, for sure. you'll stop, for
instance, shaving: till your chin's as shift-end ragged as your sleepless
breath at night; start,

again—your hand and blade an intermission's echoes, stale and old
glove hollow with what they hold. you'll sleep, too, with all these
women on the road—their tired, pooling eyes so many pairs of tinted
lenses: shading you

from the glint-glare edges of each next game's anxious puckdrop.
(your wife? at home. or, out with the girls, her sisters even—to catch a
movie, grab a bite. but you've been married near three years now, and
there's no curse, no

hex in that arena, till the seventh.) so: it will continue. you'll lug
your anxious trying and denials, a sack of pucks: onto the ice and back
again each night, a cool black weight and mustiness always hanging in

the air. you'll purse your lips and breathe deeply through your nose.
and with each shift's frantic convincing, you'll simply grow more sure—
damn near, at times, indignant—that you will, in fact, do anything.
you know

that now; know the only question left is: *when?* it's this you carry
with you; a faulty strap about to snap its last just as you push off from
the post or skip-step the bench door's gullied threshold and scar hard
into that first

stride's cut of ice. but right now your hotel room's phone is ringing,
its message light sore red and blinking out the score. and even as
you segue sore-ankled and unsteady from the shower, you know you'll
reach a bit too

roughly for the cord, clutch at it: the one last loop of tape that tugs your
wrist too tight; that numbs your hands, cuts to the quick. that much,
you know.

Royston Tester

Once Upon a Prissy

On Thursday night around eleven, Enoch decided to leave Bar Andaluz for a few hours and explore the Barrio Chino. When he crossed the Ramblas at Escudellers he hadn't planned to do much more than track down the Pensión Sol that Fabio had recommended—get a whiff of the new neighbourhood he would adopt after moving out of Bar Andaluz.

Enoch wandered for an hour along the Paralello, past the hordes of neon-lit bars and dance halls already in full swing, and then entered the heart of the barrio along Conde del Asalto. Then he went left up San Olegrio, where a line of women seated on folding-chairs or standing, some smoking, others knitting or crocheting, one peeling vegetables, awaited their clients and listened to the radio.

One of the seated women—in her fifties and stolid—lifted her skirt for Enoch, and he took a long look at the shaved, clipped cunt he was offered, and walked on. A younger mulatta dressed in crushed velvet leaned forward with prices on her lips as she fumbled at Enoch's crotch. "*Maricon*," he said; first time the word, in any language, had left his lips. Faggot. And the woman chuckled, repeating it to her friend who was idly adjusting a black choker.

Across from San Pablo the streets became even narrower, the passersby more down-at-heel and swarthy, creased with Andalusian and North African sun—and hopelessness. The cramped working-class buildings were more forbidding than on the wider streets, the ever-present stench of piss, rotting fruit and sewers more powerful. Enoch walked on to the rooming house.

Pensión Sol was at the corner of San Jeronimo and San Bartolomé—well off the tourist-beaten track and clearly a dive of the first order with a dim entrance and peeling shutters. Flies, dogs. There were very few people about, and those who passed looked away or seemed far too concentrated on their own business to worry about a limey nineteen-year-old scouting out a slum. It'll do, he thought. No one's going to track me down here. And he felt mildly exhilarated at the prospect.

Enoch wandered along thinking of his old friend Randy back in Major Chubbsy's halfway house in England. Randy often turned a trick or two—and made a mint—with the fairies who hung out at the Briars Guesthouse

and at Black Rock swimming pool or under Palace Pier. Enoch had even sucked Randy off a few times at "Naked Night" at the Briars to pay off debts. Not to mention all the fucking Enoch had done and been forced into at Blanchland detention centre. And the pulling in London on the Thames bankside near Tower Bridge once he'd left Brighton. Enoch was no novice at menfuck, but he'd never seen himself as a queen. Survival and lucre turned his crank. So now, as he felt the familiar stirring in his loins, he decided to try his luck at peseta-making, just like the ladies down the road.

But where did rent-boys go?

He knew from Fabio that the transvestites and more theatrical, old-men-in-powder-and-rouge homosexuals hung out along Arco del Teatro and at the lower end of the Ramblas—around Santa Monica and Plaza Puerta de la Paz. So that's where he headed, stopping for a bottle of San Miguel and a plate of frites in a squalid Muscatel bar—Molino—across from the Drassanes shipyards. He watched the street for a while—the Calle Madrona—bought a packet of Habanas from a kid who was working tables, lit up and headed onto Rambla Santa Monica. Past midnight, bustling and raunchy.

It was no use trying to get into one of the groups of *travestis* hanging about with American marines and spilling across both sides of the Ramblas, so he stood with a small crowd gathered about a pavement artist chalking up the features of a Madonna and Child in bright pastels. He watched the watchers of the *travestis*—men strolling by, lingering. A trade in progress between the Rambla Santa Monica and the direction of Calle Madrona. Enoch followed a transvestite and her john and saw how the system worked; several adjacent houses on Madrona—three of them—were the brothels. He wandered up to Arco del Teatro and at the corner of Guardia caught the eye of a middle-aged man: wavy hair oiled back from his forehead, somewhat paunchy, dressed in smart, pressed trousers and obviously... looking. Enoch walked up to him, smiled and took out a cigarette.

The summery-looking man said something Enoch did not understand.

"*Inglés*," muttered Enoch.

The john seemed surprised, looked the teenager up and down, and said something else unintelligible. Enoch had overlooked the crucial role of vocabulary to this occupation. But he was not going to let a few phrases defeat him. And he was not going to pull out a mini-dictionary, even if he had one.

Enoch indicated they should move off together. Not exactly sure where.

The man hesitated. Then rubbed his fingers together.

"*Dos mille*," said Enoch, feeling very savvy. He had mastered a few Spanish numbers. Key ones. Two thousand pesetas was around twenty pounds, certainly the going rate in Brighton and London that year.

The man rocked his head from side to side, playfully, as though doing

his sums. Then he grinned; the flicker of a gold tooth.

In the balmy evening, they walked along Guardia to Conde del Asalto where Enoch headed for the nearest and seediest looking pensión—Colón—and walked in, prey at his side. "*Cama*," said Enoch. "*Una noche.*" The proprietor seemed uncertain as Enoch went about booking a bed for one night at a cost of seven hundred pesetas. Enoch lacked the guts—or the terminology—to ask for just an hourly rate. This was the last of his Spanish banknotes. The john said nothing as Enoch handed over his passport and checked in. They climbed the stairs to the second floor and entered the spartan room: single bedstead, dresser, amber light bulbs. It looked out over the street choked with traffic and crowds heading to and from the Ramblas. The floor smelt of bleach. And cum.

The bellied, dandyish man closed the door and adjusted his short-sleeved shirt. In the orange light Enoch began to strip, get the guy going, trying to ignore that the john was holding out his hand.

The rusty-coloured man said something in Spanish that escaped Enoch who tried to look quizzical as well as seductive. The john rubbed his fingers again. "Pesetas," he said, enunciating so very clearly. Was this a menopausal rent-boy mugger?

"No," said Enoch, scoffing as he caught the joke and raised his own hand. "You give ME." He pointed to his acne-spattered torso that, in this light, seemed a mite healthier.

The stranger let out a snort. "*Dos mille.*"

"Very funny," replied Enoch, pawing suggestively at his sallow, hungry stomach.

The man stared at Enoch and his hairless boy-chest. "*¿No?*"

"No? Yes," replied Enoch. "*Si.*" And he lowered his jeans and tired underwear to create the fullest impact.

"*Mille quienientas*," announced the john, puffing his own chest a little. One thousand, five hundred.

"Eh?" The price was falling.

"Give. Give," said the man, growing impatient, stabbing at the palm of his hand. "Give mow-ney. Here. Give."

Enoch stared in disbelief and pointed into his own hand. "No. YOU. GIVE. ME." Jab, jab, jab.

The two men glared at each other. Enoch's dick began to droop.

Suddenly the man spat at Enoch, cursed him furiously, and hurried out of the room, slamming the door.

Enoch sat open-mouthed on the bed, his threadbare Wranglers and underwear around his ankles, and slapped the head of his sulking cock. The john thought Enoch was a virgin in need of breaking in. Was that it? It had to be. Did he look so bloody innocent? Did the man think I desired HIM? What the fucking hell happened?

"Little more to learn yet, Nell Gwyne," he told himself, wondering whether he could get a refund on the room.

He wasn't eliminated so easily. In fact, he resolved to turn the situation right around. He couldn't be *that* incompetent; he was Enoch Jones.

This time, when Enoch headed toward Rambla Santa Monica—waving touristically at the uneasy proprietor as he left the seven-hundred-pesetas-a-room Pensión Colón—he took a good look at everyone *but* the *travestis*. He made eye contact with men; he walked about more effeminately than was his wont; he smirked and enticed his way through the early hours.

He got absolutely nowhere.

Sometime around 4 A.M. he decided to return to the Pensión Colón on Conde del Asalto. He felt completely at a loss—desperate, even—and couldn't fathom what he was doing so wrong, apart from not dressing as a woman. Maybe that'd have to be his next tack; borrow clothes from Taya Muñoz, the proprietor of Bar Andaluz? Somehow it didn't appeal.

On Calle Madrona he stopped at the Molino bar he had visited so many hours before and, with the last of his loose change, ordered a beer. There were several people inside: a drunk U.S. marine fresh from some blowout or other, a couple of hookers and by the window, a mole-faced youth, washed-out and as pimply as Enoch, who seemed interested in nothing and no one. A barman who'd seen better days—his attention mostly on the street, a half-gone cheroot between his lips—seemed to be talking to himself. Enoch took out yet another cigarette and worked on his future.

Maybe he would leave Barcelona after all. If Taya and Fabio would loan him the bus fare back to England, that is. There was always the dole in Britain. Even Chubbsy might take him back if he concocted some story. As a last resort, there was Vera and Graham in Birmingham, his adoptive parents. He was not without options for a brilliant adulthood.

He sat there for nearly an hour before realizing that the youth at the door was observing him. Enoch acknowledged the glance and, to his surprise, the whey-faced teenager sauntered over and asked for a cigarette. Enoch invited him to smoke it at the table. There they sat, swiftly understanding that there was little point trying any more words. This seemed OK to the kid who, after butting out the cigarette, tapped Enoch's arm and indicated they should leave.

On the street, his new friend introduced himself. "Joaquín," he said touching his own shoulder. Enoch responded and, side by side, they walked across the Ramblas and along Calle José Anselmo Clavé, a street littered with cheap hotels. Military guards were posted outside an imposing building.

As Joaquín and Enoch were about to enter Hotel Barcelona, a student place with backpackers' laundry and sleeping-bags hanging over its balco-

nies, Enoch stopped his friend and demonstrated—by pulling out his empty pockets—that he was penniless. Joaquín nodded—as though he already knew—and walked in past the young woman at the front desk who barely raised her head from *Mundo* magazine. He uttered a few words—one of them *quince*, fifteen—and the two teens entered a ground floor room the size of a single bed. There was a three-inch strip of mirror tiles at pillow-level around the entire wall—as though floor and ceiling were zipped into place.

Joaquín proceeded to massage Enoch's genitals and undo his clothes until Enoch lay naked on the bed. Joaquín went down on his cock, gently rocking back and forth as he gobbled. Enoch reached for Joaquín's shirt and removed it awkwardly. Joaquín then stopped his sucking and took off his own clothes to expose skin as plaster-white as Enoch's flesh, and a pencil-dick as limp as it was cheesy. Turning around on the bed, Enoch worked his friend over as best he could. Spitting dried-out pubic hairs from between his teeth.

It was only Enoch who shot; deep into his silent friend's mouth. Joaquín was barely aroused. Enoch rested a few seconds as Joaquin dressed, indicating the English boy should do the same—and right away.

"Pesetas," muttered Joaquín as though the word meant "listen." He made a circular movement with his hand and held up three fingers. He wanted three thousand pesetas. Thirty quid. "Mañana. Bar Molino," he said. And he held up ten fingers pointing to Enoch's watch. "*Noche.*" Night. 10 P.M.

What an idiot, thought Enoch. What makes him think I'll show? Thirty quid for that? "Fine, Joaquín." They headed back out to the street past the magazine-reading woman who took the rolled three hundred pesetas Joaquin handed her as they left.

At the Ramblas, Joaquín shook his hand. Then gripped Enoch's arm very firmly. "You," he said, pointing directly at Enoch's throat. "Bar Andaluz. Calle Vidrio. Taya y Fabio Muñoz." Joaquín was more than serious. How did he know Enoch's address? How could someone so impotent and enervated be so sharp?

Grasping his arm even more tightly, he twisted Enoch around like a dancer and sent him on his way up the Ramblas, like a puppy. "*Buenos noches, inglesa,*" he said dourly.

When Enoch arrived at his seven-hundred-peseta room on Conde del Asalto, he looked at the bare ceiling bulb and the iron bed and realized he'd got the rent-boy routine figured. It was 6 A.M. Fatigued, despairing, relieved—he wasn't sure which—Enoch fell upon the pillow and let his tears soak into it. At least you know what to do now—more or less. No words, after all: English, Spanish or anything else. Just a few gestures and a price. Payment. Action. Enoch now knew where to take a john. Tomor-

row, the world! It's going to be OK, he told himself. You just watch, kid. It'll be roses.

Later that morning—Friday, around eleven—Enoch left Pensión Colón and headed again for the Ramblas, his passport safely tucked into his jeans. In the lukewarm rain that had been falling since first light, he felt cleansed somehow, and determined, once more, to make his way in this godforsaken city.

Along Calle Madrona, Joaquín had indicated a small shop with grills on the window and coloured plastic strips in the doorway that seemed to do a good trade in brown paper bags, judging by the men entering and leaving. Joaquín had said nothing—merely tapping Enoch's arm as they passed by.

He'd start there.

The cramped premises were no disappointment, full with ten or so men in their forties and fifties, respectable-looking and well-fed—very unlike the characters you passed elsewhere in the Barrio Chino. It was indeed a magazine store, the shelves lined with well-fingered pornography and stairs at the far end led to where the queer clientele—another twelve or so—made their choices.

But not only about what to read.

For there was Joaquín, alongside an elegant man, leaning towards a publication in a way that involved touching the man's besuited arm. Enoch's first impulse was to run. But he thought better of it and, instead, began browsing the shelves himself, right next to a man whose eyes had not left Enoch's ass since he joined this happy library upstairs. Enoch's fingers were trembling—as much from hunger as nerves—while he flipped through a copy of a German nudist booklet with a gang of muscular, rock-hard boys on its cover.

Enoch became aware of Joaquín brushing by him, followed by the businessman. How simple it was. Joaquín made no sign that he recognized his young English john from earlier that morning. Enoch closed the magazine page, feeling uncomfortable and impatient, then replaced the German hardons in their rack as he glanced at the man's face. The gaunt, shiny features nodded indiscreetly. Enoch touched the man's elbow before going downstairs, past the vigilant and bespectacled Algerian who manned the cash machine, and out into the humid midday.

Enoch walked ahead of the slender john in his linen trousers and Italian sandals, leading him right to the Hotel Barcelona along Calle José Anselmo Clavé. Wordlessly, Enoch strolled into the lobby and its pockmarked tile floor. A huddle of North American backpackers—designer-casual in running shoes and T-shirts—was exuberantly, and with great humour, pocketing their Michelin maps and rail tickets, moving out onto the thin strip of

pavement. Yesterday's *Mundo*-reading girl had been replaced with a stern-looking gentleman in his sixties wearing a tie and shirt, greasy at the oversized collar. Enoch gave a sidelong glance to the rooms on the ground floor where, even now, Joaquín was likely plying his trade.

"*Quince*," muttered Enoch.

The man made a quick study of the shabby, foreign-looking nineteen-year-old and frowned. Enoch indicated the rooms a second time. It wasn't going to work; the man was hesitating. Enoch prepared to scram; eyed the exit. Suddenly, the elderly receptionist lifted a key from its numbered cubbyhole and pushed it across the counter. Without a word, Enoch snatched it up—number fifteen–and led the way as though he knew the routine, hoping to hell room fifteen was where he thought it should be.

Twelve, thirteen, fourteen...home!

The rest was a cakewalk.

Afterwards, Enoch presented the front desk with a rolled-up three hundred pesetas—just as Joaquín had done. The man pocketed the money and resumed the checking of his El Gordo lottery tickets against the newspaper.

Once outside, Enoch walked in the opposite direction to the john, the remaining two thousand seven hundred pesetas safely against his pubic hair. Not a word had passed between the john and Enoch, not even the price—three fingers in the air and a boner was all it took.

Four times that day—only stopping because his cock was sore and fantasies worn out—Enoch repeated his traffic between the Calle Madrona magazine shop and Hotel Barcelona. By early evening he had earned thirteen thousand, five hundred pesetas—over a hundred and thirty pounds! And the Hotel Barcelona was richer by fifteen hundred.

How simple, immorality. A lucky devil did look down on the city after all.

At ten o'clock that evening, after a sumptuous paella in Barceloneta waterfront, his underwear still rancid with semen and folded banknotes, Enoch made his rendezvous with Joaquín—who introduced him to an Algerian friend, Ahmed, whom he recognized from the magazine shop.

On Calle Madrona, they sat at the Bar Molino.

Nothing much to say.

Joaquín was as pasty and sullen as before. Enoch wondered if his friend had slept. Ahmed ordered something—it sounded like *ajenjo*. The barman put out three shot glasses below the counter and poured a dark yellow liquor over a sugar cube held in a pair of miniature tongs. Cheap absinthe? Zotal liquor? The process seemed to take a long time. When he'd finished, the barman returned the unmarked bottle to its cupboard and presented the three men with their drinks.

Ahmed raised his glass and swigged. Joaquín sipped. Enoch followed

the younger man's lead.

"Jiggy jiggy good?" said Ahmed.

Enoch nodded—the drink was like nothing he'd ever tasted. Heavy, like a brandy that had gone off.

"Jiggy jiggy, fucky fucky," repeated Ahmed, raising his eyebrows expectantly. "You understan'?"

Joaquín looked round at Enoch and held out his hand. He reached under his belt, peeled off three notes and handed them over.

Ahmed plucked two bills, ever so elegantly, from the transaction, leaving a one-thousand note in Joaquín's grubby hands. "Jiggy jiggy: twelve hundred pesetas me," he said, "three hundred pesetas Hotel Barcelona; fifteen hundred pesetas you. Understan'?"

Enoch finished his drink and stood up.

Ahmed jumped to his feet and moved in close.

"Fuck off," said Enoch, turning away.

Ahmed showed him a blade in the palm of his hand.

The barman tapped Joaquín for payment.

"English? American?" said Ahmed.

Enoch did not reply. He kneed him and made to run.

"*Puta i Raimoneta*," hissed Ahmed in Catalan, pursing his lips mockingly. Prissy whore. And grabbed Enoch's neck slamming it down against the counter.

"You fuck. You pay *me*."

"OK," said Enoch, choking. He was no John Wayne.

There was no use battling this guy. Ahmed was stoned as well as determined.

Ahmed pulled him up close. "Shop. Magazine. Over there: one, two, three, four times?" He counted it out in a glutinous accent, baring his teeth with every number. "Twelve hundred, plus twelve hundred, plus twelve hundred, plus twelve hundred. Hmm?"

Ahmed wanted four thousand, eight hundred pesetas. He caught Enoch's glance toward the door—and slammed his pretty English neck back down against the counter.

"OK, OK," said Enoch. The side of his skull felt wet.

He reached inside his jeans and paid.

What with this unanticipated expense, the seafood dinner he'd just devoured, and the booze he'd put down between johnfucks, Enoch was left with three thousand, five hundred pesetas. Thirty-five quid for a day's whoring.

The three walked out of the bar—none of the other drinkers seemed in the slightest curious about the fight.

"Bye-bye, fairy tale," scoffed Ahmed, resting his arm on Joaquín's shoulder. "I've got my eye on you, man."

Enoch headed for Bar Andaluz, consoling himself that he still had *some* money. Tomorrow, he would return to Calle Madrona. And tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.

It might all be a fairy tale.

But he was in.

Meredith Quartermain

First Night

bus to Point Grey the Earl I type bust
through Chinatown it's free tonight along Pender Street
wheelchair gets on bus driver kicking the seats up
with his boot strapping the chair in chair-woman
accompanied by young man & folded scooter
young woman a man's overcoat over her
shoulders they get off on Burrard Street
at the Ports store and the Royal Centre
the Vancouver Hotel all aglitter—we
carry on past St Paul's Hospital its star-shaped
strings its rainbow arches of lights Davie Street
a block later squeegee kid on his haunches
on a rim of asphalt at a gas station squeegee
and plastic pop bottle of water in the shadows
of a battered hedge he pulls his feet in closer his arms
fold tighter into the folded legs his hands make
fists on the tops of his knees and he bows his head
into the fists a small scrunched skeleton
in thin hood as though to sleep against the buses
and cars roaring past too fast to run out and clean
windshields for a loonie

on the way back in the first hour of the first
day a crowd on Point Grey smoking pot
hey there's the bus run for it Happy
New Year Happy New Year the bus
jammed with jolly people tiny pointed
hats rainbow-coloured wands
a woman with pink hair another
with earrings flashing lights blue and red
all starry-eyed crowds at Burrard's Bridge
the San Fiorenzo 42 guns no room no room
lights on the bows and wheelhouses of boats
at the wharves

Premier Smithe's attorney Davie Street
someone in a blanket under a shop awning
no room no room till the Royal Centre
strangers hugging in the street youths high-
fiving it whooping yelling at the bus wheelchair
woman the same one cannot get on no way
to know she could've if she'd wheeled to the next
stop turn right on Pender past Malone's Pub
the Vancouver Vocational Institute
Tinseltown mall the Chinatown gate Asian man
working woman off shift get on ragged
haggard streetmen no parties
for them shops dark buildings of brick not
plateglass turn the corner at Gore the concrete
viaduct the warehouses for produce the small
dusty homes cheek by jowl on Prior
Edward Gawler shareholder Vancouver Improvement
Company chainlink fences around matchbox yards
I type years patched in porches and bare
lightbulbs clashing siding rickety steps
the poorer older the first Vancouver
that has not the means of Tiffany lamps grand
pianos wide porches stone pillars
has not the means of
gardens and views
happy new year
it's free tonight

Contributors

Leanne Boschman-Epp lives in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, where she teaches creative writing at Northwest Community College. Her poems and mixed media have been published in *Dandelion, Other Voices, Geist*, and *Room of One's Own.*

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Janieta Eyre, born in England, has gained a strong reputation for her self-portraits which are "fiction, disguised as reality", to use her own words; photographs that provoke thoughts about relationship between image and identity and between art and reality. Her work was recently exhibited in a solo show at the Contemporary Museum of Art in St. Louis and in group shows at Musee d'Art Contemporain, Montreal, at the Art Gallery of Hamilton, the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Ithaca, N.Y., and the North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, N.C. In addition, her work has been shown widely in solo and group shows in Canada, the U.S., Iceland, Europe, and Korea.

Bernadette Higgins was born in England, has lived in Canada, and now lives in rural Maryland, U.S.A. Her poetry has appeared in a variety of magazines across the U.K., Ireland, Canada, and the U.S., among them *Ship of Fools, The Antigonish Review, Ambit, Other Poetry, the North*, and *The ShOp.*

Jeanne Levy-Hinte has Masters degrees in both communications and social work from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. For eight years she worked as a psychiatric social worker in a factory town on the outskirts of Detroit. She lives in New York City where she studies writing with Sheila Kohler, Gordon Lish and the editor-at–large of *The Paris Review*, Elizabeth Gaffney. Her work has appeared in the literary journals *Apostrophe, Washington Square* and *Yemassee.*

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William Metcalfe's most recently published story appeared in Montreal's *Edge* in 1969. He has resumed writing fiction this year after a thirty-two-year break. He lives in Nelson, B.C.

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Meredith Quartermain is the author of four collections of poetry: *Terms of Sale, Spatial Relations, A Thousand Mornings*, and *The Eye-Shift of Surface.* She also co-authored a series of poems, *Wanders*, with Robin Blaser. Her work has appeared in many literary journals, including the *Matrix, Queen Street Quarterly*, and *The Capilano Review.* Her newest book, *Vancouver Walking*, is forthcoming from NeWest Press.

Robert Parker works as a grower in a greenhouse in New Hampshire, though writing remains his vocation. His short stories and nonfiction articles have appeared in a range of publications. "Snow" is part of a longer work in progress.

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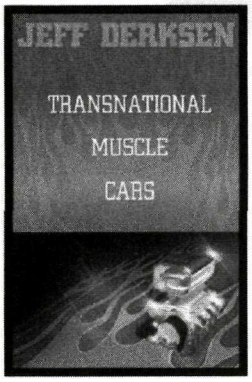

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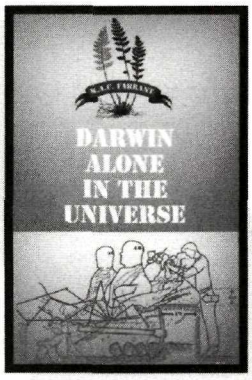

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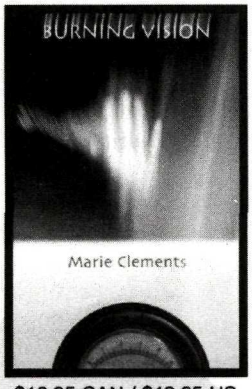

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42:1

As I'm changing in the bathroom, I rehash my scrap with Fruitcake. The moral of my story is that people like her ruin Christmas. Mrs. Claus corrects me: they don't ruin Christmas; they make it necessary. That's Mrs. Claus.

—Lauro Palomba, Page 24

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