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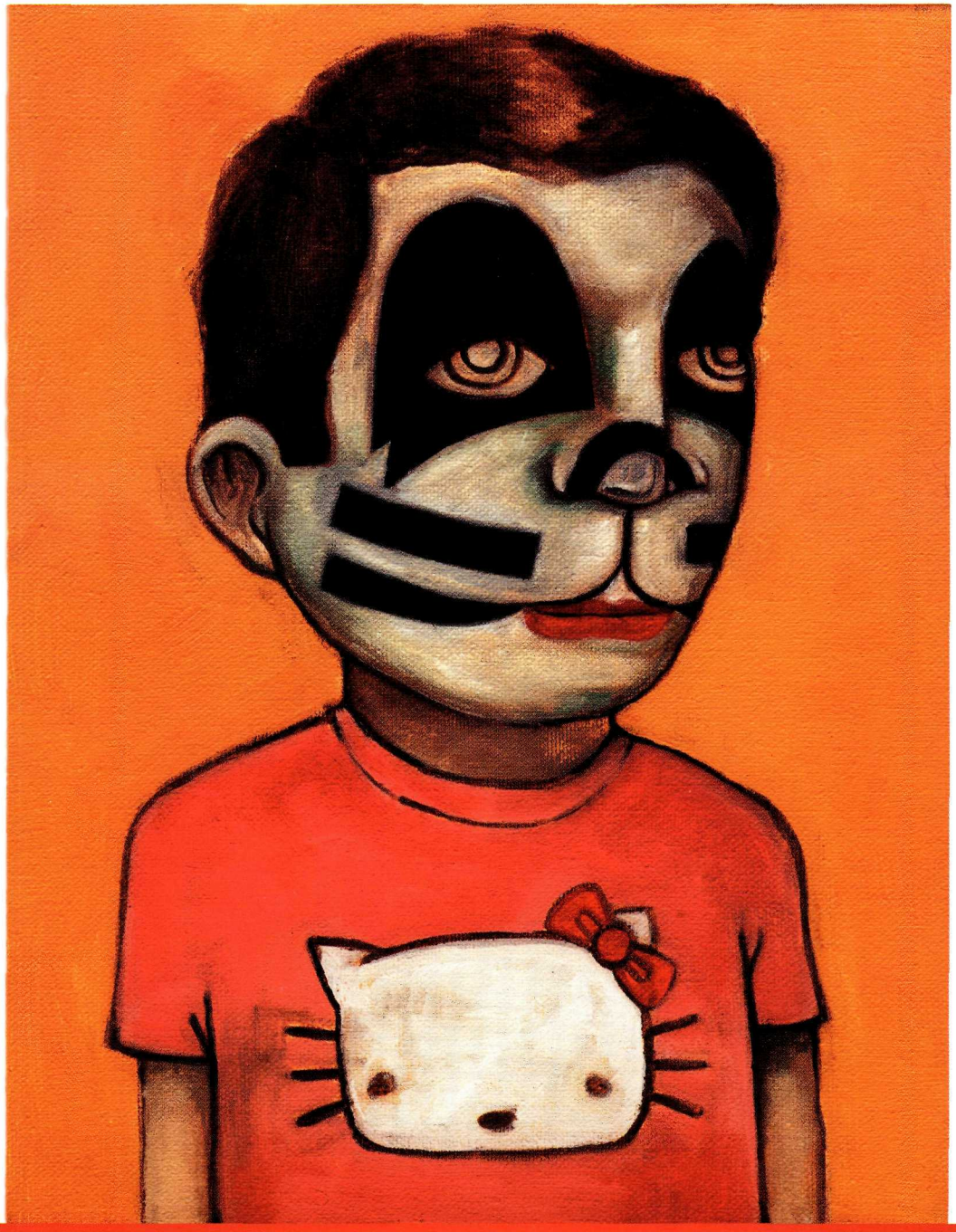

PRISM international

2002 Maclean Hunter Endowment Award For Literary Nonfiction

Grand Prize – $1,500

Marcello Di Cintio
"Lion Hearts"

Shortlist

Paige Haggard
"Five Minutes"

Marie Shields
"Reflections"

Janet Trull
"My Life and Times"

Marika Deliyannides
"The Promise of Snow"

Tessa Dratt
"My Brother's Keeper"

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Contents

Volume 41, Number 2
Winter 2003

2002 Maclean Hunter Endowment Award for Literary Nonfiction

Judge's Essay

Mary Schendlinger
The Adventure of Narrative / 7

Winning Entry

Marcello Di Cintio
Lion Hearts / 9

Fiction

Kim Trainor
I Am Calling You / 18

James Marshall
Everybody Knows Jesus Was Just Joking When He Said Stuff Like That / 33

Andrew Binks
Johnny Rocket / 54

Jay Dolmage
All Right. Okay. / 63

Poetry

Sharon McCartney
from *Karenin Sings the Blues: A Suite Around Anna Karenina* / 27

Gordon Mason
Virgin and Child / 32

Michael Kenyon
Heart Room / 44

Jan Zwicky
Study: Disciplines / 45
Study: Garden Gate / 46
Study: July / 47

Cornelia Haeussler
Outlanders / 48

Jack Illingworth
Pan, Posing (for the Pan Painter) / 50
The Great Rendezvous / 52

Contributors / 74

Mary Schendlinger

The Adventure of Narrative

Great narrative has certain requirements: it must provide the reader with enough background to understand what is going on; it must present characters (including the narrator) who we can believe and care about; it must tell a story in which something inevitable occurs. Very few stories manage to do all these things well. "Lion Hearts" by Marcello Di Cintio, winner of the 2002 Maclean Hunter Endowment Award for Literary Nonfiction, is one of them.

Here is a narrative that moves us, fills us with despair and urges us to think again about things we believe. Di Cintio is in control of his craft and knows what he is writing about, but he does not claim the material. To read "Lion Hearts" is to accompany the narrator on an adventure. No one, not even he, knows how it will turn out, but he goes with his eyes open and his feelers out.

His subject is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Middle East, but he doesn't say so. His story is how he comes to meet, grow fond of and learn from two people–Ali, a Palestinian man in Jerusalem, and Shiri, an Israeli woman in Cairo–but he doesn't say so. During his visit there, he experiences all possible human feelings, but he doesn't say so. (Well, except for once or twice.) All is revealed in the particulars that Di Cintio chooses to include, and not to include, about *what happened.*

One of the tools of Di Cintio's trade is his use of simple, unadorned language, a lens through which the reader can see right to the story. Another is his dialogue, a mix of direct quote and reportage:

I tell her about the falafel stands in the Muslim Quarter... "I understand," she says. "I cannot go there." I ask her why. "Because I am Israeli."

This is conversation as we experience it and as we enhance its meaning by telling someone else, and it sounds much more "real" than a scrupulous reporting of every word that was said. Another of Di Cintio's tools is his habit of knowing his place. "I scan my own memory," he writes, "my own privileged life." Period. No breast-beating, no dutiful confession of lessons learned, no claim of special sensitivity to people's pain.

Di Cintio compliments his readers by trusting us to make our own connections and draw our own conclusions. At the same time he assumes no prior knowledge on our part, except when he is absolutely sure: toward the end, for example, when he writes to Ali and Shiri again after Septem-

ber 11, 2001. Nothing has changed and everything is different, and the spectre of the event looms over the story, yet Di Cintio's text is free of the terms "September 11," "9-11," "New York," "Twin Towers" and "terrorist attacks."

Because Di Cintio uses plain language, writes without an agenda, and knows how to tell someone about something that happened, this is a deluxe nonfiction story: gripping, compassionate, unsentimental, and a darn good read.

Marcello Di Cintio

Lion Hearts

In 1968 Ali Jiddah was walking in Jerusalem's New City eating a banana. He had a brown paper bag in his left hand. When he passed Bikur Holim Hospital, an Israeli medical centre, he placed the banana peel and the bag into a trash bin. Then he walked away. He was nearly home by the time the bomb went off. The explosion injured nine Israelis. He was seventeen years old.

***

In 1998 Shiri Lev-Ari was in the midst of her military service with the Israeli Defense Force. She was in officer's training, and was stationed in Hebron. One afternoon a demonstration of angry Palestinians threatened to turn violent. She was called to the scene. Tear gas didn't disperse the mob, and she and her fellow soldiers had to escalate their response. There were children in the crowd, and Shiri remembers them running from her rubber-coated bullets. She was twenty-one.

***

In 1999 I had Millennium Fever; I wanted to be somewhere exciting when the clock turned on 2000. I took a December flight to Israel from Calgary and got the first bus to Jerusalem, the swollen womb of Armageddon madness. I met Ali just inside Jaffa Gate. It was two weeks before the New Year and a group of Americans were crowding the plaza and handing out pamphlets declaring "Earth's Final Warning." Ali walked slowly around them. He wore dark sunglasses and a full-length black leather jacket. His hands were behind his back fingering a string of Muslim prayer beads. I recognized his face from a photocopied news article pinned to a hostel corkboard. "Are you Ali Jiddah?" I asked. He nodded. "I am going on your tour today," I said.

Ali spent seventeen years in Israeli prisons for bombing Bikur Holim. Now he is a tour guide.

Ali leads his charges–myself and a collection of American tourists–through Jerusalem's Old City. We make the rounds of all the "important" places, but Ali's tour frustrates those who want to linger at the holy sites. At the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the spot where Christ died and was buried, Ali barks, "We are leaving," to a tourist who spends an extra minute

at the shrine. At the Western Wall, the holiest site in all Judaism, Ali instructs "Go ahead and touch the wall, but be back here in five minutes." Ali's briskness and severity, though, are somehow charming. He would rather pause at a sweets shop to offer us a taste of honey-soaked pastry, or give us a spoonful of creamy *sahlab* from his favourite vendor outside Damascus Gate, than line up with pilgrims to touch the stone where Jesus was crucified.

The tour is unashamedly political. Ali shows us Arab businesses that have been closed by Israeli authorities, Israeli soldiers hired as bodyguards for Jewish settlers, and homes of Palestinian martyrs. He points out a house owned by Ariel Sharon. The roof is topped with a giant menorah and the Israeli flag drapes out of a third floor window. "You see? This is the Muslim Quarter and he puts these things on his house. This is blatant provocation."

The tour ends in a souvenir shop on King David Street. Ali tells us that the artifacts in the store are of higher quality and better price than elsewhere in the *souq,* but he doesn't bother with the souvenir hard-sell I expect from him. Few of us buy anything. The shopkeeper is disappointed but Ali is not perturbed. We pay him for the tour and he disappears into the narrow streets.

I spend nearly two months in the Old City. Within a week or so I visit all the major sites: The Dome of the Rock, The Al-Aqsa Mosque, churches belonging to dozens of Christian faiths. Some nights I go to the Western Wall to enjoy the serenity of the continually-lit plaza. Most nights, though, I visit with Ali.

I meet Ali in front of my hostel and follow him through dark Jerusalem streets to his home near Al-Aqsa Mosque. I make this trip a dozen times, but always get lost unless Ali leads the way. He lives in what he calls the African Quarter where over sixty Muslim families originating from Chad, Nigeria and Sudan live. Ali's father, a local mufti, travelled to Jerusalem from Chad on a pilgrimage decades ago and settled in the Old City. Ali was born soon afterwards and calls himself an Afro-Palestinian. Ali is close with his mother–she still prepares his meals–but he and his father are estranged. "He doesn't agree with my politics," he says.

At his house Ali orders his cousin to make coffee and we sit in his living room like we've done almost every night. We are friends, somehow, and I am proud that while other travelers are passing out on foul Israeli wine I'm visiting with Ali Jiddah. Ali appreciates the attention, I think, and smiles when I start picking up his mannerisms, like the way he asks for a short cup of Turkish coffee by holding his thumb and forefinger two inches apart, or the way he answers boring questions with "Ya, ya." I chat with his three serious daughters and play with his mischievous son Mohammed, who Ali calls a "little terrorist." But mostly we talk politics.

"When I was released from prison–Amnesty International helped me–I told my family to bring me to the top of the Mount of Olives. I stood there and looked at Jerusalem, and I cried.

"I was a bomber for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the PFLP. It is true, but now I know that violence is not the way to achieve anything. I know a woman who lives in the Deheshieh refugee camp. It is near Jericho. She lost her home in 1948. A few years ago her son was shot. The bullet didn't kill him right away. He suffered in hospitals for two years before he finally died. We called him "The Living Martyr." His name was Mohammed, and I named my own son after him."

I travel with Ali and another group of tourists to the Deheshieh camp to visit the woman. We walk through the refugee camp until we find her house. I am surprised that Deheshieh looks more like a town than a camp. I expected tents and people lining up for food and clean water but the residents have lived here for over fifty years. They've had time to build houses and raise a generation of children who know no other home. There is a tragic permanence to the place.

The woman, who Ali calls the "Mother of the Struggle," welcomes us into her house. We sit in her living room, drink tea, and pass around the iron key to a home she has not seen in over fifty years. Ali translates for her. "I watched my son suffer and die, but I do not hate. I know there are Israeli mothers, too, who have lost their sons in the struggle. I cry when I see them on television because I know what it is like to lose a son." I leave her house shaken but naively optimistic.

Before returning to Jerusalem Ali brings the group on a tour of Hebron. He shows us the Ibrahimi Mosque, the resting place of the prophet Abraham and the building where, in 1994, Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein sprayed machine gun bullets into the backs of praying Muslims. I touch the bullet holes that still scar the marble walls. Our tour ends at sunset when all of Hebron seems to disappear behind closed doors. The streets are empty, except for Ali and his group, until flashing lights and sirens break the stillness. From the top of Malik Hussein Road an Israeli army jeep speeds towards us flanked by a dozen sprinting soldiers. Before we know what is happening they take up positions around the square, draw their guns and shout at each other in Hebrew. I ask Ali what is going on. "Something is happening," is all he says.

I am surrounded by soldiers and half-expecting gunfire. I am terrified. For all my fascinations I don't want to be this close. This is not my struggle. I want to be safely on the fringes. I think of bullets and tear gas and I don't know whether to run for cover or drop to the ground. Instead I pull my camera from its case and start taking pictures. I filter the moment through my lens to make it less real.

***

I am in Jerusalem for most of Ramadan. For one month each year devout Muslims refrain from eating during daylight hours. When the sun goes down Muslims pile into restaurants and kitchens to break the day's fast. Twice I join Ali at his favourite restaurant in Beit Jala, a village near Bethlehem in the West Bank. Ali is observing the Ramadan fast this year. "But I do it for the good of my body, not my soul," he says as we tuck into a feast of roast chicken, hummus, Turkish salad and fresh pita bread. "I am an atheist. I spent seventeen years in prison. I watched friends die in front of me from hunger and bullets. I have already seen hell so I do not fear Allah." He holds up his prayer beads. "These are just a habit."

On the night before New Year's Eve I go for a walk outside the Old City walls with Carlos, another traveller. It is late and the streets that are usually thick with traffic are nearly deserted. The full moon shines with a deep yellow–inspiring Doomsday predictions among some guests in my hostel–and we pause to take a photo. A car with Palestinian license plates drives up on the opposite side of the street and stops in the middle of the road. Inside are four men. They shout at us from the car windows. "Hey! What the fuck are you doing!" They sound drunk.

"Nothing," I say. "We're just taking a photo."

"Get over here!"

Carlos and I don't move. The men yell again. "Get over here you son of a bitch. Come here or we will fucking kill you." Another car comes up the road behind the red sedan and honks its horn. The men wave for the car to go around. Then they resume swearing at us. "You fucking assholes are dead."

Carlos and I start to run. We head down the hill toward Lion's Gate where Israeli police are always stationed. We know if we can make it there we will be safe. When we start to sprint we hear the sound of the sedan speeding up the road and the screech of tires as they turn their car around. They are coming after us. I can hear their screaming engine get closer but I don't turn around.

We make it to the gate just as the Palestinians catch up to us. We shout for the police and two officers come running with assault rifles in their arms. "These men are after us," I yell, pointing to the sedan. The men stop chasing us but don't drive away.

To our surprise the officers grab Carlos and I, press us against the stone wall, and begin searching us for weapons. "No," I say. "What are you doing? The men in the car. They were chasing *us*."

While we are searched, another officer walks to the car to speak with the Palestinians. A moment later the sedan drives away and Carlos and I are hauled into a police van and brought to the police station. "They threatened to kill us," I say, but nobody says anything to me.

In the police station a curt Israeli police captain questions me. She asks why we were walking late at night, how Carlos and I know each other, and why I don't have my passport with me. She never asks about the men in the red sedan. Then she opens a thick binder filled with criminal dossiers and spends a half hour trying to match my photo with the photos in her file. I sit quietly next to another prisoner, a drunk Palestinian, until I am set free.

The next day I tell Ali about my arrest. He is very interested. "Tell me," he says. "Can you identify them?"

"Who?"

"The Palestinians who were chasing you."

"No. I don't remember what they looked like. Why?"

"They are collaborators. They work for the Israelis. They bring suspicious men to the authorities, and in exchange the police look the other way when they rob tourists." He drags on his cigarette. "Are you sure you cannot identify them?"

"Yes, I'm sure," I say and hope Ali doesn't bring it up again. Even if I did remember I wouldn't tell him. I just want to be a tourist.

One evening Ali and I visit his mother in the hospital. She felt ill and Ali insisted she be admitted to make sure it was nothing serious. "She is an old woman," he says, "and having a son like me is hard on her heart." Afterwards Ali takes me to another hospital, Bikur Holim, the hospital he bombed when he was a teenager. "The garbage container was over there," he says, pointing to a stretch of sidewalk. He recalls that day in 1968, how his mission was part of the PFLP's "Night of Bombs," retaliation for an Israeli attack on Jordan. Ali tells me about the banana peel and the brown paper bag, and mimes how calmly he placed the bomb in the trash. He is smiling and sharing the details with great relish. For the first time I can see the terrorist in his smile.

I want to ask him how many people he hoped to kill but I don't say anything. He is my friend and I am afraid of the answers.

***

I leave Jerusalem and travel south to Cairo. I find a copy-editing job at an Egyptian magazine and a cheap bed in a downtown hotel. I meet Shiri there. I am chatting with a pair of Israel-bound Aussies about where to find cheap food in Jerusalem. Shiri and her two friends are eating burgers out of McDonald's take-out bags and eavesdropping from the next table. Shiri leans over and taps me on the shoulder. She has curly black hair that hangs to the middle of her back, a tiny green jewel in her nose and a sesame seed stuck on her chin. She speaks with a thick Hebrew accent. "Excuse me, but I heard you say you can eat falafel in Jerusalem for 5

shekels. That is impossible. You are lying."

"No I'm not. I never spent more than 5 shekels when I was in Jerusalem."

"Where do you eat?"

I tell her about falafel stands in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, and in Arab East Jerusalem. Shiri nods and leans back in her chair. "I understand," she says. "I cannot go there." I ask her why. "Because I am Israeli."

Shiri and her two friends, Naomi and Maya, are art students from Tel Aviv. They are studying a unit on Islamic and Egyptian art and decided to spend a week in Cairo visiting the museums. I ask her if they experienced any problems as Israelis in this blatantly anti-Israeli city. "Sometimes we worry," she says, "and we never speak Hebrew when we are on the streets. We have to talk English to each other and this is difficult because our English is not good. Yesterday we went to Islamic Cairo to visit the old mosques and marketplaces–the architecture is very beautiful–but Naomi made a mistake. She started talking in Hebrew. Everyone around us stopped and stared at us. And they pointed and whispered 'Israelis, Israelis.' So we left.

"Most times we tell people we are Italian. Do you think I look Italian?' I tell her she does. "But I need an Italian name."

I suggest my mother's name, Rosalina. "It means 'little rose,'" I say. Shiri frowns and snarls, "I'm no little rose."

"What does 'Shiri' mean?"

"It means 'My Song.'"

"That's very pretty."

She shrugs. "It is also the first words of *The Iliad*, when translated to Hebrew. My last name is Lev-Ari. It means 'Lionheart.'" She sips on her Coke. "I am no little rose."

She has a black-covered sketchbook next to her. "May I see your drawings?" I ask. She shakes her head and says she never lets anyone see them.

The television in the Cairo hotel is fixed to CNN, but few of the guests pay much attention to it aside from catching up on football scores. One afternoon a news anchor reports, "Today in the Middle East, seven Israeli soldiers were killed on the Lebanon-Israel border..." Shiri rushes to the television and leans toward the speaker in order to hear the news over the noise of the hotel lobby. I can tell she is crying. "Children in Israel grow up fast," she says to me after her friends have gone to sleep. "Palestinians, too. We grow up too fast. I am twenty-two years old. When you were twenty-two you finished university. You had a degree already but I am just beginning. Instead I know how to load and fire a submachine gun. I worked military strategy in a war room. You studied Shakespeare while I shot rubber bullets and tear gas into crowds. I know people who are dead from

bombs.

"I've seen Palestinian police stand back and do nothing as their people riot, and I know that there are Israelis, too, who work against peace instead of for it. So we fight, people on both sides die and sometimes I wonder why. Is it because Jewish settlers want to build their homes in the West Bank? Is it because of what the Germans did to us? I will never leave Israel. But I want peace. I hope it happens soon.

"Part of my life has been stolen. I'm only twenty-two, and already I'm so tired."

She looks up at me, tears in her eyes. I ache to give her comfort, but I say nothing. I scan my own memory, my own privileged life. I have nothing for her.

"Would you like to see my sketches?" she asks.

Her book is filled with figure drawings and sketches of flowers and buildings. The work is rough and unskilled. A soldier's drawings. I feel disappointed. Part of me hoped she would be a gifted artist as well as a warrior and a beautiful woman. I want her to be everything.

Later I show her some of my photographs from Israel and the West Bank. She finds my photos from Hebron. "What is this?" she asks.

"That is in Hebron," I say.

"I *know* it is Hebron. What is happening here?"

"I got stuck in the middle of military maneuvers. It was pretty scary until they told us it was just a drill."

Shiri points to one photo in particular. Two soldiers are taking cover behind a wall. One is cradling an assault rifle, the other is speaking into his radio. Shiri holds up the photograph. "You are a very good photographer," she says. "This is very beautiful."

The next day is Shiri's last in Cairo. We drink coffee and smoke sheesha in a dusty Cairo coffeehouse. "I've read the Koran. In translation. I thought it was very beautiful. The poetry is very beautiful. I read the New Testament, too. I didn't like it. It was too dull. I liked the ending, though. The Revelation. That was exciting."

We have dinner together in a tacky tourist restaurant. She is returning on the early morning bus to Tel Aviv and since I have to work through the night at the magazine I will not see her off. I hold her hand in the restaurant and tell her I'll visit when I pass through Tel Aviv. She promises to leave her address and phone number for me at the hotel desk on her way out. I hug her good-bye and she holds out her palm to me. "*Khamsha,*" she says. "It is a Jewish blessing. Protection from the evil eye."

When I return to the hotel late the next morning, I inquire at the desk for Shiri's message. The curt Egyptian manager says there is nothing there.

"Are you sure?" I ask. "I was expecting a message from one of the women in Room 14."

"No. She left this morning early. And she left you nothing." He pauses, then adds, wagging a finger, "And those people are bad people."

"What do you mean? They're not bad people. They are my friends. They are good people."

The manager swears at me in Arabic and kicks me out of the hotel.

***

When I return to Israel I go to see Ali. It has been several weeks since my last visit, and there are a few new items on his television. Next to his medal of service from the PFLP there is a photo of his son Mohammed that I took, and, most surprisingly, a framed photograph of Ali shaking hands with Yasser Arafat.

I point to the photo. "When did you meet Arafat?"

He laughs. "That was two weeks ago. Arafat was visiting the neighbourhood and wanted to meet community leaders. Some people came to me and said 'Will you meet with Arafat and represent Jerusalem's Afro-Palestinians?' I told them I had no love for Arafat, but they said I was a community leader and should go. So I went to see him and shake his hand and somebody takes the picture." He takes a long drag of his cigarette. "My friends saw the picture and they joked 'Who is this man shaking Arafat's hand? It cannot be Ali.' They made fun of me.

"Arafat will not bring peace. He is weak. But I believe that peace will come. I don't know how but I have to believe it for my children. I do not want my children to live in a world of hate. Look at all we have in this country. If we can learn to live together we could live like kings."

I tell Ali about Shiri. He is very interested. "I would like to meet this woman," he said. "I will give her a tour of the Old City. Show her places she has never seen."

***

I reach Tel Aviv the day before I fly back to Canada and visit Shiri. She had left her phone number for me before she left Cairo. I found it on my pillow. She didn't trust the hotel manager to give it to me. I meet her in the bus station. When I see her, she is sitting on the floor and yelling at a smirking young man staring down at her. She turns, sees me, and grins and I wonder how many people ever get to see her smile.

"What did that guy want," I say, pointing to the man she just rebuked.

"He told me he liked my ass. I told him he cannot even see it when I'm sitting down. Then I told him to fuck off. Israeli men are jerks."

We walk along the beach to Jaffa. Shiri is not fond of seaside strolls–she equates walking with marching–and it takes some effort to talk her out of hiring a cab. We pass a former dolphin aquarium. "They are turning it into a disco," Shiri says.

Later, we say good-bye in the main bus station next to a group of young female soldiers. They wear army uniforms and have guns strapped across their shoulders. One has her hair dyed purple. They sing Spice Girl lyrics and take pictures of each other with a disposable camera.

I hold out my palm to Shiri. "*Khamsha.*"

***

In June 2001, a Palestinian suicide bomber blew up the "Dolphinarium Beach Disco." Seventeen Israelis, most in their late teens and early twenties, were killed. Images of their bodies, some still in shimmery dancewear, flashed on television screens everywhere.

***

In June 2002 I wrote my third letter to Ali and my second to Shiri. I don't know what to say when I write. I want to tell them about my life in Calgary, but I know their world does not have room for me. I want to ask them about suicide bombers and Israeli incursions and whether or not they still hope for peace. I want to ask Ali if he stills calls his son a "little terrorist." But I am afraid of the answers to these questions, too.

Instead I write: "I hope you are well. I am thinking of you. Please stay safe. *Khamsha.*" I still haven't heard back.

Kim Trainor

I Am Calling You

Our Lady, oh mystical rose, to thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve, to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears... (concentrate on your desires)

I don't know when she started keeping notes on the Virgin Mary. It must have been in the fall, around the time when reports began coming in of the escalation of the civil war in Rwanda, rumours of genocide. The international community was stalled on technicalities and refused to act. I'm sure the two were connected–the civil war, the notebook–but it didn't seem that way at the time. She used a cheap black cardboard notebook with a red spine, and she'd leave it lying around the small apartment we shared. I'd come in after a late shift at the hospital and look to see what she had written, turning on the desk lamp that scattered blue light across the cramped handwritten entries and the smudges of ink:

"Since June 24, 1981, the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus Christ, has been appearing to six young people in the remote mountain village of Medjugorje in Bosnia-Hercegovina... The events are currently under investigation." 8 March. *New York Times.*

3 April. *Washington Post.* "Janet Helmsley of Tulsa, Oklahoma, a 27-year-old mother of two, claims to have received the stigmata–the marks of Christ's passion–upon praying repeatedly to the Virgin Mary. Observers confirm wounds have been seen on her hands and feet that bleed at regular intervals. The case is currently under investigation by the Vatican."

17 April. At an anarchist demonstration on the steps of the Art Gallery: a man walking back and forth on the periphery of the crowd, carrying a large cardboard placard with a message in crayon: "Hear Her Words! Call 1-800-348-MARY."

18 April. "A woman claims to see the Virgin Mary in the Mojave Desert on the 15th of each month. Although an official who spent a year investigating the desert case says 'there are no apparitions, and

people are to be discouraged from going there,' Marian devotees still come from around the world to Our Lady of the Rock. There have been reports of a dark blue halo appearing around the sun, and of rose petals falling from the sky." *Georgia Straight.*

There was a grainy newsprint photograph of Janet Helmsley with her hands raised to show dark wounds on her palms, and another of a woman in the desert next to a tall white cross. The notebook had a certain weight and texture that appealed to me, so that I would sometimes sit in the dark and hold it in my hand, or slowly turn over the thick pages, stiff and wavy from the glue and the damp West Coast air.

When I asked her why she began keeping the notebook she couldn't say, only that there had been an unusual number of sightings, or at least reports of sightings, everywhere she turned, like eyes staring back at her from the pages of newspapers and books, and from the streetlamps plastered with notices which she passed on her way to and from work. Was she drawn to the tone of the radio reports and newspaper articles, of a sorrow of being in the world? Or to an unarticulated longing, embodied in the wounds and eyes of the witnesses? She didn't say. But she continued the meticulous work, adding the handwritten notes and gluing in articles as they came to her.

I didn't see much of her for a while–I began working graveyard on the desk at St. Paul's emergency room, recording the overdoses, the battered women brought in by the police, the psychotics who had been turned out onto the street. I would come home exhausted and fall into bed at dawn. Her notebook was my only contact with her during this time. In its densely marked pages I could see what she was doing, where she had been, what she had read.

The woman who saw apparitions in the Mojave Desert became the focus of her attention, and I read the fragments of the story as Jane collected them. The first report had been brief, coming from a column of news briefs in the *Georgia Straight.* By then the story was already several years old. She researched back issues of San Francisco and Los Angeles newspapers, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *New York Times.* A vision was said to have come to a Latina woman, a vision in which Mary appeared overhead, a veil draped over her face, and told a woman, Constanza, to go to the desert to pray to her. This was several years before Jane had begun keeping her notebook. Constanza found a site on the northwestern edge of the Mojave, and each time she went she received a vision of the Virgin Mary. At first only a few friends and family members went with her, but slowly over the first year, as the rumours spread, more came–until as many as several hundred people might show up. Vendors came with rosaries, miracle-fold umbrellas to keep off the desert sun, Virgin Mary T-shirts. The

church stepped in to investigate and proclaimed after a year that Constanza was misguided–there was no vision. Rumours still circulated that people had been healed; that one day a dark halo appeared around the sun and turned the desert light blue-grey and granular like the effect of an eclipse; that rose petals had fallen from the sky, the scarlet stains absorbed by the yellow earth.

I started to realize how deeply she had immersed herself in documenting the sightings. At first I thought it was only an unusual cultural phenomenon she studied, something she might use in one of her art projects. But it slowly consumed her. It was as if she were trying to learn a new alphabet, a new language, collecting the individual words and phrases as they appeared–eyes staring back at her–and learning to speak them. She charted human suffering the way radar stations track the covert flight of a military jet over the Arctic, the way one traces the movement of whales through the Pacific by listening for the echo of their long, complex songs. The more time she spent on the notebook, the more she withdrew from her daily life, from her work, from me. I saw less and less of her until I had only the notebook and its record of her constant search for some kind of redemption or intervention.

I ran into her by chance on Granville Street. Headlines in all the papers were about a massacre in Rwanda that had just been uncovered. Soldiers rounded up all the children of a village in a churchyard and cut off their heads with machetes, then signed the foreheads like trophies. Their blood formed a reddish brown mud in the yard. It was the first time Rwanda had been mentioned prominently in several months, after those first rumours of genocide.

Jane was soaking wet from wandering around snapping photographs of street scenes, her latest project. We stood in the pouring rain and exchanged telegraphic messages–the phone bill needed to be paid, we were out of cereal, had I seen the library book she'd misplaced. She kept looking around and as we talked she took a photograph of a newspaper box, the headline on Rwanda prominent behind the wire-cage window.

She asked if I had heard about Rwanda. The rainwater streamed down Granville, mixing with rainbow slicks of oil and gasoline. Up ahead, between the pavement and the opaque grey sky, a narrow band of oblique shining light sliced and made the wet street gleam. Everything look newly washed, like the beginning of the world.

"Why don't you come home with me. You're soaked through." She shook her head and rummaged through her camera bag.

"Here. Will you take this home with you?" It was her notebook, the pages wet and curling. "I forgot I had it with me in my pocket and it got wet. The ink's running. Could you put it by the radiator so it can dry out?"

A triangle of light lay across her face. I asked if she was okay. She wiped the rainwater from her eyes, blinking. Then she said, "I think I might be sick. Maybe it's the flu. I feel so heavy, like I've been dragged back into my body, my flesh. I can feel the blood heavy in my veins." She looked directly at me and her eyes were dark and still, like slate. I hadn't heard her talk like this before, as if talking from a great distance, not talking to me directly. I asked her again to come with me, or at least go into the Ichibankan for some hot green tea, a bowl of miso soup, just to warm her up a little. She was shivering from the damp cold. "No, there's no time. I should go. I want to finish off this roll of film before the light changes. I won't be long." She turned in the opposite direction, away from the shining golden light, down Granville, until the pavement cut off the thin horizon and there was only the heavy rain.

One night when I came in the notebook lay on the kitchen table, held open by a stone I'd picked up on the beach. Jane had underlined in thick red marker a quotation from one of the articles on Constanza: *The Blessed Virgin told me to come here. She said the desert is wide. So I came.* I imagined far to the south the desert rapidly cooling as the sky dissolved into the dark emptiness of space, the spiral galaxy we're caught in scattering a few glittering blue sparks onto the desert floor. Reconnaissance satellites passed overhead, recording the land in binary code, transcribed and scrutinized, locked away in alphanumeric files. I remembered a photograph I saw of the Mojave Desert taken from space: a concave ochre bowl crisscrossed by delicate cracks bound by dark mountain ridges to the west. You could almost see the land scarred by sorrowful narrative lines, the stains of military installations and decaying radioisotopes.

I thought about Jane. Was it the heat that called to her, the desert, the wide-open sky? Maybe the notebook itself drew her imagination south, to find the original of this blueprint of human longing, the elusive language she pursued page after page, with each handwritten entry or glued-in report, as if by gathering together all of these multiple observations from around the earth she might articulate what she couldn't say in a single voice, and find the language that might lead her to salvation. She was drawn to the land, looking for an embodiment of the stories and fragments she'd collected in the notebook, something she could touch, like a child's red-stained handprint found on the wall of a prehistoric cave.

The apartment was silent and dark except for the scattering of blue light across the kitchen table. Jane wasn't home. I removed the stone and picked up the notebook, feeling its solid heft in my hand, and flipped through the dense pages to the most recent entry, but nothing new had been added now for several weeks. It was as if she had disappeared. I turned back the pages to the marked article. Papery flutter of moths. *The*

Blessed Virgin told me to come here. She said the desert is wide. So I came. I turned out the light and sat in the darkness until my eyes adjusted. It began to rain, soft, tentative, then a steady downpour drumming on the balcony, the window frames. Were they still down there on the edge of the Mojave, the crowd of onlookers and pilgrims and tourists, snapping Polaroid pictures in the stillness when Constanza paused, as if listening to some ethereal voice, and then said to them in a half whisper, "She is among us?" I thought of them standing there in the heat, with strings of plastic beads in their hands, hoping that if they hadn't been able to see anything, perhaps the camera had caught an impression on film, the outline of her sorrowful body slowly appearing as a dark bruise in the grey liquid matrix of a Polaroid. I placed the stone on the open page of the notebook and went to my room, falling asleep to the sound of the heavy rain.

When the sun rises orange and viscous in the east, the heat flicks on, instantly hot on skin. I still feel the heat that soaks you to the bone and clings to the body like a second skin. I look at our old roadmap–its orderly grid of latitude and longitude casting a net across the ghostly Sierra Nevada like the spine of a marine fossil embedded in the dry land, the creased yellow and blue-scored terrain now tattooed with small black print MERCURY MOJAVE TEHACHAPI CHINA LAKE, red highways slashed through ochre hollows–and see beyond to the vast stretch of silver-green creosote and crippled Joshua trees that slip in and out of focus through the wavering heat. I see the hand-made signs, black on white, black arrows pointing further down the road, the words "OUR LADY" in careful, block print, glimmering signs that proliferate on telephone poles and fence posts, nailed to the trunks of Joshua trees, until I'm no longer sure in which direction I'm heading under the white midday sun.

We crossed the U.S.-Canada border a few hours before midnight and drove through the night, always south, following the stream of red taillights. We stopped only twice for food and coffee, switching turns at the wheel, driving through the dawn and then the hot grey air of the freeway that seemed to loop every few hours, repeating the same monotonous fast-food ghettos, information booths, gas food lodging signs, until somewhere near the Oregon-California border, exhausted, we stopped at the next rest area to spend the night. Jane slept rolled up in a quilt across the backseat. I stayed up front, with one of my coats as a blanket, waking every hour or so confused at finding myself in the ghostly interior of the car, disturbed by the light cast from the shallow street lamp of the rest area and by the sound of the freeway so close by, like a powerful river. I kept dreaming of motion–dreaming we were still driving south with an unexplained urgency along with all the other cars on the highway, their taillights receding in the

distance, the steering wheel gripped in my hands, so that each time I woke up I felt a sickening, jerking sensation as my sense of urgency and speed collided with the stillness of the car.

I must have slept at last, heavily, from exhaustion, until the sun came through the rear window liquid orange, spilling over onto the faded vinyl interior. Jane lay sprawled across the back seat looking vulnerable and skinny, unprotected, as the orange touched her face, soaked into the hollows of her eyes. By the time I had tried to scrub my face and arms clean with cold tap water in the washroom, the information booth was open, handing out free coffee and doughnuts. We sat on the bumper of the car and ate in the warm orange light before getting back onto the freeway, already heavy with traffic.

Towards the end of the second day of driving the land changed. Sometime in late afternoon I'd turned off onto a smaller highway that took us east, towards the Mojave, and slowly, almost imperceptibly at first, the land changed, felt different–hotter, drier, pressed closer to the sky that was white with reflected heat. Around sunset an electric singing began, as the light turned a delicate rose in the warm, dry air. Jane had been quiet and withdrawn all day, hardly speaking except to suggest we trade seats, or to ask if I needed water. But when the cicadas began that high electric humming she seemed to come alive again and she turned to me and said she felt as if she could drive all night. She was wearing a cotton dress crumpled from two days of travelling and had dark circles under her eyes but the delicate light softened the darkness, and the land that stretched out around us felt expectant with the humming, chirring song. We had crossed over into the high desert, into the scarred, political landscape of the Mojave.

We stopped at a diner on the side of the highway. The waitress served us lukewarm watery coffee in chipped mugs, plates of the dinner special, a casserole drenched in gluey white gravy, and then returned to the counter where she sat smoking a cigarette, watching CNN broadcast live from Rwanda. The U.N. had finally decided, too late, to intervene. Images flickered across the screen: still photos of bodies with gaping wounds and strewn body parts, blood-encrusted machetes; American marines storming a government bunker; malnourished refugees behind barbed wire; the arc of tracer fire in a dark sky. Over a constant wailing of sirens reporters excitedly detailed possible targets, the techniques of precision bombing, kill ratios. I remember stepping from the chill air saturated with tracer fire and sirens, out into the warm desert night, and feeling released from the oppressive gloom. Jupiter shone overhead, and we drove for hours with only the distant glimmer of the stars and our headlights illuminating a brief stretch of the dark road ahead, seeing small blurs and brief flurries of movement at the edges of our vision. Jane drove through the night.

I had taken a Polaroid of her when we stopped at the diner. I think I was

trying to record the difference that we both felt, the through-the-looking-glass quality of the dry humming land, as if the world had tilted a few degrees off its axis. I wanted to make a visual record of something I couldn't even see, but felt or heard–the closest I can come to describing it is to say it was the sound of the electric humming all around us that came from the land, carried on the wind that rose as the sun began to set. The photograph didn't turn out; only the outline of her body and her face, without features, just an oval, a blob of pale flesh, the blue of her dress seeming to dissolve into the twilight and the ochre land. She was only half there in the distance, dissolved in blue. I took it into the diner and placed it on the table to see if the image developed more detail over time, but the blue only darkened, removing even the first faint outline of her body, as if she'd chosen to walk out of the camera's sight at the last moment and left only a trace of her presence.

"It feels abandoned," I said, as we stood on the edge of the slightly raised section of land that had been cleared of shrubs and desert bushes. At our feet was a small wooden crucifix no more than a foot high that had been planted inside a circle of rocks. A small plastic Jesus was nailed to it, a thorn crown on his head and black drips of blood oozing from his wrists and face. Plastic roses lay scattered around the base of the crucifix. Jane crouched down to touch the feet of the plastic Jesus, the tiny metal nails in his wrists. "It doesn't look like anyone's been here for a long time."

"Maybe you're right," Jane said.

It felt to me like a museum diorama, as if people had set up camp for a while–for how long? weeks? months? a year or more?–and then vanished as suddenly, without warning. As if something devastating had happened, a drought, a massacre, a neutrino bomb, and the sun had reclaimed the bodies, leaving behind only the plastic remains and the scorched votive jars, glass shards.

"What are you looking for? What did you think you would find?" She looked up at me but the sun was in her eyes.

"Do you think we should try taking a photograph?" she asked, then took the Polaroid camera out of her bag and snapped three pictures, aiming over my head towards the tall white cross in the centre of the clearing. She laid them down to develop inside the circle of rocks.

Blue sky. Blue sky. Blue sky.

"I don't know what I'm looking for. Do you ever have a feeling that you're falling? Like you're swinging through the air and suddenly realize the net is gone, or when you're going down a flight of stairs and you think you've reached the bottom so you step forward to walk away but there was one more step, and instead of your foot touching the ground where you thought the ground was, you go right through the floor? That's how I've

been feeling, only magnified a hundred times, a thousand times. It comes on all of a sudden. I feel like I'm falling. The world's falling." She put two of the photographs into her camera bag, and placed one at the foot of the crucified god. "I feel so heavy, I can feel every ounce of blood in my body." The sun lay directly overhead. No shadows.

Jane looked up at me again, and said, more of a question than a statement, "She must have believed in the possibility of redemption, she must have, to come here and create this shrine. She saw something, a vision, a sign. She believed in what she saw." Jane looked out across the grey-green plain, crisscrossed by a network of dirt roads, and in the distance, some kind of glass dome.

"But you don't believe," I said.

"Someone has to keep looking."

She crouched over the scorched jagged pieces of glass like an archeologist reconstructing an ancient burial site. I left her and walked over to the tall glossy-white cross that stood in the middle of the clearing. It was covered in pieces of paper from its base to eye level–petitions, prayers, in pencil, ink, crayon, photographs faded in the sun. A photograph of a frail-looking man lay inside a clear plastic bag, an embryo in its caul; someone had nailed it to the cross, with typed words pasted along the bottom of the picture: "Please save my father." The hot white sun poured down overhead and the plastic bag fluttered in the incessant wind that blew across the dry, stamped land. The sun burned down in straight lines. No shade, only the sun overhead, burning.

Jane looked distant, impossibly distant and small, her thin dress whipping around her bare legs in the wind. She stood alone, a dark body on a white plain. I couldn't reach her, a blotch of ink soaking into a white page or a bruise on skin. Concentrating on the flatness of her dark trace, I lost myself in the plain's geometry, becoming part of the unbounded grid, no longer able to block out the light with my own solid form. A jet roared past overhead, black, razor sharp, cutting through the shimmering light. It disappeared. The sound followed, a crushing roar that snapped me back into an awareness of my body, waves of sound travelling through the dark liquid flesh, pulling me out of the light. I looked over at Jane. She had one hand raised to shield her eyes, her neck arched to the north, towards the vanished jet. I could see the thin bony curve of her arm raised, then dropped to her side. She turned to look at me, and the light shone through the cheap fabric of her dress, and she looked translucent, shining, as if she'd turned to walk out forever into the scouring, burning desert light.

That night, in a hotel in Mojave, I dream that I am parked on the shoulder of the highway in the middle of the desert. I am standing next to the car but I am alone. In the distance, far down the highway, I can see the reced-

ing taillights of a car and I know with the clarity that sometimes comes in dreams that Jane is in it, leaving me behind. It is twilight–the sun has just set and a grey unnatural light, almost a blue light, suffuses the air. I cross over the ditch at the side of the road and up into the desert that spreads out around me. I am surprised that the bushes that seemed so small and evenly spaced from the road are as high as my waist and some as tall as I am, and scattered unevenly so that it is impossible to walk in straight lines. Far to the horizon lie dark mountains, low, like cutouts, and then an incandescent turquoise light shining above them that imperceptibly merges into black sky. The creosote and Joshua trees darken; slowly the blue-grey light is absorbed into the darkening forms as I walk further into the land which pulls me in like a gathering current, a sea tide, until I am so far in I can no longer see the highway, until I stand there in the warm darkness and know that all around me the desert is coming alive with the ticking and chirring of insects, the creaking of hollow creosote in the wind, the papery flutter of moths. I feel the invisible signals of the desert: radio isotopes in our bones, traces of plutonium, flesh pierced by radio waves, sequences of genetic code, imprints of an ancient sorrow. Just before the dream ends, I look down at my hands and see patterns of pale blue lines tattooed across the skin, luminescent in the darkness, that grow as I watch and cut across my wrists and along the insides of my arms, then draw my eye up to the jet black sky scattered with stars so that I can no longer distinguish between my body and the land, just as a satellite crosses by overhead, so close that I can see every detail of its intricate design like a liquid silver eye shimmering in the blue light of the distant sun.

Later, as Jane sleeps, I turn to a blank page in her notebook and quickly write these words before I forget: "There is a prayer for intercession that is never granted. There is a wish for an embodiment of meaning. There are jet streams overhead, a bright planet low on the horizon, the sound of the desert in the night. The sound is unfamiliar, compressed, the world seems knocked wide open. This is what remains. The desert is free of apparitions. The sky is black and presses down with distant stars. The desert is wide."

Sharon McCartney

from Karenin Sings the Blues: A Suite Around Anna Karenina

Levin's Complaint

(Levin, a wealthy landowner and long-time friend of Stiva, falls in love with Kitty, Dolly's sister, and proposes to her. Infatuated with Vronsky, Kitty rejects him at first but, eventually, Kitty and Levin marry.)

Alone in the vastness, I sleep in a haystack,
awake to confusion, a couch-and-four passing,
happenstance, my unaware wife-to-be dozing
on cushions inside. She startles, parts the curtains
precisely the moment of my wondering,
my lifting my eyes.

Now how probable is that? Yet you rely
on such twists, coincidence, tricks of the cheapest
hacks, my steward's wife, for instance,
so amiably settled, snug cottage, able sons,
an income secure and sufficient, happy,
her husband tells me, as she never has been,
then you strike her with irreparable illness,
damage her, a boot in the slats of a crate.

Do you delight in such irony?
What makes you so bitter?

You missed your mark with Madame Karenina,
Instead of indictment, a bite at unfairness,
she's an addict, a weakling, narrow, to blame.
How much truer to show her as she would be
had Vronsky failed her, his love or loyalty
transferred, Anna abandoned, humbled,
a hanger-on, a whore.

Vronsky deceives you. You wanted him shallow,
a privileged bounder, merciless rake, pursuing
Karenina as savagely as Laska, my setter bitch,
after a grouse. But his passion, his perplexity,
becomes him–how he puzzles over Anna's
despondence, his helplessness. In the end,
he's the victim we pity, the tragedy, flung
on the dust heap of the Serbian war.

My own character? I cannot thank you for that.
You might have made me less awkward,
more generous, more like Stiva, not his profligacy
but his poise, his understanding, his delight
in all kinds of company, of misfits and morons,
of jackasses like me.

Have I the capacity to change, to rewrite
what is written? Perhaps suffering is the point.
Observe how Kitty reads and reads the same
sad story, how it pleases her to cry. Are we
your proxies, your agents, in the estates of pain?

What I still cannot fathom is why, having constructed
all this, the years you took to plot and plan, to tinker,
why, when it would be so simple, a mere stroke of ink,
you could not have inserted one iota of truth,
even a clue, if not a hackneyed bolt from above,
then a character, a Christ-figure perhaps, a visionary
who sees beyond doom, the blue dome that mocks us,
who could tell us why we stumble so clumsily,
why we hope without hope, why our children must die.
A ladder, a footbridge, a stile to ease our way
over the barrier, the paradox: the end so infinite,
so incomprehensible, yet a life without end,
equally so.

Anna in the Afterlife

Believe me, you don't want to be here,
this ballroom of desperation, of defeat,
the unending waltz of we who declared
ourselves too tired, too weak, too poor,
too put-upon to suffer another breath.
Our hubris, our bitterness lend an unpleasant
air to the orchestra. Each new arrival
is announced with disdain.

Judas is here,
carping about preordination–no way
but the highway, the leap from the overpass,
the bottle, the needle, big toe on the trigger
of the shotgun in your mouth. He rants,
"It was already written. Betray the man.
Put my neck in the noose. Without me,
he'd be nothing."

If only I believed him.
That's my fate, foreverly doubting
my last drink of it's-never-too-late,
how I crouched by the rails
like a linebacker, muscles clenched,
failed to straighten, to reconsider,
to amble away.

Don't let me see you here. Don't listen
to those who preach resignation–
that's a shovel of dirt on your grave.
Life isn't a gift, it's a dare.
Think Scarlett O'Hara, not Anna Karenina.
A small dose of denial can go a long way.

Anna's Morphine

(Toward the end of the novel, Anna Karenina becomes more and more dependent on a liquid medicine that is said to be primarily morphine.)

I am the fat tongue unlocking her lips,
booted knee scything her snug thighs,
gloved finger that orbits her pursed nipple,
breath on her nape, engine, engendering–

no, I am better than that.

I am the good news that nothing matters,
a break in the weather, a spanking breeze
after torporous heat, a January thaw,
illicit warmth, as if she could ingest
the diamond of sunlit macadam on which
the ebony cat snores.

I undress her tenderly,
a pastime as we commiserate in the drawing room,
each day tedious to stupefaction, box within box
of disappointment, a nest of frowning dolls.

Do not blame me. I am as much a victim
as she, an illusion, an idol cast to satisfy
her fancy, not mine. I find the exercise taxing,
her kittenish demands, a greater draught
each day, her resistance whelming
exactly as my respect for her wanes.

Irritant, she sets me on edge, fawns
her shoulders into me as we promenade,
tilts too close when she speaks, insists
that I tarry with her over coffee and petit fours.

Everything she says sounds ridiculous,
thick-headed, dim-witted, solipsistic.
I hear myself snorting and am appalled,
but can't help it.

She thinks nothing
of my burden, of what it means to be paradise,
mortar and pestle, warp and weft of another.

When she departs, decamps, vanishes
into the effervescence of evening,
I am not sorry she is no more.

James Marshall

Everybody Knows Jesus Was Just Joking When He Said Stuff Like That

You know when you eat corn on the cob, and you get a bunch of stuff stuck between your teeth, and you lick at it, and you suck at it, but no matter how hard you try, you can never get it out? Guilt is a lot like that. So is Heidi Henderson. I *hate* Heidi Henderson. I hate her I hate her I hate her. She's going out with my best friend. Matt. Matt looks exactly like Jesus Christ. He's got the long, flowing, wavy brown hair and the beard and the sad eyes and everything. It's wild. When he goes places, people nudge each other and point and whisper, "There's Jesus." I don't look like anybody.

Sometimes when I'm bored, and Matt and I are out in public, and nobody seems to be noticing him, I yell out real loud, "Look, everybody! It's Jesus Christ! If you can catch him, you get three wishes!" I think it's pretty funny. Matt? Not so much. Once I yelled it out in a mall. A couple of kids started racing toward us. Matt bent his knees and squatted down a bit. He put his hands out and shouted, "I'm not really Jesus! I'm not really Jesus!" But those kids kept coming. So Matt turned and started running for it. It was one of those days when I was fed up with everything I'd seen, and I was pretty sure I'd seen it all. Then I saw a couple of kids chase Jesus Christ through a mall.

Matt is terrified of kids because they remind him of midgets, so he was hauling some serious ass. His long legs and skinny arms were totally pumping. His wavy brown hair was bouncing, floating, and falling behind him. I cupped my hands around my mouth and called after him, "Run, Jesus! Run!" He didn't talk to me for a couple of days after that. I said it wasn't worth it, when I called him up to apologize. But it was totally worth it.

I don't know if the world has always been like this. But these days, people are always talking about choices. Accountability is this huge thing. We all have to accept responsibility for our actions. No excuses. When I was a little kid, I walked in on my dad cheating on my mom. All I did was

open a door. But that was a long time ago.

Right now the phone is ringing. I was sound asleep a second ago, but now I'm wide-awake and freaking out. I always freak out when my phone rings. It could be anybody. Calling about anything. I stub a finger on the bedside bureau, reaching for the receiver. "Son of a. Hello?"

The voice on the phone says, "Steve?"

"Yeah. Who's this?"

"This is Jesus Christ. Your Lord and Saviour."

For the most part, Matt digs it when the boys and I call him Jesus. He plays it up. He knows when we're not calling him *that* we're calling him Grungy Bath Matt and Worn Out Welcome Matt. He's got a history of letting people walk all over him. "Oh, hi, Jesus," I sigh. I fall back into bed and close my eyes. "How's it going?" There's a pause. Some voices in the background.

"Not that well, actually."

When my friends and I are hanging out, and we've got nothing better to do, sometimes we chase Matt into the kitchen and push him down on the linoleum, and we kick him. We don't do it hard or anything. Nobody wears shoes when they're doing it. It's all sock-footed. But we call it "Taking the Boots to Jesus." It's good times. Even Matt likes it. A little. He gets to be the centre of attention. When he starts freaking out, we stop. Usually.

"You're not calling about my sins, are you, Jesus? Because I've totally been meaning to ask for your forgiveness, right? I just haven't found time, what with all the sinning and all. But now that I've got you on the line, listen. I'm sorry. About everything."

"I'm not calling about your sins, my child."

"Oh, well, that's good." I rub the back of my hand over my forehead. "Hey, Jesus? You know when I said I was sorry?"

"Yeah."

"I wasn't really that sorry."

Matt believes life is a series of humiliations. He's always saying that. "Life is a series of humiliations."

"Steve? Can I come over?"

"I'm a liar, Jesus. A big fat liar." There's another pause. More voices in the background. Heidi Henderson. I even hate her name.

Once when Matt said, "Life is a series of humiliations," I slapped him right across the face. It was a pretty good slap. Caught him totally off-guard. Turned his head to the side. Bent him down a bit. When he straightened up, he put his hand on his cheek and looked at me. There was a really hurt look in his always-sad eyes. "What the hell was *that?*"

"Normal," I said. He thought about it for a while, rubbing the side of his face. Then he started to smile.

"That's so true." He rubbed his face some more. "So damn true. Hey,

you guys! Did you know Steve is some kind of Zen Master or something?"

Matt is pretty smart. But he kind of missed the point that time.

My ear is sweating. I lift the phone straight up in the air for a second and shoulder-wipe the wetness away. "You want to know the truth, Jesus?"

He sniffs some snot up his nose. "I don't even know anymore."

"Most of the time, when I say I'm sorry, I'm not. I mean, apologies are like commercials in the TV show of my life. I don't believe in the products, but I sell them. To keep the show going." I lick and suck at something that's been stuck in my teeth since last night or I don't know when. "But you probably knew that already."

"*Steve*," he says. "I've been walking around all night. Can I come over? I really need to talk to you."

He's crying. I don't know if he just started crying, or if he's been crying the whole time. He's definitely crying now. I fight with the covers. I swing my legs out and sit on the edge of my bed. "You're not hurt or anything, are you?" He doesn't say anything. He just sniffles. "Where are you?"

"At the college. I can be at your place in fifteen minutes."

"Do it then."

"All right."

He hangs up. So I hang up. And then I get up and start to get dressed.

I guess the boys and I are pretty hard on Matt. It's not because we don't love him, or he's not our friend, or anything like that. It's because he never sticks up for himself. I mean, if he ever said, "I don't want you guys pushing me down and kicking me anymore," well, I don't know, we'd probably keep doing it. But if he ever said, "You guys do that again, and I swear to God, I'll kill every last one of you," we'd stop. Not because we'd be scared of getting hurt. It's sort of hard to be scared of a guy who looks exactly like Jesus. We'd stop because that's the attitude you've got to have. That's the attitude Matt needs to get.

Maybe life really is a series of humiliations. Maybe it isn't. I don't know. But I know it can get rough. And your friends can't always be there. To kick it in the nuts, grabs its hair, and knee it in the face for you.

I take a good long look at Matt as soon as he opens the door to my apartment. He's not bruised or bleeding or anything, so I relax a little. He's wearing sandals, blue jeans, and one of those ribbed, cream-coloured, turtleneck fisherman sweaters.

What kind of clothes would Jesus want me to wear? What kind of TV would Jesus want me to buy? What kind of car would Jesus dream about getting? I'm always encouraging Matt to ponder questions like these.

When he reminds me that Jesus told us to sell what we own and give the money to the poor, I say, "Come on. Everybody knows Jesus was just joking when he said stuff like that."

If Jesus were a one-man cover band, what song would he open with?

Cheap Trick's "I Want You to Want Me."

"Come on in," I say. "Smokes are on the table. Beers are in the fridge." Matt shakes his head. He's not crying anymore but it doesn't look like he's left the tears very far behind.

"Let's go for a walk." He's standing in the entryway. "I know I said I wanted to come over. But." He sticks both hands in his hair and leaves them there. "Let's go for a walk." He pulls his hands and his hair back hard. "I've got to keep walking. I don't know why."

A minute later, we're outside and walking. Side by side down the middle of the street. Past a shirtless guy mowing his lawn. Green garbage bag hanging out of his back pocket. Past a black dog running from side to side behind a chain link fence. Barking a warning. Past a little boy on a little bike. The picture of potential. One foot on a pedal. One foot on the ground.

Matt says, "Last night I walked in on Heidi and some guy." I stop dead in my tracks. I don't say anything. I just stop dead in my tracks. Matt keeps walking. He's got to keep walking. He doesn't know why. It sounds like all he did was open a door. *Get out of here!* All I did was open a door. *Get out get out get out!* When you open that door, it doesn't matter if you turn around and leave right away. It really doesn't. *Close the door! Close the stupid door!* You're locked in there for good. And it's like you've got corn stuck between your teeth. Only it's not corn, and it's not your teeth.

I jog and catch up. "Who was it? You know him?" Matt keeps looking straight ahead.

"Never seen him before in my life."

I nod and look away. I let a few seconds pass. I look back. "You actually walked in on them?"

"Yeah."

I nod and look away again. I let a few seconds pass again. I look back again. "They were, like, in the act?"

"I don't want to talk about it."

"For sure. I can understand that. Totally. It's cool."

This is *huge.*

The real reason my friends and I call him Worn Out Welcome Matt and Grungy Bath Matt is because of Heidi. Nobody walks all over Matt like Heidi. Once a bunch of us were hanging out at Nick's place–we always hang out at Nick's place, I mean, the apartment his parents rent for him, because it's massive, one of those two floor jobs, it's even got furniture–and we were listening to a little Hip, and some Sarah Harmer, and smoking and drinking and talking, and out of nowhere and for no good reason, Heidi started telling us, in a really loud voice, about what she and Matt had done the night before. She'd talked him into putting on one of her outfits, a pair of her shoes, and some of her makeup, right before bedtime,

if you know what I'm saying.

Now I'm not saying there's anything wrong with a guy dressing up like a woman. There isn't. Well, maybe there is. A little. But nobody gets hurt. Except for Matt. When Heidi talks about him doing it. In front of all his friends.

She went on and on about what they'd done that night. Gory details. Graphic images. By the time she finally shut up, she had all of us thinking maybe chicks really *do* write letters to porno mags. I felt so bad for Matt. He just sat there the whole time. Trying to smile. Totally Put In His Place Matt. Sometimes we call him that, too.

When you believe life is a series of humiliations, there isn't a whole lot you can do. Other than look forward to dying.

I got up and went to the kitchen. I grabbed another beer. When I came back, Heidi started in on me. She said, "Did all of that sex talk make you uncomfortable, Steve?" Everybody got quiet again. Some conversations started up when she finally finished embarrassing Matt, but everybody got quiet again.

"No," I said. "Not at all." I twisted the top off my beer. I got it between my thumb and middle finger and snapped it into the kitchen.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah I'm sure." I took a drink. "Thanks for asking though."

Heidi uncrossed her legs, got up, and walked over to me. She made a real show of it. She knew everybody was watching. She was holding her hands behind her back. She was looking down at the carpet, smiling to herself. She was wearing a pair of black heels with thin black straps that coiled over her feet, and up around her ankles. She was wearing a short black skirt. A white button-up shirt. It wasn't buttoned all the way up. I remember. Part of the problem with Heidi is, she's hot. And normally I'm a big fan of hot girls. But when it comes to Heidi, I'm not. The problem with Heidi being hot is, she knows it. And it makes her ugly. It looked like she was going to walk right into me. That's how close she got. She was still smiling. Still looking down. "You know what, Steve?" She looked up at me. A perfect blond curl fell in front of her face. She brushed it away with one finger. "I think I make you uncomfortable. In general."

"Yeah, well. If you want me to clear up *all* of your misconceptions, Heidi, I should probably take a nap first. And have a sandwich or something."

Heidi doesn't hear what she doesn't want to hear. Ever.

"I think you're attracted to me," she said. She started staring at my lips. "*Intensely* attracted to me." Her mouth was open a little, and her tongue was rolling around in there, just behind her teeth. "And I think it makes you very, very uncomfortable."

Sure. Heidi is attractive. But so are black holes. In a way.

"Look, Heidi. I don't want to be cruel or anything. But if you were half as good-looking as you think you are, you'd be a lot better-looking."

"It's not that you want me." She still wasn't listening. She put a finger on my chest and started tracing it around, watching the wake it made in my t-shirt. "I think you *need* me. Biologically."

This was in front of everybody. Matt. All his friends. Everybody.

"You know what *I* think, Heidi?" I took her hand away from my chest and held it. Not rough or anything. "You know what I think *you* need? Real bad?"

"No," she whispered. She whispered, "What?"

"I think you need a real good...psychiatrist." I let go of her hand. I took a step back and a drink of my beer. "Professional help, Heidi. Seek it out."

Heidi was the only one who laughed. Everybody else was freaking. Matt was right there. His girlfriend was flirting with me. I was burning her. None of this was supposed to happen. Ever.

Heidi took a step toward me. She took my hand in both of hers and held it. She shrugged. "Maybe I'm wrong." She smiled up at me, playfully. "Maybe you're just not used to being around liberated women."

Whoever liberated Heidi must've yelled out, "You're free! Go find someone to oppress!"

I said, "I've been around plenty of people like you. Believe me."

"You can't stand feminists. Is that it?"

If Heidi is a feminist, then feminism isn't about equality. It's about payback.

"No, that's not true," I said. "I like feminists. I think they're...sexy."

She laughed again. The black hole part of her blue-gray eyes twinkle-twinkled little stupid stars. "I think *you're* sexy, Steve." She brought my hand closer to her. Closer. It was so close it was, you know, *there.* "Why can't you just admit that you think I'm sexy, too?"

"I think maybe it's the loathing."

Her smile changed. It didn't disappear. It just changed. She'd finally heard me.

"You know what, Steve?" She squeezed my hand and dug her nails in. Hard. It was probably as hard as she could. "If you didn't have that gigantic pimple on your forehead, I'd think you were *really* sexy."

I laughed and laughed. "Pimples come and go, Heidi. But there's no anti-acne soap for the soul." I jerked my hand away from her. "There's no anti-acne soap for the *soul.*"

Matt and I have been walking in silence for a long time now. Past Augustana University College, where we both go to school. Through Jubilee Park, where we go to get drunk between classes sometimes. Past St. Mary's Hospital, where we were both born. "Cowboy boots and a cowboy hat."

That's what Matt says, totally out of nowhere.

I look over at him, all confused.

"What?" I have no idea what he's talking about. "What about them?"

He's frowning, but in a sad kind of way. "That's what this guy was wearing," he says. "Nothing else."

"You're kidding."

"No." He wipes his hand over his mouth. Over his mustache and beard. "You know what *she* was wearing?"

Heidi does modelling work when she can get it. For catalogues mostly. Too short for the runway I guess. Anyway. Sometimes she talks them into letting her keep the clothes. Exercise outfits. The suits businesswomen wear. Nurse scrubs. It could be anything really. "I'm not sure I want to know."

"Ropes," he says.

"Ropes?"

"Just ropes," he says.

"Wow. That's rough. That's going to take some time to forget. But hey. You know what they say: Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Unless it's that flesh-eating disease. I hear that messes you up for, like, a while."

Matt says, "Was he a real cowboy, or just a guy pretending to be a cowboy? That's what I'm wondering now."

"I can see why you would. For sure." That's what I say. But I can't see how it matters. One way or the other.

"I heard them before I saw them. And I knew what was happening, but I still had to see. I don't know why." He runs a hand through his hair. "When I walked in, and they got themselves untangled–I mean, Heidi was still tied up and everything, but when this guy rolled away from her–he ended up half sitting up and half lying down. And he put his hand on top of his cowboy hat." Matt looks over at me, like he still can't believe it. "And he *kept* his hand on top of his cowboy hat. The whole time I was there. Like there was a strong wind a-blowing."

I want to be supportive. I want to be a good friend. Those seem like good things to be. Especially to Matt. But I'm having a hard time keeping myself from laughing. Matt really helped me out a while ago, when I was having a hard night. It was right after a girl I loved, and still love, and will always love, told me she didn't like me "like that."

"Chloe? Are you there?" Pause. "If you're there, pick up." Pause. "I just. I just wanted to." Pause. "I mean." Pause. "Chloe, all I ever wanted." Pause. "All I ever wanted, Chloe." Long silence. Click.

I still leave messages like that on her machine sometimes.

Anyway. I was drunk and depressed and downstairs at Nick's place. Everybody else was upstairs, having a good time. I could hear their voices.

I could hear their laughter. It didn't make any sense to me. Their floor was my ceiling. My ceiling was their floor. It was the same thing. The same difference. I was in a bad place. And Matt came down and found me. He sat next to me. He started listening before I even started talking. I told him I was sick of everything. Mostly myself. I hated the way I felt and the way I kept making myself feel. I told him, "I don't even know who I am anymore."

He said, "Steve, you are who you are."

"Yeah," I said. "But who are you, when you don't know who you are?"

He shrugged and said, "Frank?"

I must've laughed for half-an-hour.

We're walking past Spaceship Park now. Spaceship Park's claim to fame is that it has an exact replica of the U.S.S. Enterprise. The one from the original *Star Trek* series. Only the replica has a couple of slides sloping down from the big saucer-like thing on top. And it's pretty big, but it's way too small for a starship. Plus it smells like piss inside, from all the kids who can't hold it and don't want to go home. And it's just there. There's no explanation for it. There's no plaque or anything. It's just there. A replica of something that never really existed.

"You know whose fault this is?" says Matt.

"God's?" I say. "Is it God's fault?"

"No."

"Is it Satan's fault? Society's fault? Your parents' fault? Your teachers' fault?"

If he wants to play, I can think of people and things to blame all day.

"No. It's my fault." He sighs. "It's all my fault."

"Come on. You can't blame yourself." That's what I say. But it's not true, because you can. And you do.

"Heidi is gorgeous, right?" He's not asking. "She's smart and funny, and she's *crazy* gorgeous. But she's always pretending. Always trying to be someone else. Anyone else. She's dressing up. She's role-playing. She's a nurse, a lawyer, an aerobics instructor..."

"A calf."

"Yeah," he says, almost to himself. "Heidi is always pretending."

"A calf."

"I was never pretending." He scrunches up his forehead. "What are you talking about? A calf."

"The ropes," I say. "The cowboy," I add. "She pretends she's a calf"–I see the hurt bubbling up in his eyes and I trail off–"sometimes. Apparently."

He nods and bites his lower lip and looks away.

"Sorry. But hey. It's over now, right? You can put all this stuff out of your head."

"I don't know."

"What do you mean you don't know?"

"When I walked in, and I saw them there, I didn't say anything. I just looked at them. I really *looked* at them. And they looked back at me. Heidi started crying. She called after me. I didn't even realize I was leaving until she called after me. I didn't go back." He pauses. He shrugs. "I called her up later. We talked. And now I don't know."

"When your girlfriend cheats on you, you break up with her. That's what you do. It's, like, the law."

"You don't know what she's been through," he says. "In her life."

The problem with Matt is, he had a really good upbringing. Maybe a little too religious. But other than that. I mean, he never got shipped around like an unclearly-marked parcel, from relative's house to relative's house. His mom never went through a whore phase, a total slut phase, a "forget my son, I want to get married again, now, to anyone" phase. She didn't give up on that, like she gave up on everything else. She didn't try to fill the emptiness with smoke and booze and bingo balls. His dad never disappeared. Forever. And ever. Amen.

Sometimes I think I'm lucky.

When you've had a really good upbringing, you can't see the world right. You can't see the world the way it *really is.* Or maybe it's when you've had a bad upbringing. That you can't see the world the way it really is. I don't know. Whatever.

"It doesn't matter what she's been through," I say. "Who cares? Nobody. Look. You're my friend, and I love you and everything, so I don't want to hurt you..."

"Say it," he says. "Just say it."

"Heidi has always been pretty open about her fetishes. And when I say pretty open, I mean painfully, embarrassingly open. And you look exactly like Jesus Christ. Now tell me. Tell me there was never any of *that* when the lights were off."

"I never thought she was just using me. If that's what you're getting at."

"Yeah. Now say it like you mean it."

"It doesn't matter. I don't care. I love her."

"She *cheated* on you."

"You know what's weird? If she'd been upfront about it. If she would've asked me."

I grab his shoulder and jerk him so he stops. When he turns to face me, and I see his always-sad eyes, I just about lose it. I just about punch him in the throat. I think it's because I want to be him. I don't know. Maybe I just want to kill him. "You know what your problem is?" I'm not asking. "You're too forgiving. Too accepting. God, man. You're just too damn...*good.*" I say it like it's disgusting. Like it's repulsive. I don't know why. "If you want to

live until you die, and I think you do, you've got to"–I shove him in the chest so hard he has to take a couple of steps back–"*change.*"

We're still walking and talking two hours later. And I never actually manage to talk him into breaking up with Heidi, but I talk him into a trial separation. He calls her from a pay phone, to tell her what he's decided. And without asking me first, he tells her that *I'm* coming over. To pick up some books and CDs he's lent her, just in case they never get back together.

Matt and I walk back to my place. He crashes as soon as we get there.

And then I'm over at Heidi's. She's getting undressed and cursing me, and I'm locking the bedroom door, saying, "This is the last time. I swear to God."

She makes a sad face. "This is the last time," she says. "No, really." She rubs away a pretend tear. "This time I mean it." She curses me some more.

"Who was he?" The bedroom door is officially locked. I'm propping a chair up under the doorknob anyway. "The cowboy."

"You mean his *name?*"She's unbuttoning her jeans. "You want to know his *name?*"

"Okay, yeah." I kick my shoes off. "Never mind." I pull off my shirt, ball it up, and whip it at her head as hard as I can. She ducks. It misses her. When she straightens up, she gives me the finger.

There are five things I like about Heidi. Two of them have nipples.

I say, "Not that I care or anything. But just so you know. One of these days, you're going to get yourself killed."

"You *think?*"She's shaking her hips from side to side, pulling her tight jeans down. "You think it'll be *soon?*"She leans down and gets her pants all the way off. Then she straightens up and pulls off her plain white T-shirt.

"I only mention it because it'll be a hassle. For me. Talking to the cops, I mean." I lean down, lift my leg, and yank my sock off. "Explaining our"–I yank off the other sock–"relationship."

She stops undressing and starts staring at me. She's just standing there, stripped down to her underwear. Breathing hard. Hating me. She's still holding her shirt. For a second it looks like she's going to say something. Something important. But she doesn't say anything. She sighs and sits on the edge of her bed. She drapes her shirt over her bare legs and starts smoothing it out for some reason.

I almost feel sorry for her. Seeing her there. Mostly naked. Looking at that shirt. It's such an ordinary shirt.

She says, "I love him, Steve. I really do."

The feeling passes. "No you don't." I unbuckle my belt. "You just think you do." I undo my fly. "You're incapable," I say, dropping my pants. "Of loving anyone."

She balls up her shirt and throws it at me. "Are you talking to me or

yourself?"

I don't know. My pants are around my ankles, and I caught her shirt, so now I'm holding it, and I really don't know. "God, I hate you."

She laughs and falls back flat on her bed. "Are you talking to me or yourself?"

"I'm talking to you," I say, tossing her top in the corner. "Just you."

Michael Kenyon

Heart Room

When does monogamy become celibacy? When
the skies have been grey for days and you stop

losing things. When the robin strikes the window
and stands panting on the ground
for longer than your anxiety to know

the outcome. As soon as it's clear. (To the bushes
to die. Into the air to test his wings.) As soon
as you forget. When does

celibacy become unfaithfulness? When
the child returns home to a gaunt house
in the shade of full-leafed trees. When

the wind sighs its way
along a city street and gives
you a sore throat.

When the smell of earth wakes sadness,
and your frantic self contracts with this dark cousin
to share the day if she will share the night.

As soon as it's clear. (To sit
on the house steps. To go in.) As soon
as you forget. There is mercy

in love but you are not patient. Pebbles
in the pocket. Count them. The iron bed. Tap.
Tap. Squeak of the woodstove door at dawn.

Jan Zwicky

Study: Disciplines

For instance, logic–which would overwhelm him
sometimes, like a sickness

or the impulse to remove the chair,
to let the floor

strike out unhindered, pure stretch of lino
three feet wide right to the baseboard.

Or politics, the racket of collapse
like steering with a flat, mind

veering constantly toward abstraction,
useless, unable

to rescue anything, because forgetting
how to praise:

> the mouldings, their made-from-woodness
> in the winter light.

Study: Garden Gate

You are swinging on the garden gate,
a hoop of dark green pipe
trellised with wire. Its creaking
as you sweep across the walk, the thud
as it falls to, a complete
seventeenth-century satisfaction.

You will never again
know sweet peas in such profusion–
even with their squarish stems packed tight,
more than will crush into a single hand.
What happens next? Why can't you remember?
Some scent, the colour of its eyes.

Study: July

The house of childhood has
white siding and red
window-frames. Mounds
of mashed potatoes every night.

A confetti of arrivals. But only men
depart, and no one
waves goodbye.

Van Gogh in the hayfields, the clanking
as the baler drifts away, then
toward us; then away.
Or it rains.

Every evening bees gather
in the grape leaves by the porch.
Lightning to the south.

Cornelia Haeussler

Overlanders

We brought only enough flour to last the winter
and hardware: cutlery, axeheads, the stove you carried
on your back across the pass. All rust now.

We dug a pithouse from the ground,
bloß wie echte Indianer.
There were small animals to trap
and tea made from the underfur of leaves.

We came to the gold fields
for adventure and to carry fortune
home with us. But what little we found
of that bright metal cost us more
to extract than it earned us in return.
Not enough even to purchase passage home.

We left behind our old village, the streets
so narrow my grandmother begged us
to close the window or the whole town
would whisper of our politics. The last
I saw my young sisters, they leaned over the balcony,
their white nightgowns billowing
in the morning sun. Write often,
they called after us, and for a time, I did.

Childhood friend! How far away
from home we've wandered
into a wilderness so barbaric
we had to bite our breath
our desire was so strong.

In time we took our wives from the daughters
of the land. And they made good wives,
hardworking, your Annie and my Susanna,
Old William's silent girls, bright- eyed
and blushing. Our children were born
brown-skinned and smelling of salmon.

What remains of the precious cargo
I bore next to my skin all that long voyage? Cufflinks,
a fountain pen (and not the coin now
to purchase ink), the silver baptismal spoon
presented by my Godmother. Useless in a new world.

We are here for good. We make the best of it.
We beat the stick against the drum,
offer rough bark as sacrifice to bears,
concoct a salve to wipe the lifelines from our palms,
mark our skin with willow and pledge ourselves
reborn under the moulting moon.

We sweat, we roll in carrion, we wax our beards
with last September's tallow, wash and wash.
Over mountains, across an ocean, we carry with us,
in the folds of our being, a persistent odour
we can never wash away.

Jack Illingworth

Pan, Posing (for the Pan Painter)

This obligatory graven image:
gleefully mugging for the keen
panographer, hips, tumescence
always pivoting toward presumed
eyes. It was said that to see Pan
was certain death, that wine, ardour,
fervid terror, could not deter
the mortal panic of matted haunches,
vermiform lips, daggy buttocks.

Never mind this–he knew well
his stories were rustic farce,
that to bugger a quaking shepherd
was more conquest than most poets
would allow him. He called it envy,
killed new birds for breakfast
each and every day, muted
those humiliating folktales
with his bloody, clangorous routine.

Pan knew, though, that someone
had to see him, that modeling
paid better than living off the land,
that if he was seen drinking
with satyrs and bearded, horn-
handed loggers, herming their
women with his rigid crook,
then that time he slid up Heracles'
frock might well be forgotten.

Poor superstitious hick: Pan
had no idea that pictures
are not quite of this world,
that even the glibbest of gods
can't blackmail himself
into conjugal bliss. Once
a chump, always a chump,
as the costumed satyrs say,
which brings us round to Marlis.

The Great Rendezvous

was a deductible junket for voyageurs
and clerks, half of the Northwest Company
paddling in for drink, talk, and trade.
Now it's a family event for diverted drivers
and airborne re-enactors, keen to enjoy

three long July days of cannon and caroling,
drinking songs chanted by the lustily sober
and covertly wasted, the perennially arrested
blacksmith reprieved from his lines for the nonce,
sent to stand by the river and huzzah the arrivals.

The blackflies were waning, the mosquitoes
were close as steam, the gun-salutes frightened
the children, who wanted the stacks of beaver
pelts to be kitten-soft, not firm, dry props.
False MacGillivrays paraded in pomp; it ended.

Then came the piss-up: enough Blue, vodka,
and Canadian Club to fill an oxbow lake,
real gas barbeques, and no goddamn tourists.
Pan found Marlis at the canoe dock, drinking
a litre of Bull's Blood, cursing the anklebiters

and explaining to some well-meaning boys
just why she wouldn't go see their blues band
play at the Inntowner, when she'd seen Stevie Ray
at the Elmo, and wasn't about to hear "I'm a man"
sung by someone who quite obviously wasn't.

She took a pull on her wine and stared at the river;
three birds quickly rose against the last light.
Woodcocks, muttered Pan. *Really? Yeah.*
Hm. Pan grinned. *Wanna see a lynx?*
Where? Over there. Ten bucks says that's what

scared 'em up. You sure? Yeah. Well...
Soon they were on the water in a staff
boat, rowing to avoid attention. Pan
beached it on a sandbar, left his flashlight
off, whispered a *come on,* and led her

through a stand of ash. They had not
gone twenty feet before Pan nudged her
thigh–*There*–and stepped behind.
Somehow his hand on her hip led
her gaze, darkened shade, quickened white,

and she saw a great airy paw, gloved in thick
ghost's fur; then a loose peaked shoulder;
an ear tuft, silhouetted; and two eyes,
lichen yellow, blinking glacially,
alert and almost unutterably vacant.

Pan kissed her neck, ignoring the familiar
rasping taint of deet, breathing cool air
on her mosquito bites. Marlis closed
her eyes, forgot the lynx, the ashes,
the actors' hubbub, forgot about Pan.

Andrew Binks

Johnny Rocket

On a rooftop in an alley behind Rue St. Denis, the exhaust fan from a lesbian bar, feet from my window, fumes until early morning, expelling the odours of food kept warm far too long. My fridge smells as well when I slam its door; fumes that permeate the clothes held at an angle by the narrow wardrobe. Too close to the fridge, a gritty hot plate sits on a yellow plastic cover that has been stapled to a table decorated by tiny faded snapdragons singed with cigarettes, and dented pots that have been too hot to hold. For a few minutes every afternoon hot sunlight glares through the grease onto the table. I must keep the window shut. Beyond it, the exhaust fan rattles.

I am slick with sweat. *Sueur*, the French say. They also say *Suer la misère*: Reeks of poverty. The white jeans have been too confining. Though sufficiently revealing, I'm starting to feel like a poached sausage. I choose a loose tank-top, and the blue and white short-shorts. Peel off the jeans. Hang them at the foot of the bed. Shorts *sans* underwear *caleçons*. Slip on my flip-flops. I love summer.

Angelique's door is wide open. She sits, hand under chin. Cigarette, the root of a fine thread of white smoke. She is staring out the window. I knock. She inclines her head. Grins. I hand her my rent, forty-five dollars. Mostly she's a shaky drunk. She can't keep track. She doesn't even recognize me. Sitting there now in her hot little room, half the size of mine. A mobile home after a twister. But it has a view of St. Denis and the little patio in front of the Lesbian bar.

Beside her room and across from my own, lives Louie-Marie, a fat old Frenchman who tried to sell me his cap before, when I was in my jeans. He does this when he needs more beer and his welfare cheque has been spent. He always offers me that goddamned greasy brown and white cap for five dollars, (one-ninth of my weekly rent). "I see you coming down da street der all in white and I say, boy he would look smart wit dis white cap on" like that, in his Québecois accent. Alas, the stains on it would clash with my skin-tight white jeans, I want to tell him.

There is a picture of his son, whom I remind him of, in an army uniform. He always says he is coming to visit, "tomorrow, maybe next week." He never comes. Too bad. I would *love* to meet him.

But now, because of an almost empty jar of peanut butter from which I

manage to scrape even less, and a puddle formerly known as butter, which is being absorbed by the sleeve of a frayed silk shirt I had carelessly tossed over the back of the chair, I need to hit the pavement in my flip-flops. (I defy anyone to say they know the pavement of any town as well as I).

I still have five dollars–the remains of a return bus ticket from some guy in Chicoutimi who wanted me to visit him. Wisely spent, five dollars can buy two days of groceries or it can buy an evening of distraction. Fuck wisdom. Some would say it's more than food I'm after.

I waft down the stairs. On the other side of the door to the street sit my intense hot lesbians in leather, wearing hair on their ankles, drinking beers.

If it were earlier, the cleaner, a bony guy with a shoebrush moustache, would be jabbing at their butts, scrubbing the ground, wiping sweat off his nose, and scowling specifically at me. As if I'd harmed him. And my dykes aren't much better, rolling their eyes now as I slip past in my skimpy tank-top and these striped short shorts. It's my neighbourhood. I'll go out in tinsel and shower curtain (which some of 'mes voisines' do), if I want.

But now I walk through early evening light similar in its yellowness to early morning light, but tarnished like my window. Like booze or weed, the heat leaves us shiftless. And the cumulonimbus are brooding bags of hot water on a glass table top, waiting to spill their contents. It's too hot to think. My armpits slurp with sweat. Likewise slides my enlarged scrotum against my thighs.

St. Denis is midsummer melancholy. Gone are the well-dressed promeneuses. The heat finally gotten the better of those who wear pounds of foundation, rouge and lipstick, under dark bangs or black hair pulled tight. Faces taut against the bone. Absent are their blasé husbands or lovers, who lean against shiny cars while the women run in to pick up that must have "petit quelque chose" and disappear for hours, the men looking like plump fashion models in their pleated pants and stonewashed silly silky shirts. On their feet, espadrilles or perhaps a smart pair of sandals showing tanned pedicured toes turned fat. Gone they are to northern New York, Europe or maybe even South America to cool off in the duty free shops of airports. And they do not materialize until sometime in September when they can think of buying something for the cooler weather.

I have wandered down this sultry trottoir of Rue St. Denis, in and out of the same knick-knack shops and card stores looking at things I have seen a million times, and each time I decide that I will buy when I have enough money, but I end up with less and less, as if I have to do penance for desire itself, through poverty and vanishing means.

The bath shop, the paper shop, the fine luggage and men's things store, all with doors shut, occasionally someone sitting or lying drugged on the steep steps. I consider a foray into these cool oases, yet the paper shop bores me and the man who sells caleçons pour les hommes has had his

hands on my caleçon one time too many. He owes me some briefs. My pulse races at the dirty thought of what I've let him do. Still, I toss my head proudly and strut by in my sluttish summer outfit. God, I'm horny and this heat leaves me no option. Sun on a man's back is stronger than any Spanish fly. It will take more than a hand job tonight. I do one circuit of the familiar junque in Persian Paradise to breathe in the sweet incensed air and recover from rushing past Monsieur le caleçon.. My cock has painfully erected a circus tent.

I exit and the Persians glare as if I have shoplifted. I am innocent. Where would I put a lumpy leather thing with bits of broken glass glued to it? Perhaps that is what they think is in my shorts.

After passing the Carré St. Louis (a small square for the recreation of we, the less fortunate) I find what I am looking for: a cute college number at Les Frites de Joe. (Le "cheep wagon," as we Anglophones call such things, squeezed into a parking space between two buildings, grass growing around the tires. A callus on the tumour of lower St. Denis).

I sidle up to the college boy. Him in runners with brown socks. Definitely straight. Possibly curious. An ass like a honeydew melon and probably just as sweet. I feign an appetite for food. I must order to keep from looking obvious. After many visits I am still treated with a distance as long as Josephine's short fat arm passes the frites over the counter. She is small, part native, part French, (aren't they all), with a jammy complexion on a round face and eye-enlarging glasses. Does she do it all by touch? The glasses can't help. She announces the college boy's order "poutine", more like *poo-taine* and shoves them where she senses he might be and then opens her fat palm for him to pay her. Fresh haircut him, he obviously works out or plays soccer with those thighs and butt. Most likely bathed in sweat, *en nage*. Obviously Anglais. Ignores me. He'll learn. I chuckle smugly. He makes an opera of this transaction. Is he flustered? I try to catch his eye but a large transistor radio chatters in Franglais in the back, while a three-times-as-large and twice-as-old version of Josephine shadows the background, playing referee to two little papooses.

I watch Mr. Adida-ed-butt to the corner. Where are my frites? He's getting away. Look back! Look back! I ESP. But he's gone.

For one dollar and seventy-five cents I must partake not only in a generous helping of frites, but of frites sickeningly covered with melted curds and thick gravy. Is this not substantial? Is this not treat-like? Crunchy yet soft. They snap when bitten. The frogs know how to do this.

I take my dinner to a bench in Carré St. Louis and pull fries out of melted goo and gravy and hoist them over the edge of the bag and into my mouth, all to try not losing a drop of precious, calorie-filled fat. Ah poverty; the one time when calories are a commodity. If I can't fuck I'll eat.

Day sounds change to night. Traffic sounds fade and are replaced by the

clang of pots and dishes. Food smells and laughter lazily tumble out of windows and into the square. Strong smells too. Smells that remind me of a place or a time or of a whole season.

The heat keeps the park parasites in suspension, to the ground, to their benches. I do not want to share my little feast of the brown paper bag with anyone. Wait. Someone watches. I uncross my legs. Scratch my crotch. That's the signal. But I recognize him. He's a thug. A pimp. Straight, but cute. Perhaps bi, but too dangerous. Meanwhile, the birds suspire in the cool trees in an odd dispute but will not flitter forth. I bury my face in my fries.

I waltz back up the other side of St. Denis, past tiny cafes with Barbie Doll patios where Americans conspicuously eat under the watchful eye of the rest of us, wealth free and on foot. Searching for my reflection now in the windows of these places. I don't look that bad.

One restaurant is frantically busy, a place I've dreamed of finding a sugar daddy. It's all glass with black tables, black and white tiles on the floor, a high wooden bar and very nasty looking waiters. These are where the ones who have not gone to Rio dine. All of them. Behind glass, a veritable *Dior*ama of the world as it should be. Wearing thongs they do not sweat in. Happily delirious, drunk and drugged on their own superbness, poking at bits of artfully arranged peas and penne and fruit purees with morsels of chilled whatever and smoked whatever else. Sipping Pinot Blancs or Pimm's. No patio here. Patios are definitely for plebs and turistas. These *mannequins* waft from air conditioned penthouse to climate controlled Corvette to chilly tiled restaurant. Afterwards, with the lid down and the elan and energy of the Queen Mother doing her walkabout, they retreat, windblown, to their crystal castles in the sky. And I complete this perfect scene in my slutty street wear, turning more than one head, while looking for my image in the window. Unfortunately these men are all heteros or homos not interested in a piece of street trash. Maybe? Oh fuck that. Besides who can really get excited wearing beaver or mink to keep the goose bumps off her transparent flesh in the summer?

Air-conditioning just shrinks your dick.

I smile. I still have three dollars and twenty five cents and I am full– full of cheese and potatoes and gravy, all doing their best to keep me feeling alive, from the pit of my stomach right up through my stinging post nasums. It's time for something to sweeten this boy up and cool him down.

On the next block, I walk up wooden steps to a counter that sells soft crème glacée twisted in a spiral with chocolate or just plain, *simple.* I'm guessing white doesn't have any flavour. Actually, I'm not sure I know what real vanilla tastes like.

For a dollar I get "un medium twiste" which is gigantic, but average as

ice milk products go. I lick it in a fashion that might excite a voyeur, forcing me to slow and zig-zag. Finally I cross the street and toss the gluey remnants into a planter. At my front doorstep by the patio of L'Exit, I see that tonight's street life is a definite downer, leaving me with nothing more than a rancid poutine taste mixed with sugary glop.

The interior of L'Exit is dark. It is certainly too early to go up to my squeaky bed. I still have some change, so I venture in for a drink. Mind my own business. Clamber on a stool at the big dark bar. A chalkboard far to my right announces I can order a glass of *bière en fut* for one dollar fifty, which I do, with enough left for an ungenerous tip.

A dim reflection in the mammoth mirror bears down on me from behind rows of liquor and liqueur. The tan on my shoulders shiny and smooth. My waist bloated. And further up the mirror, out of view, directly above me possibly, is my filthy little room, void of oxygen, full of nothing but stale carbon dioxide from me and the many old men who have died on the bed-of-nails springs which poke and prod at random.

A glass of draft slides into view. I will have to nurse this baby.

My eyes continue to rove over the reflection in the gigantic, ship-like mirror. Light from the street brings small tables and chairs into profile as little red lamps reflect their flat surfaces. There are gold-lameed pillars around which the tables and chairs congregate. Lush. Anything unattractive disappears into the darkness, like an impressionist painting. All shadows and light.

Something else catches my eye, below the mirror, in a plaid shirt stretched across a wide back. A head appears and becomes part of the pleasing vision. I glance up to the mirror again and the reflection of the eyes of the shirt-dweller looks back at me. Eyes wink. I look down into my tiny beer and take a dainty sip. I glance up again and the reflection smiles. Holding the line of the gaze, my heart becomes a hard lump of fear in my esophagus. I continue to sip. The barman turns and swipes the coins into his palm and grins a friendly grin, not the grin of a predator. He is as much at a loss for words as I. My pants may explode.

When you're walking on a fall or spring day shielding your eyes from the dust the wind blows up into your face and you lean against the tugging of it and suddenly a gust catches you from behind and hurries you along for a few steps, or when you wait to see the tide change but you never really see it , you only notice that now it isn't coming in. You become aware of the game nature plays with our own nature, tossing us, teasing us and sometimes drowning us if we aren't aware of the undertow or where the wind is coming from.

I grin. I smile. I verse vice-ah. I cough a bit because of the beer or a bubble of oxygen in my throat. Not with nature's grace do I unstick my thighs and stumble from the bar stool to a recently vacated-by-lesbians

table underneath the chalkboard. I sit secluded from general view, but with full on view of the bar keep. With nine tenths of a beer still at my disposal, I nestle into the lumpy, stuffed red alcove. I watch Monsieur le barman from a safe distance. His wide shoulders betray his slim waist and thighs tight in his jeans. I can only imagine the rest, and I do.

He performs likewise with a grand floorshow full of humour, machismo and Frenchness as he takes orders from the waitress, butchly splashing shots of poison into glasses of ice and banging beer bottles onto the bar.

In the meantime, I grace the corner with my shiny shoulders and knees crossed tightly. I play hard to get, but he is harder to ignore.

Halfway through my beer a candy-coated waitress brings me another beer, a pint this time. She leaves without a word. As he wipes glasses from his consol he winks me-wards again. I coquettishly toast him, still on my first. He nods. Drink up.

I am now in the game. Timidity cowers tightly behind bravado, which rears itself as a painful boner. I lean forward and uncross my legs.

The beer washes minutes and hours away. I continue to play with this Chevalier, this Aznavour, this classically French, balding, big-nosed, cleft-chinned lumberjack. The scene sweetens to a kind of pleasureable pain, myself semi-drugged thinking of the times when I had a life, a friend, and sadly dreaming of when I will again. Sooner, I hope, than later.

Exhausted from this and three big beers later, I rise and tilt toward the bar.

Hoping for at least a phone number from this encounter, I extend my hand, which is immediately seized by one bigger, firmer, thicker, rougher and perhaps friendlier than my small-boned English one.

"Merci pour les bières monsieur," I say in my scholastic way.

"Ça me fait plaisir," He says with exagerrated politesse. "Où vas- tu?"

I point ceiling-ward, ciel-ward, je suppose. "I live upstairs. J'habite en haut."

He frowns. Is he familiar with the squalor to which I am subjecting myself? "I will come to get you tonight."

I want to believe that he might actually do so, and on a white stallion.

"I'm in room three," and trying not to sound too desperate I add, "if there is no answer continue to buzz, continue a presser le bouton." (I press the air with my thumb). Again we shake hands, this time sex surges down my arm igniting the underside of my balls.

Outside, a hot wind now blows. The lesbians have long abandoned the patio, but the dark street is alive with lights from passing cars and glowing shop fronts. Sheet lightning flashes up St. Denis without a sound. Other restaurant patios are now crowded.

My stagnant room has taken on the climate of a tool shed. I take my damp towel and head for the bathroom around the corner at the other end

of the hall from my own room and beside the bedroom of a strangely pious (to this protestant boy) woman. Mademoiselle Murielle Dupont is, I think, a plain-clothes nun. She leaves her apartment every day looking painfully scrubbed and powdery with skirts and blouses pressed crisp. She keeps the adjacent bathroom looking equally proper, yellowed, but clean.

After a cold bath, I walk to my room hoping none of my neighbours will be in the hall to engage me in light conversation or sell me things. Other creepy crawlers await me in my room under the light of the twenty-five watt bulb that, fortunately, makes them impossible to see before backing into closets, bedclothes and yes, the refrigerator. Still wet to fight the heat, I flop, hoping that the three or four hours until my suitor's arrival will pass with great haste.

A knock pulls me from a damp dream, rolling me from the lumpy mattress onto the floor. I take the two steps to the door, opening it to see my prince's rugged face and feel his breath. He gives me a quick kiss on the lips. "Come with me." He says.

Ooh la la!

I slip on the white jeans and the tank top knowing I have caught, but not yet netted, this one. The old silk shirt is now entirely buttery.

My door squeaks and clicks shut behind us and then we fly down the linoleum edged-with-metal-to-damage-the-shins-if-you-slip staircase. The white horse is nowhere, but this knight will do.

"I am Jean," he says in his broken English, which he insists speaking "Jean Rochet."

"Rochet?"

"My English friends call me Johnny Rocket."

He is big, a big *coureur de bois.*

"*C'est pas loin,* I don't live far."

The warm wind blows, lamps swing madly, and there is faint thunder now, after the white flashes, but still no drops of rain. I feel as though we have just crossed enemy lines in this deserted city. We pass my favourite, and completely unaffordable, croissant café at the corner and head one block over to his street and then back down to his flat.

"You must be quiet, Gilles is a light sleeper."

With my hand touching his back we tiptoe down the hall, Gilles's room on the right, living room on the left, and into Jean's room, which is off of the dining room. A hot breeze plays in and out of the room. He disappears past the dining room leaving me on the edge of the bed. I look at my feet. They are still clean.

He comes into the room, smelling of sweet cologne, shirt off his hairy torso and he pushes me down onto the soft unlumpy large very comfortable bed which I can't help appreciating although afraid that I will fall asleep instantly from the total of all the nights of bad sleep added up.

But his hands are on me and my hands are on me, peeling at my tight jeans. He slips off his own pants with the frankness only a Frenchman can possess. This done in darkness. But I can feel he has everything, round chest, hard shoulders, everything firm that isn't completely rock hard. And finally pulls off my pants, tickling my feet on the way. His hands on my hips heave and pull me about on the bed. I see myself a lean loose slut, not like the frite-eating-ice-cream-cow I have become. He pulls my hips up off the bed and presses my groin into his own. He is being a true Frenchman, my knight in shining armour and I'll just have to lie here and take it, like a man. I can't touch his body enough, running my hands along his huge thighs, pulling at his ass, making him topple onto me, to smother me in his solid masculinity.

He kneads my torso (and squeezes my love handles). "Women, they are all like dis," he says as he slaps the back of my thigh.

Does he find me womanly?

"But men are this." He presses his large hand into my front, below my sternum, above my crotch, and I regain my composure.

He obviously appreciates my body. I too appreciate having his large hairy hands squeezing, groping, holding and pinching. I grab his breasts and pull on his nipples as hard as he pinches me. Does he know how long it has been?

And after, we lie in a soaked clump. Not sweaty. Sweat doesn't come from this type of activity. It's a warm dampness of body fluids that seals you together and doesn't leave you gasping for coolness, the heat grows and becomes more and you relish it with your flaccid appendages folded into each other.

And the ground shakes.

"That is the last metro, the only one with metal wheels," he tells me. And its metal wheels role underneath us.

The storm has come closer and, as we lie, the monsoon fades our view of the homes across the alley. A sharp crash brings a wave of cooler air in the window and over us. The storm does its best to hold our attention but somewhere between its ebb and departure we fall into a light sleep interrupted by his soft kisses and caresses, annoying snores, and another heated round in his tangled nest.

I open my eyes when the door of the room bangs shut to see Jean climb onto the bed, croissants balanced in one hand and two mugs in the other, still naked, hairy like I remembered, his thick warm penis flopping from side to side.

"Café au lait Monsieur."

I pretend to care that he is seeing me, hair askew, face puffed and wrinkled, teeth unbrushed. Poutine breath.

We eat and dip and from time to time he pushes at me or squeezes my

skin or ruffles my hair and growls. In the daylight I can see his body has a natural tan, all one colour, except for the undersides of his big soft feet, which are a pinkish white. He is perfect, I think. He is kind and strong and sexy as hell.

"Today I leave for P-town," he says.

"Mmmm?" says I.

"Provincetown."

"Vacation?"

He shakes his head, "I 'ave a job as a cook."

"For the summer?"

"Maybe longer. Would you like to live here."

"Montreal?"

"No, 'ere in dis flat, in my room, when I am gone."

"How much?" I ask.

"One 'undred forty five a month."

"But what happens when you come back?"

"I won't be back."

Quickly calculating that my precious forty-five a week adds up to more than that, I accept. "When?"

"Today, Tomorrow, I will talk to Gilles. 'Ee will be your flatmate. He cleans at L'exit."

"I think I've seen him."

I look straight ahead and out the window at two blue nuns (like the ones on the wine bottle) in the alley arguing over who will drive a little car. Love's like that, isn't it? It takes longer really. But eventually someone goes away. Somehow. God, how hot they must be, clammy white skin under those robes. I shiver at the thought. Then I recognize one is Mademoiselle Murielle Dupont, my neighbour.

"Maybe les soeurs would like this," he says grabbing my cock. It takes me a second to realize he is referring to the nuns.

He takes the mug of coffee from me and puts it on the floor; grabs my shoulders and pushes me into the bed. I feign a struggle, but let him have his way. He doesn't mind my poutine breath. He nibbles at my shoulder. Bites. I close my eyes and feel the sweat, *sueur*, being licked away.

Jay Dolmage

All Right. Okay.

He pedals. His knees buckle in and out as his legs churn round and round. His tires squeak from their newness, their rubber still knobby and pitch black. He coasts. He pedals. He coasts. He rolls down the neighbourhood streets, his hair wild in the wind, his part blown left to right, a little scraggly ducktail trailing from the back of his head like a flag. He pedals. In this neighbourhood, parked cars sink into lawns, into the road, their axles busted, their tires soft, their engines rusted out or gone for good. When he swerves around a corner, he swings wide to avoid these dead things, these husks of machines. In the car windows that aren't smashed in, he sees himself, briefly, a boy with a bony knee poking out of a rip in his jeans. He catches a glimpse of the spinning spokes, the beautiful shimmer of rapid movement, a whirl of light. He flies like a kite without a string in a sky full of wind. He rides all day. Okay.

On a brown lawn, a woman yells at her son and her husband yells at her, but their voices blur as he pedals away, as he turns another corner. Other kids stand on their lawns pointing plastic guns at one another, pretending to kill or die. They spin to aim at him as he passes, but too slowly. He speeds away, cruises through an intersection, pulls into a skid, stopping just to leave a smear of rubber on the pavement. He stands straddling the bike, his feet on the ground and his elbows resting on the handlebars. He spits, wipes sweat from his forehead, then twists around to admire his skid mark. Cars rumble and backfire, pull out of driveways. Doors open, slam to. He gets back up on the seat. He pedals. He rides. Up to his school, past his school, its doors locked for the summer, the playground windswept and empty. He's thankful for summer, for that final bell that freed him from grade three. He spits again and the long string of saliva flies over his shoulder, hooks around his face and lands on the back of his T-shirt. Then, he spits again and it lands on the lawn outside the front doors of the school as he accelerates away.

He pedals towards his own driveway, zig-zagging from street to sidewalk to lawn to street. As he gets nearer to his house, a big black car pulls up to the curb. The driver-side door opens. The boy slows, bites his lip, stops pedaling. He watches the car with nervous eyes, swerves over to the other side of the road, up onto the sidewalk, glides past his house then away again. He turns back to look only after making some distance. He sees a

big figure strut up his walk, a man with his jacket half-zipped, chains gleaming round his neck. The boy pedals. He pedals away. Coasts out that day, and the next, and the next, from warming dawns through clear, sunny afternoons and into the slanted and enchanted light of early evening–he coasts out the first shiny weeks of summer. Then one morning the bike goes missing.

He walks the streets of the neighbourhood, slow and sad. He spits. Everything he sees, he wants to break. Everyone he sees, he wants to fight. His parents tell him that there's nothing they can do. All right.

One night, the boy's uncle Mike visits his house and he brings beaver pelts. He's been up North, trapping, hunting, fishing; collecting dead animals. Uncle Mike and his dad sit around in the living room looking at the pelts. They let him look too. He holds one in his lap and smoothes the fur. His dad holds a bong so big that it comes up to the boy's hips, a bong so big that it looks like furniture. But furniture that the boy is not allowed to touch. The bong is passed between brothers and the boy's uncle holds it between his knees, puts a lighter to it. It gurgles–a sound like water trying to get down a hair-clogged drain. It's purple. As far as he can see, you put your mouth on a part and your finger on another part and it makes smoke. It's like an engine with two mufflers. You turn it on and hold a flame to it, like the barbecue out on the front porch. He's not allowed to touch it. His uncle Mike blows smoke out of his mouth and nose. He talks about how beavers are the worst pests, screwing up all the good fishing lakes. As he talks, his eyes look smoky, gray, full of dark water, like he's crying or laughing really hard.

The boy looks at his uncle, at his eyes and his big hair, how it sticks up on top like long grass and then falls down his neck and forehead unevenly. He looks until his uncle sees him looking, then he looks away. The boy's eyes stare at the bulge in the breast pocket of his uncle's camouflage jacket–the knife pocket–and then he turns his head away. He sits and listens to the stories about fish and beaver. He watches the adults drain and crush cans of beer. He takes a sip when it's offered.

"What does it taste like there, Chopper?" his uncle asks.

The boy thinks for a second and then, because he's pretty sure he knows the answer, he says, "Beer."

The men laugh like this is the funniest thing they've heard since they've been on earth and he smiles a bit, but nervously, because the laughing is very loud.

"Beer," he says again, and they laugh again, even louder, like violence. But they don't laugh when he says it a third time. Later, he washes his mouth out with water to lose the tinny taste. Later still, after the adults fall asleep on the couch and the boy is alone, he feels the pain of his bikelessness. It aches like after stubbing a toe, but bigger, unlike any pain on the body.

He comes up with a plan. All right. He decides to put up a sign. He puts down the pelt that he's been holding and he springs into action. He gets some markers and he looks around for paper. He opens drawers and cabinets. But, nothing. Okay, he thinks, no paper. So he just goes down to the telephone pole on the corner by the intersection and writes right on it with marker. On the street it's dark, quiet, aside from some vague strains of guitar music and yelled lyrics muffled behind closed doors. The street is empty, except for hunched and broken cars and trucks leaning on the curbs. The telephone pole is lit only by flickering streetlights, so he can't see so well. He draws a picture and prints out the word "Stole" above and below it. He writes his phone number down too. And then "Call." Call about a Stole bike. The picture he draws is supposed to be his beautiful blue bike, with its gleaming metal, in all of its power and perfection, but it looks like two circles and a stick. Okay, really, it looks like a skinny dick with great big balls. "Call," it says, above a picture of a dick and balls, written on the telephone pole in between signs for *Lose Weight Make Money*, *Lost Kitten*, *Learn English* and *Puppies For Sale*. But, he thinks–it'll do.

Okay. And now, all there is to do is wait. Wait, and hit trees with sticks. Wait for the adults to wake up. Wait and maybe ask his mom for money for candy or for a Fudgsicle or a pop. Ask until she says no in a different voice than all the other nos and then get out of the house and sit on the curb by the intersection. Waiting: this is all there is. This is what he does. He waits. Waits all day. Stares at his shoes and tosses pebbles. Watches the other kids in the streets jump rope, shoot one another, yell, kick balls, kick one another, kick. He waits. Until the streetlights start coming on again and he finally says "screw it" and walks home, into the house, past Dad on the porch, sitting in silence with the broken bits of his boom box that, earlier in the day, busted into pieces, and past his mom in the kitchen, whispering into the telephone. He leans in to see if the call is bike-related, but he can't really hear anything–and when his mom sees him she flips the back of her hand at him–go away. And so he does. Right into bed, into sleep.

All right, he thinks, when he wakes up in the morning, who could be that evil? Who could be so crappy as to steal the bike? Maybe one of the kids from school. Maybe one of the kids from school who lives on his block. One of those kids he watched the day before. He walks up and down the street and peeks into garages and looks on lawns. But the bikes he sees aren't his, are nothing like his, nowhere near as cool, nowhere near. He walks and walks and when he sees kids he says–Seen My Bike Seen My Bike Seen My Bike? At the edge of one yard, a girl stands attached to her little brother by a long skipping rope. They each have an end tied around their waist, but the brother is lying almost in the road, blubbering, bleeding from a knee, while his sister stands on the grass. The little boy is

wearing a big foam hat and his face is red with crying.

"Seen my bike?" he asks the sister.

"Get off my property," she says, even though he's standing on the sidewalk. She stares at him hard, her eyes like the darkest marbles. She kicks at a dandelion with a flip-flopped foot, the thong jammed up between her long toes. The boy steps off the curb towards where her brother lies on the pavement, a skateboard overturned beside him, holding his knee and sounding like he might never stop crying. The sister steps between them. "Get up," she says to her brother, "and try to stay on this time." She kicks the skateboard along the sidewalk. It spins around upside down and hits her brother in the ribs.

"It's blue, it's blue and new, I just got it," the boy tries again, trying to get the girl's attention.

"Shut up," she says, and steps towards the boy threateningly, pulling her brother a few inches along the sidewalk by the waist as she moves. So he walks away, but slowly and with confidence, knowing she'd have to tow that dead crying weight behind her if she really wanted to get him.

"Fine," he says, when he's a few feet further from her. "Fine, but if I find out you took it, I'll tell my dad." He spits, but his mouth is too dry for an impressive loog. "Shithead!" he adds, moving quickly away.

"Come back here and say that," she yells, straining against the rope and scraping her brother along the pavement a bit more. But the boy is gone. He jogs away, down the block and around the corner.

For the rest of the day, he has similar luck. No one has seen the bike. Or, at least, no one is talking. And all he gets for his efforts is no, no, no, and no signs of anything suspicious. And he sees other kids mounting their own rides and pedaling their own rides. It saddens him. He bites his tongue, tries not to cry. The other kids pedal off into the brightness of the day, leaving him with the taste of blood in the bottom of his mouth, some tears near his eyes. Okay.

Out front of every house he's lived in, his dad has set things up on the porch or the patio, or beneath a set of stairs. There's always been a little barbecue and a boom box that his dad tunes to Rock. There's big, tall, beer cans piled up against a wall out there and a big chair, a lounger, that he's not allowed to sit in. And fifteen-pound weights that his dad lifts when he cranks up the tunes. Here, at this house, in this neighbourhood, like in all the neighbourhoods he's known before, his house is set up a certain way, distinguishing his yard from the others. He's allowed to be out front, with his dad, but not on the big chair and not near the cans–don't knock the cans over. When they get high enough, his dad'll bag them and walk them over to the recycling machine at the nearest beer store. He'll claim his change and buy more beer and start the stack again from ground up.

Now, after this day's search for evidence fails, he stands in front of his

house, amid all this stuff, and he looks at the busted pieces of what used to be his father's boom box. But he doesn't worry about this loss. He walks over to the car in the driveway of his house, an old Camaro that hasn't started since it brought his family to this town. He sits on the up-curve of the back spoiler. He thinks bike, bike, bike. He thinks, he wonders, he puzzles, he reasons, he imagines. All right, he asks himself again–who could be that crappy?

And he thinks, hey, it must have been that guy with the trucks. The guy from down the street who parks three trucks on his lawn, the trucks that get taken apart and put back together, but all seem to work, and never get left in the road or the driveway to die. The guy, this truck guy, that his dad wants to fight. The guy who's gonna get a pounding. The guy whose wife comes down and sits with Dad and Dad gets out the weights and cranks the Rock and they have a couple beers. Or they go in and make the bong smoke. Then the guy drives by in one of his trucks, and he sees them out front and he stops right there, stopped in the middle of the street and he gets out and yells–Motherfucker! Or–Bitch! Depending on who he's looking at. And he takes his wife home in the truck. And then his dad doesn't say anything, he just lifts more barbells and more beers. Later, when his mom gets back from work, Dad will rub her butt by the fridge and whisper to her. Or Uncle Mike will come over and he and Dad'll heat the bong up again and they'll light the barbecue and cook hotdogs. And it'll smell like those hotdogs and propane and weed. And his dad will swear about that guy with the trucks and seem like he's going to go down the street and start something before he sits down in the chair and later passes out.

Eventually, after the Rock is switched off, in the dark, in between snores, there will just be a smell. Then, the boy will lift his short legs to step over the adult limbs. He'll be brave enough to go over and stare at his dad's face, at the chin moving up and down as he breathes, and he'll think about the clench he gets in his jaw when he's mad, when he looks like he might pound somebody. The boy will wander around the bodies out front on the porch and he'll catch a whiff of something. The food and the barbecue and the drugs and nightfall and all the little pools of beer in the bottom of all the stacked cans out there–all these smells will mingle and create a new bad scent. A smell like armpits, feet, the stuff that's been in the fridge since Christmas. A disgusting smell that matches the way he feels about being bikeless.

So it was him. The truck guy came down and took the bike and put it in the back of one of the trucks and Dad got up off the chair and he said–Hey motherfucker! And they fought for it. His dad fought for the bike but the guy was just too much for him or had attack techniques and got away with the bike and hit his dad so hard that he forgot any of it happening. So to him it's a mystery too. That's why he didn't mention it. That's why he

doesn't talk about the bike.

But, the boy thinks, if there was a witness they could say what really happened. They'd tell him that it was the man with the lawn full of trucks. They'd finger him. The witness, his dad, his mom, his uncle, everybody, they'd get together to get him. They'd all march down to his house, to his lawn, past the trucks, up to the front door. And that guy would get an uncle and dad combination beating. And they'd get the bike back and twist his arm and then get the belt out and make him count each smack as they whipped the buckle off his bare sorry ass.

He needs a witness. So he goes to ask the lady across the street if she saw anything. Her house smells like the flowers in her garden, but also too clean, like new shoes. Nothing like his house. He walks right up her front steps, opens the screen door. He knocks twice, then two more times, and stands on her porch until she comes to the door. But she keeps the chain on when she opens it, she eyes him through a narrow crack. And she won't open up for him past that.

He asks around the neighbourhood again, but none of the kids have seen anything. And he knows, now, that he won't be able to expect help from kids or old ladies. Okay, he thinks. There's no witnesses. There's no bike. And, really, there's not much chance that the guy down the street took it. Because who needs bikes when you've got trucks? You can't even use bike parts on your truck or truck parts on your bike. He realizes this; he gets mad. He spits on the sidewalk.

Back in his house, he picks up a beaver pelt that's been sitting on a couch cushion on the floor. He remembers that at Uncle Mike's own house they've got one in the freezer. A Beaver. He saw it–it was the only other time he'd seen one, dead or otherwise. His uncle has a freezer the size of a fridge laid sideways, all full of food. Full of frost and things in boxes and meat from lakes up North and stores down here. And the beaver in it is all together, it's not just the pelt. It has beaver meats and parts frozen on the inside, under the fur, and a gash on a little short leg from a trap and a look on its beaver face like–Oh Damn. It's on some steaks and its tail is stuck between some frozen fish and it has its lame little webbed foot up on some bag of chicken drumsticks. He recalls the frosted furry thing, the cold eyes, there in the freezer.

And suddenly, he is struck with an idea. If a beaver really is a pest, really is as bad as Uncle Mike says, that beaver could do some serious evil. And he knows what happened to his bike–the beaver stole it. Stole it and rode it up north, up to the good fishing lakes, to ride around with its fur bristling in the wind, showing off for other beavers, ruining things more quickly, with a cool set of wheels. He thinks–we need to get some traps around here for the safety of bikes.

He realizes he's still rubbing the pelt. It's warm on his lap and he keeps

touching it and then, suddenly, he hates it. It isn't nice now, it feels like hot badness in his hand. He hears yelling outside, but it is too far away for him to tell which voices are raised. The room is filled with the smell of dried hide and old smoke. And evil. He throws the pelt and he lies on his back and, ever so slowly, falls asleep, dreaming of thieving beavers.

He wakes up in the early early morning, in the dark, on the couch cushion, and realizes that his parents have returned, are sleeping on the cushion-less couch and in an armchair. He tiptoes out of the room. He grabs an old green mesh tank-top from a pile of clothes in his room, for camouflage. He steps outside, out front of the house, out into the night, looking for the beavers that lurk in the shadows. He lies on the lawn as the dew falls. He lies in wait, ready to snag the legs of passing rodents. But, then he falls asleep again, snoozing until dawn when he gets up, wet with dew, and returns to his bed. He tiptoes back through the living room, past his sleeping Mom and Dad.

By noon, he has woken again and scrounges up a breakfast of pop and bread. He realizes something. Okay. So it really couldn't have been a beaver. Because a beaver's legs don't reach long enough from its crotch. Even the big ones. The size of the pelt that he has handled makes this clear and his memory of the freezer beaver makes this obvious. The beaver legs were short as the chicken drumsticks they were perched upon. You can't ride a bike if you can't reach the pedals with your feet. So it wasn't a beaver. All right.

He has the house to himself, so he sits out front in his dad's chair, careful to look around the block first, to make sure no one sees him sneaking a seat in the lounger. He picks up some pieces of boom box, but he can't make them fit together. They seem to have all come from separate machines. He chucks a bowl-shaped speaker out into the yard and it spins unevenly before skipping off the lawn and onto the sidewalk. All right.

The bike must have just taken off. Must have just left. Yeah. Got up and got out of town. Sometimes he called it the Blue Bull–because, vaguely, it looked like the cartoonish bulls on the sides of his dad's stacked beer cans. And, to him it was a Bull. He would wrangle with the handlebars like they were horns, and pop wheelies like they were a violent bucking. So it is not such a big stretch to think that this thing might have actually come alive and galloped off. It could've gone off to find some lady cow.

Okay, but that's the stupidest idea yet, he thinks. The bike is like a bull, yes, except very very different. Like, it's made of metal. Like, it isn't an animal. Like, come on. He gets mad at himself enough to go and throw some rocks up in the air and try to karate-kick them. Then to hit some trees with a stick.

After that, he spends the rest of the day as he has spent the past handful, wandering, worrying. He feels slow on his feet and trapped by the rows of

houses, the rows of dead cars, the blocks of streets. At one point, he sees the girl, the one who he called a shithead, walking along the sidewalk towards him, a rope tied round her waist, again, but with no brother on a skateboard attached to the other end. Where the one end of the skipping rope used to be attached to another waist, it now dangles, torn, trailing along the sidewalk as she walks. She has the skateboard in her hand. He skips between two cars and towards the other side of the road, wondering if maybe the girl's brother is lying in a ditch somewhere, covered in road rash and crying, the rest of the rope still attached to his waist. He imagines the girl running, pulling her brother behind her, then the little boy falling off the board, again and again, until finally being left behind.

And right then, she sees him walking and she skips across to the other side of the road too, to cut him off, so he skips back the other way. She switches direction again too, and is now getting closer and closer to him, so he fakes one way and runs the other, away from her. He thinks about all the things he might yell, but says nothing. She stands in the middle of the road, silent as well, but with menace, and flips him the bird as he runs away, turning her body to face him with her threatening eyes and her skinny finger as he moves down the street. He says nothing. He just keeps moving. He wanders the day away and falls asleep early that night, fitfully.

When he wakes up, he finds his mom in the kitchen, opening and closing cupboards.

"Where's the fucking coffee?" she asks, and he doesn't answer because he doesn't know. He waits for a full minute, until she gives up looking and sits down, then he grabs a box of cereal and pours himself a bowl. He jumps up and sits on a counter. His mom gets up and goes to the fridge.

"Any good news?" he asks.

"What?" she asks with a snap, like the sound of small firecrackers. And she pours milk into the bowl of cereal in his lap.

"You know, phone calls or anything," he says.

And she says, "Fuck no."

He rubs one eye hard with one fist, the other one holding his bowl so the milk doesn't slosh out of it.

"No one called about my bike," he says, and it is not a question, just an empty statement, hollow-sounding, with feeling dug out of it. She says no again, now without the swearing, without the frustration of tone, in a completely different voice than the one she used to answer his first question. And she rubs his head and messes up his hair and tries to give him a hug and moves to get him a spoon that's not burnt. She brings it over and sees the red in his eye from rubbing and she makes this little noise and goes to touch his face. But he's already out of there.

Outside, the sun is just above house level. His stomach feels as though it's been slit, all his guts taken out by the bad luck that's been cleaning him

like a fish. But he collects himself, jams his guts back in. And he's okay. He's not down, despite everything. He's up. He has hope. He has a new sunny day. Okay.

He ends up at his school, sitting on a swing, twisting the chains that support him around in one direction, then the other. All right. So it wasn't a beaver because of size. And that's stupid. It's totally not an actual bull and it totally didn't run off on its own. Because that's even more stupid. It wasn't that his father had been punched so hard that he'd forgotten taking a smack in defense of the bike–because it wasn't the guy with the trucks. There's no witnesses. He stands up, grabs the seat of the swing and throws it. It flies for a second, pulling the chains taut, and then catches, falls, swings back at him with a heavy jangle. He walks away. Okay.

He shuffles back towards home. He can see his front porch as he approaches it, but his dad isn't out there, he's gone. And the spot on the lawn where he used to leave his bike, the back wheel still spinning, there beside the dead Camaro and in front of the porch–this spot is vacant. Who could be that evil? he thinks. Who could be that crappy? Then, out of nowhere, he knows. He isn't hit with the realization, it doesn't strike him, it just wiggles up next to him. It was the guy with the big black car. The Man. The guy who wears matching jump suits. Jump suits that are expensive-looking and sort of shiny, but also soft. The kind that zip up the front, though his only gets half zipped, to let these gold chains hang out in his chest hair. This is the guy who usually comes around to his house like he's on a mission. Like he's a cop, except with a different uniform. Mean like a cop. And, like cops, he's not from the neighbourhood, he sticks out and people notice him, pretend to keep doing whatever it was they were doing, pretend they're not watching him out of the side of their eye. This is the guy who came last week and then again this week. The guy who, now, when he comes, the boy's mom answers the front door and his dad goes out the back. And the boy knows to stay away. This is the guy who is The Man. The Man who, if he's angry, breaks something before he leaves their house. Like when he came over last time. When he picked up his dad's boom box and smashed it down and it blew up, the Rock coming out of it all the way to the ground and then, when it hit, coming out like the singer was a backfiring engine for one chorus worth of sound.

He can see him. The Man visits him sometimes in his mind. He knows that The Man has rings on almost all his fingers and that they shine like the spokes on a new bike or Uncle Mike's hunting knife. He knows that The Man drives up slow and he walks back to his car slow. Leaves in the silent wake of busted things and people hiding out back. Walking away, taking big slow strides, the legs of his jump suit rubbing together and making a slick shifty sound. His chains sliding back and forth across his chest, his chest hair and his half-zipped jacket. Slow. The man's car hum-

ming deeply as he pulls away, his mom standing there shaky and big-eyed on the porch. All right, so it was him.

And he doesn't know how to ask his dad about it, or his mom. No one talks about The Man. And he knows he definitely can't just go up and accuse him. He wouldn't go near him without having weapons or knowing how to take him down hard. The Man could decide the something to break is him. He thinks about maybe talking to Uncle Mike about getting the hunting knife and then going up to the guy with it and saying "Hey Ass." Waving the blade around saying "Hey Ass Give Me My Bike Back." Or, getting some of the beaver traps to set up around the yard to clamp down on the guy's leg and hold him there while the boy searches the big nice black car, looking in the trunk and the back seat for his bike. But he does nothing. He knows he can't do anything.

All morning he tries to concentrate on anything and then tries to ignore everything. Eventually, he gets hungry so he asks his mom for money and she actually gives it to him. But once he has the money, he doesn't really feel like buying chips or pop or Fudgsicles. He just looks at the change, stares at the beaver on the back of a nickel, the tops of his shoes. He sits down on the sidewalk in front of his house. He fingers a hole in the knee of his jeans.

Then, before dusk, his dad comes home with a brand new old boom box and there is Rock again. The radio has hardly any dings in it, is fairly shiny without looking like it just came from a department store. His dad calls it good as new and half the price. And his dad walks the empty old cans to the beer store in a big garbage bag and gets some new ones with the money from the machine. Uncle Mike comes over with full fish, half-frozen, and they cut them open with his knife and throw the guts at the dead Camaro in the driveway. And then they get the barbecue going. They start the bong up too, and when his mom comes home from work they all sit out on the front porch and set the cans in a new bottom row for a new stack as they finish them.

Soon enough, his mom takes off down the street and it's just the guys. His uncle and his dad talk about getting out of the city for a while. Going hunting, trapping, fishing. The boy asks if he could come along, if he could hunt, trap, fish–could get away, get out of the city for a while. But then the men get quieter and the music seems to get louder.

One day soon, maybe the next day, maybe a week away, some time in the middle of that summer, he will walk in the neighbourhood, still looking around for the bike, but now just casually, when he hits him in the side of the head. A sponge football. He turns, and the girl with the skipping rope around her waist is standing right beside him, too close for him to escape. She has him.

"Hey," she says, "loser."

And all he can think to say in reply is "hey," as well. Once again, the skipping rope is wrapped around her waist. She backs him into the middle of the road and stands there, in front of him, her eyes sparkling with something. He waits for the pounding, tensing his muscles for the first hit. But, instead, she hands him her skateboard and turns her back to him. He uses his hands to push his hair over to one side of his head, nervously brushing at it with his fingers while she looks the other way. Then he sets the board down in front of him, steps on, grabs hold of the frayed end of the skipping rope and says, "Go."

She starts to run, dragging him behind her, and he bends his knees deeply and rolls, the wheels bumping along the sand and the small rocks at the edge of the street. He holds tight, keeps low, and she picks up speed, moves to the very middle of the road, where the pavement is flat and clean and the wheels start to spin smoothly. She runs, he coasts. Her flip-flops flip and flop like the drumming at the start of a rock song, before the guitars. When she turns around a corner he arcs out, leaning over to maintain balance, and rolls up beside her. Then, letting go of the rope, he flies off on his own, catapulted, his hair blowing, his duck-tail waving like a little hairy flag. He rides. When he starts to slow, he uses one foot to push off the ground and propel him further, faster. He flies like a kite with no string. Away. Okay. All right.

Contributors

Andrew Binks is a graduate of Queen's University and the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art, and has performed across Canada. He has studied writing at the Banff Centre and UBC. "Johnny Rocket" is one in a series of short fiction entitled *French Stories.* Andrew's recent novel, *The Boy in the Ice*, is about the erotic turmoil of adolescence.

Marcello Di Cintio has had his travel non-fiction appear in *Event*, *Prairie Fire*, and the *Cairo Times.* He is also a two-time delegate to the British Columbia Festival of the Arts, now sadly defunct. His first book, titled *Harmattan: Wind Across West Africa*, was published in 2002 by Insomniac Press.

Jay Dolmage, a student, lives in Ohio and Toronto. Some of his stories are in magazines like *Kiss Machine*, *The Gingko Tree Review*, *Tart* and *The New Quarterly.* He sings in the band Finishing School. He rides a bike–a red one–so fast.

Cornelia Haeussler lives in Williams Lake, BC, where she works as a water technician for the provincial government. She has published poems most recently in *Grain*, *The Malahat Review*, *Prairie Fire*, and *Other Voices.*

Jack Illingworth was born in Crooks Township in northwestern Ontario, although he now spends too much of his time in Toronto. He is a contributing editor at *Maisonneuve* and a regular contributor to *Books in Canada.* Excerpts from *Panography* have appeared in *Matrix* and *Grain.* His newest chapbook is *The Writings of Noah Job JAMUUNDSEN on the Passenger Pigeon*, which was written with Melissa Weinstein of Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Michael Kenyon divides his time between Vancouver and Pender Island. His first published story was in PRISM 20:4. His latest story collection is *Durable Tumblers* (Oolichan Books, 1996). He's currently working on a novel and a sequence of Samurai poems.

James Marshall lives and writes in BC. He is currently working on a collection of short stories.

Gordon Mason was brought up in the West of Scotland. His poems have been published widely and won international prizes. His forth collection, *On Stony Ground*, is due out shortly from Peterloo Poets. Work-in-progress is the collection *Sailing on Glass*. He has taught high school in England and America and advised teachers in India and Nepal.

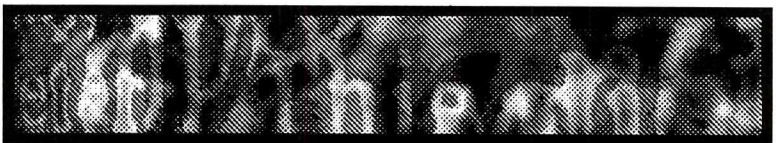
Sharon McCartney's work has appeared previously in PRISM *international* (most recently in 39:3 Spring 2001) and in *The Malahat Review*, *Event*, *Queen's Quarterly*, *Queen Street Quarterly*, *sub-TERRAIN*, *Geist*, *Prairie Fire* and elsewhere. Her second collection of poetry, *Karenin Sings the Blues*, is forthcoming from Goose Lane Editions.

Andrew Pommier currently lives in Toronto with a girl named Tiffany and a dog that goes by the name of Raina. He draws and paints. He shows his paintings around town. In Febuary he's showing in Munich and San Francisco. Andrew has done graphics for Momentum Wheel Co. and Atticus Scout clothing.

Mary Schendlinger is a Vancouver writer, editor and illustrator. As Eve Corbel, she is the illustrator of *Guests in Your Garden*, and author/illustrator of *The Little Greenish-Brown Book of Slugs* and more than thirty short graphic narratives in various periodicals and anthologies. She is senior editor at *Geist* and has served as editor on many projects, including the *Encyclopedia of British Columbia*. She is also a sessional instructor at Simon Fraser University.

Kim Trainor, originally from Vancouver, moved to Montreal three years ago to study at McGill University. She is currently writing her dissertation on feminist poetics. She is also working on a collection of short stories and a work of creative non-fiction called *A Book of Belonging*. "I Am Calling You" is her first published story.

Jan Zwicky's most recent collection of poetry is *Songs for Relinquishing the Earth*. *Wisdom and Metaphor* will appear from Gaspereau Press this fall.



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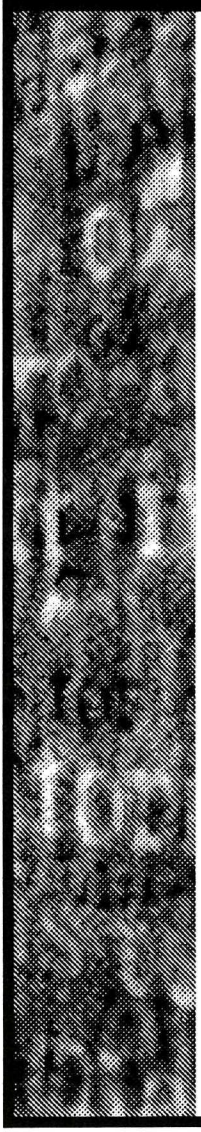

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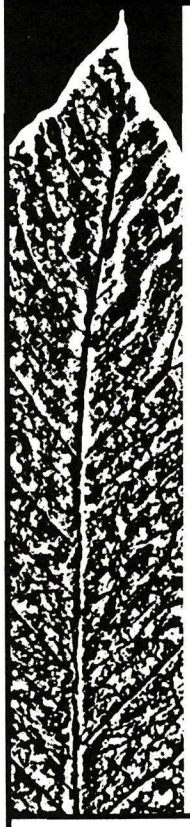

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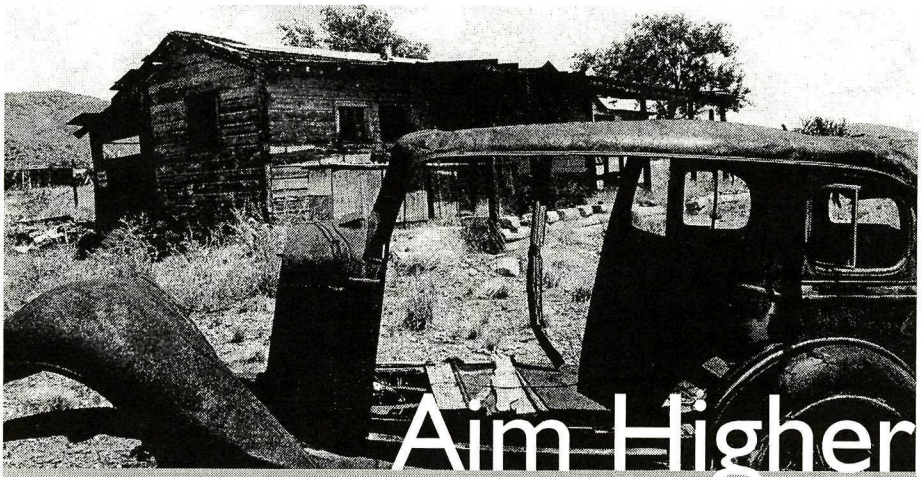
The winning entries in each category will receive a $500 cash prize and will be published in our Fall 2003 issue. First runner-up in each category will be published in a future issue of subTerrain.

SEND ENTRIES TO: Lush Triumphant, subTerrain Magazine, PO Box 3008, MPO, Vancouver, BC V6B 3X5
All entries MUST be previously unpublished material and not currently under consideration in any other contest or competition. Entries will NOT be returned (so, keep a copy for yourself). Results of the competition will be announced in the Summer 2003 issue of the magazine. All entrants receive a complimentary one-year subscription to subTerrain.



Aim Higher

Enter Arc's Poem of the Year Contest
Get Higher Recognition

First Prize $1000
Second Prize $750, Third Prize $500

Winners' poems published in *Arc* and posted on *Arc*'s web site

Two Honourable Mentions and up to seven Editors' Choices also published

Authors and titles of the final 50 poems posted on *Arc*'s web site

A one-year subscription to *Arc* for entering

Entry fee: $19 for up to 4 poems
each poem 100 lines long or less

Send your entries to:
Arc, Box 7219, Ottawa, Ontario, K1L 8E4
For complete rules, consult
www.cyberus.ca/~arc.poetry
Deadline: June 30, 2003 (postmarked)

ARC
CANADA'S NATIONAL
POETRY MAGAZINE

EVENT

new & established writers

Creative Non-Fiction Contest #16

$1,500

Three winners will each receive $500 plus payment for publication in *Event* 32/3. Other manuscripts may be published.

Final Judge: TBA. Our past judges include Myrna Kostash, Eleanor Wachtel, Andreas Schroeder, George Galt, Sharon Butala, Tom Wayman, Di Brandt, Terry Glavin and Karen Connelly.

Writers are invited to submit manuscripts exploring the creative non-fiction form. Check your library for back issues of *Event* with previous winning entries and judges' comments. Contest back issues are available from *Event* for $5.35 (includes GST and postage; US$5 for American residents; C$9 for overseas residents).

Note: Previously published material, or material accepted elsewhere for publication, cannot be considered. Maximum entry length is 5000 words, typed, double-spaced. The writer should not be identified on the entry. Include a separate cover sheet with the writer's name, address, phone number / email, and the title(s) of the story (stories) enclosed. Include a SASE (Canadian postage / IRCs /US$1). Douglas College employees are not eligible to enter.

Entry fee: Multiple entries are allowed, however, *each* entry must be accompanied by a $25 entry fee (includes GST and a one-year subscription; make cheque or money order payable to *Event*). Those already subscribing will receive a one-year extension. American and overseas entrants please pay in US dollars.

Deadline for entries: Postmarked April 15, 2003.

EVENT The Douglas College Review
P.O. Box 2503, New Westminster, BC
Canada V3L 5B2
Phone: (604) 527-5293 Fax: (604) 527-5095
e-mail: event@douglas.bc.ca

Douglas College

Visit our website at http://event.douglas.bc.ca

Fiction/Poetry/Drama/Translation/Creative Nonfiction

41:2

You know when you eat corn on the cob, and you get a bunch of stuff stuck between your teeth, and you lick at it, and you suck at it, but no matter how hard you try, you can never get it out? Guilt is a lot like that.

—James Marshall, Page 33

Andrew Binks
Marcello Di Cintio
Jay Dolmage
Cornelia Haeussler
Jack Illingworth
Michael Kenyon
James Marshall
Gordon Mason
Sharon McCartney
Kim Trainor
Jan Zwicky

2002 Maclean Hunter Endowment Award for Literary Nonfiction

Judge's Essay:
Mary Schendlinger

GENUINE CANADIAN MAGAZINE

Cover Art:
George
by Andrew Pommier

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