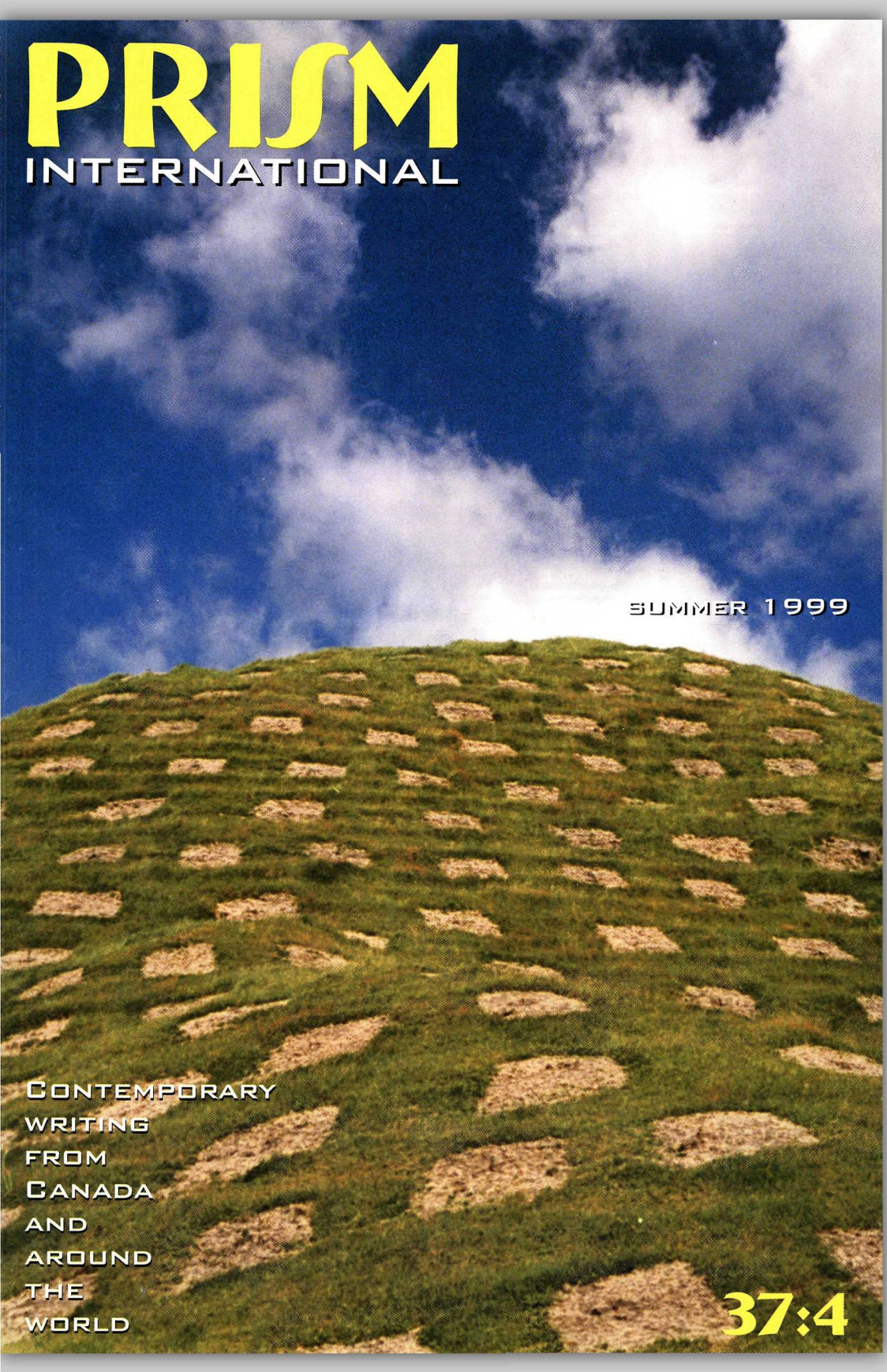
PRISM
INTERNATIONAL
SUMMER 1999
CONTEMPORARY
WRITING
FROM
CANADA
AND
AROUND
THE
WORLD
37:4

PRISM INTERNATIONAL

1998 SHORT FICTION CONTEST WINNERS

GRAND PRIZE - $2,000

"Talking With His Hands"
Sue Walsh, Victoria, British Columbia

RUNNERS-UP - $200 each

"Audhumla's Breath"
Kate Small, El Cerrito, CA, USA

"Strange Cold Storm"
Kate Small, El Cerrito, CA, USA

"The Premier's New Pyjamas"
John Lavery, Gatineau, Quebec

"Dogheart"
Sinclair James, Williamsburg, MS, USA

"Brebeuf and Lalemont"
K.D. Miller, Toronto, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

"China"
Sue Walsh, Victoria, British Columbia

"A Day's Walk"
Barbara Mulstein, Toronto, Ontario

Congratulations to the winners and a hearty thank you to all those who entered. By special request we are listing the finalists: Lisa Thompson, Norma J. Lundberg, Barbara Nickel, Matthew Brian Pitt, Natalia Rachel Singer, Billie Livingston, Marilyn Gear Pilling, M.M. De Voe, Nodar Djin and Agnes Charlene McDermott.

PRISM INTERNATIONAL

Editors
Jeremiah Aherne
Natalie D. Meisner

Executive Editor
Emily Snyder

Buisness Manager
Laisha Rosnau

Associate Editors
Jennica Harper
Kiera Miller

Advertising Manager
Bob Wakulich

Advisory Editors
Andrew Gray
Jennifer Herbison

Promotion Manager
Leanne Prain

Production Manager
Jennifer Herbison

Editorial Board
Kevin Armstrong
Pete Atherton
Taylore Daniel
Alison Frost
Charlotte Gill
Kuldip Gill
Nancy Lee
Krista LePage
Anthony Schrag

Second Readers

Théo Armstrong
Catharine Chen
Shauna Fowler
Heather Frechette
Linda Hargrave
Kim Minkus
Susan MacRae
Peter Norman
Leanne Prain
Lottie Price
Adam Schroeder
Katrina Sedaros
Leslie Timmins

First Readers

David Bova
Penny Cholmondeldy
Ross Degan
Pam Galloway
Michael Garza
Ruby Kadey
Jeff Morris
Julie Lees
Susan Little
Andrea Macpherson
Stephanie Marrisevic
Carolyn McIntosh
Kimberly O'Donnell

PRISM *international*, a magazine of contemporary writing, is published four times per year by the Creative Writing Program at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z1. Microfilm editions are available from University Microfilms Inc., Ann Arbor, MI, and reprints from the Kraus Reprint Corporation, New York, NY. The magazine is listed by the Canadian Literary Periodicals Index.

E-mail: prism@interchange.ubc.ca
Website: www.arts.ubc.ca/prism

Contents Copyright © 1999 PRISM *international* for the authors.

Cover photo: *Untitled*, by Mike Craig.

One-year individual subscriptions $16.00; two-year subscriptions $24.00; library and institution subscriptions $22.00; two-year subscriptions $36.00; sample copy $5.00. Canadians add 7% G.S.T.

All manuscripts should be sent to the Editors at the above address. Manuscripts should be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope with **Canadian** stamps or **International Reply Coupons**. Manuscripts with insufficient return postage will be held for six months and then discarded. Translations should be accompanied by a copy of the work(s) in the original language. E-mail contributors should contact us for electronic submission guidelines. The Advisory Editors are not responsible for individual selections, but for the magazine's overall mandate including continuity, quality, and budgetary obligations.

PRISM *international* purchases First North American Serial Rights for $40.00 per page for poetry and $20.00 per page for other genres. Contributors receive a one-year subscription. PRISM *international* also purchases limited digital rights for selected work, for which it pays an additional $10.00 per page.

Our gratitude to Dean Shirley S. Neuman and the Dean of Arts' Office at the University of British Columbia.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Canada Council ($16,000) and the Government of British Columbia through the Ministry of Small Business, Tourism, and Culture.

Thank you to our donors, Cherie and Julian B. Smith, and to the P.E. Fund.

Publications Mail Registration No. 08867. August 1999.

THE CANADA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS SINCE 1957 | LE CONSEIL DES ARTS DU CANADA DEPUIS 1957

BRITISH COLUMBIA ARTS COUNCIL
Supported by the Province of British Columbia

Contents

Vol. 37, No. 4 Summer 1999

1998 SHORT FICTION CONTEST WINNERS

Judge's Essay

Greg Hollingshead Arbitrary Measures 7

Fiction

Sue Walsh Talking With His Hands 9
K.D. Miller Brebeuf and Lalemont 19
Kate Small Audhumla's Breath 30
John Lavery The Premier's New Pyjamas 41
Sinclair James Dogheart 52
Barbara Mulstein A Day's Walk 58
Kate Small Strange Cold Storm 74
Sue Walsh China 81

Contributors

89

Greg Hollingshead

Arbitrary Measures

If you can't be just be arbitrary.

—William S. Burroughs

Nothing necessarily wrong with an arbitrary decision. In Latin an *arbiter* is someone called in to provide a decision. There are no rules appropriate or the rules aren't working, so somebody arrives to make the call. Arbitrary threatens in an automatic way to be capricious or perverse only when the rules are already being too strongly believed in. But fiction is art. In fiction the rules are cobbled theories about how readers might be kept reading, that is, how they might have been kept reading at some imagined time in the past. Which is to say, they are not rules at all.

When there are no rules, justice does not apply.

As a reader I have only one criterion. It is very simple and completely arbitrary: Do the words engage me? In this, I guess, I've been sent from the Carver School. This is how he said it: "That's all we have, finally, the words, and they had better be the right ones...so that they can best say what they are meant to say. If the words are heavy with the writer's own unbridled emotions, or if they are imprecise and inaccurate for some other reason—if the words are in any way blurred—the reader's eyes will slide right over them and nothing will be achieved. The reader's own artistic sense will simply not be engaged."

My own artistic sense was consistently engaged, my eye held, by eight of the stories I was forwarded. No sliding, no blurring. Each of these eight stories is extraordinary.

The ranking was a thousand times harder than choosing the eight, but fortunately this process too is completely arbitrary, and therefore was made possible—though of course never just—simply by going back to the stories again and again, reading and rereading, and so spending more and more time with some of the richness of what was achieved.

This arbiter has been asked to provide one winner and five runners-up. I also here provide two Honourable Mentions.

The winning story is Sue Walsh's "Talking With His Hands." It's an emotionally pitch-perfect parable of cultural difference and family connection.

The runners-up, any one of which in only a very slightly removed parallel universe would have won, are Kate Small's "Audhumla's Breath," a packet of intelligently rendered, grittily comic snapshots, appalling and hilarious, from the life of young-immigrant urban America, and also her "Strange Cold Storm," a dark gathering of vignettes that evoke a hellish place I recognize but can't locate; John Lavery's "The Premier's New Pyjamas," which enters with brightness and warmth into queer territory to address issues of love, power, communication, and betrayal; Sinclair James' "Dogheart," a tale that is comic, lyrical, erotic, and strange in unusual proportions; and K.D. Miller's "Brebeuf and Lalemont," which takes us directly and memorably into the head of a child as she watches her parents stumble to disaster.

The Honourable Mentions: Barbara Mulstein's "A Day's Walk," an original, telling depiction of a woman's mind at the end of a marriage; and Sue Walsh's "China," a cry of pain from a bitter young man passed over by his mentor.

These eight are the ones I loved, finally, the most. All are by intelligent writers who have created generous worlds that provided room for this reader to enter in and move around. If there were rules being followed they remain invisible. I felt free to pass what judgements I pleased, but these writers never let me forget that everything and nothing they do with language is arbitrary.

Thank you all very much for your gifts.

Sue Walsh

Talking With His Hands

When Cyrus wrote that he was soon to be married and would not be returning home to Keimoes, his father did not reply for two months. When the letter finally came, Petrus Leshoa asked his son only this: "What must I now do with this house I have built for you?"

Cyrus had not thought about the house the four years he'd been in the States. He did not consider it his. That his father built it for him now made some sense; Petrus was a man who spoke with his hands. Realizing this made it more difficult. Cyrus could not tell his father that he finally understood, could not explain that the gesture made little difference. He could not bring Chlaris home.

Keimoes township and its small cinder-brick houses sat on the edge of the crack-hard Kalahari. Should he write again and tell his father he was surrounded by lush, green firs—that things grew up without effort out of the soft, dark ground? It would mean nothing to him. Cyrus could only explain in a few carefully written lines that his new wife was white. This he knew his father would understand.

Cyrus did not receive a single word from home the first year he was in America. It was 1973. In the months before leaving, he tried to show his family on a map how many days it would take—first in a bus and then in one, two, three airplanes. The Aga Khan Foundation wanted to sponsor an underprivileged but promising student from black South Africa. When the selection committee asked Cyrus at nineteen years of age why he should be allowed to study overseas, he explained that he didn't want to work with his hands all his life—he wanted to use his head to help people. When he said the same thing to his father, Petrus nodded and replied that Cyrus was clever enough to find office work in nearby Upington, or even as far as Kimberley. Why would he want to travel any further?

Seattle was another world away. Cyrus found the people there as soft and giving as the soil. He lived, ate and studied in the dark, moist basement of an old man who charged him no rent. In his third year of studying psychology, he bought two pairs of second-hand blue jeans, a red corduroy jacket and let his hair grow out three inches—there had been little time for pleasure. When a pretty girl invited him to a party, Cyrus tore the cellophane off the pale blue dress shirt his father had given him, tucked it loosely into his jeans and pulled on a pair of brown cowboy boots he'd found

at the Salvation Army. They made him stand six feet tall.

Chlaris was the most beautiful thing Cyrus saw when he walked into the room. Her long halter dress curved out like a bell from just under her breasts and in the dim, orange light her hair ran honeylike down her bare back. He would smile and tell her years later she'd looked naked to him—that he imagined he could see right through her clothes in the ochre light and felt a bit ashamed. Every winter since then Cyrus watched her bury herself in sweaters and heavy skirts, and every spring he saw her peel them off layer by layer until she stood in the doorway of their bedroom, bare as he'd first seen her. This was her most natural state.

***

What Chlaris confessed to her husband just months after they were married was that she begged her friend Nancy to invite him to the party. She'd seen Cyrus eating slowly in the university cafeteria; she'd noticed him walking alone over wide green fields; she'd caught a glimpse of him jumping off the number three bus. After the party she took his long arms and wrapped them around her waist. She ran her palms up his crisp, new shirt, rubbed the stiff collar between her thumb and forefinger. Then she closed her eyes and put her nose to his warm, dark chest. It stayed this way.

At the wedding she remembered dancing just so in his arms, wearing a creamy chiffon gown. Cyrus picked out a brown velvet suit and a yellow carnation. The four-piece band played the Bee Gees—*breaking us down, when they all should let us be; we belong to you and me.*

It was weeks before Chlaris sat down and thought back on the wedding—about who had and had not come. A handful of friends had just not shown up. *A world of fools.* It was then too that she really realized Cy had still not heard from his family.

"It does not matter," he said to her, his smooth lip curling, twitching. "My father was always away when I was growing up."

"But why?" Her own father flew in from an assignment somewhere in South America. Stood at the microphone in his best suit and ruffled shirt and made a horrible speech.

Chlaris felt she'd been told very little about Cy's family. His father, she knew, was a bricklayer; his mother, a young woman of a different race. She had died of scarlet fever when Cyrus was three, Cy being raised mostly by his grandfather, the black minister of Keimoes Baptist Mission. When she asked once just how much he'd seen of his father over the years, Cyrus replied casually, "Between the building jobs...little bit here, little bit there." And when she wanted to know about his mother, he insisted he had no memory of her, that his father had only the one picture, and that he could not remember her full name or when he had last seen her face. Apart from this, she knew nothing. It was all done with mirrors, Chlaris decided. So carefully concealed in the dark. When she reached a hand into his soul, she

found nothing there. She could only piece together the small fragments he let her have, the tiny shards that chipped off and fell to the ground.

"It's not that I don't have a father, Chlaris," he once said, reaching up with one hand to change a dead light bulb. "You think I am an orphan? He just did not live with us after my mother died."

And now, all these years later, this father—the man Chlaris saw in her mind as silent and dusty and dark—was coming to visit them in Vancouver for three months. She had no words. No words for this person who'd said nothing to her over the years—a man who had not even noted the births of his own son's children—Chad and then little Alicia and now Julius.

She sat on a bench at Vancouver International, gently pressing the baby's clammy hands between her own, reaching up to adjust her thin cotton blouse. Chad and 'Licia were counting the green tiles that seemed to swim on the beige floor. The green ones, Chad told her, were islands; there were crocodiles all around in the water. "Lift up your feet, Mommy, or they'll get you."

Mommy. The word came so easily to her children. It rolled so easily off her own tongue when she spoke to her mother. What would she call Petrus Leshoa? There were strict rules among Cy's people about such things. Cyrus found it almost impossible at first in America, and later Canada, to call older people by their first names. He'd given her an African word to use for his father, but it felt thick on her tongue. Her voice squeaked when she said it.

Chlaris looked over at Cy. Tall as he stood, he strained, trying to look around the corner of a flat glass window. The six-thirty from Gatwick was just now being announced. Cyrus turned, looked at her and smiled. A small boy. He had called the airline twice that afternoon. Chlaris nodded and smiled in return; yes, the plane was on time. Then she turned Julius around to feed from her right breast, moving the light paisley shawl from one shoulder to the other. Cyrus called the children over to him. The two came running and flopped down on the luggage cart, vying for position. He bent down, speaking gently, the two dark heads bobbing in agreement. Chlaris rose slowly.

***

For Cyrus it had been months and years. Four years since he'd been back to see his family; six months since he'd written to ask his father to visit in return. He expected nothing, but a letter came within five weeks: "Mr. Mathaba on the corner now has a telephone. I am no longer finding work. If you ring there, we can make the arrangements." And, "I have put a good wire fence around your house this year."

Cyrus first saw the finished house when he returned to Keimoes in '81. The materials were all familiar. His father had collected them all through Cy's teenage years: scrap lumber thrown aside on a job site, old window

casings removed to be replaced, mismatched bricks piled in heaps—all hauled away on a donkey cart and stored by his father under sacks and plastic. Once Cy settled in from his journey, his father showed him proudly through every square inch of wall, floor and ceiling, as though it were a mansion. Cyrus held out a photo to his father of Chlaris and the two children—chubby little Chad holding onto his mother's calf, and Alicia, just a baby then, resting on her other hip. Chlaris's hair was drawn back into a braid, her short legs covered in a batik skirt. The picture was taken on the steps of their old-wood Kitsilano home the day they moved in. Petrus held it at a distance. "It is a strange thing," he said to his son, after a while. "Pictures can lie." Cyrus carried this moment like a snapshot in his mind.

In the airport now, he was surprised by his own mood. The anticipation had been too much; it was beyond feeling. Cy was quite sure he could climb into his car and drive down to the beach for an ice-cream instead. But he had waited for this moment. He had imagined and rehearsed and anticipated every thing his father might say, planned the journey from Keimoes to Kimberley to Johannesburg to London to Vancouver. Cy wanted nothing to go wrong. He knew exactly how overwhelming the trip would be for his father, who only ever traveled by foot or on the back of a rattling pick-up truck. The airlines assured him that Mr. Leshoa would be treated with the highest level of care, and handed from one steward to an air hostess to an airport official and so on.

Passengers started appearing between the smoked-glass Arrivals doors. Chad and Alicia stood up, and Chlaris came to his side, now burping the baby. Cyrus could hear his own blood rushing through his head; everything else becoming muffled. He expected at any moment for his father to walk cautiously through the door. He expected to smell his smell, of cement dust and coal smoke. To see his old brown coat folded neatly over one arm.

"Mr. Leshoa?" Someone tapped his shoulder. "Mr. Leshoa?"

Cyrus turned. An air hostess stood smiling behind an airport wheelchair. He looked down. His father was already struggling to get up, his feet getting caught in the metal footrests.

"Pa...oh, Pa." Cyrus gripped his father's elbow with one arm, and both his hands with the other. "I see you... It is good to see you." This all in Sesotho. His father felt weak in his arms but just as tall as he remembered. They would stand eye to eye. Cy drew back to look at his face. The skin was dry, the eyes tired and bloodshot. His father stared over his shoulder, stunned, at Chlaris and the baby.

"Pa, this is my wife...these are your children." But the old man could not stop looking at the woman in front of him. Chlaris turned her head slightly, then stepped forward and took the old man's hand. She greeted him quietly. Leshoa bowed slightly, nodded, turned back to his son.

"I think I must sit down again," he said.

***

Chlaris sat barefoot in her living room, knitting and watching TV. It was Saturday afternoon and very warm outside. The V-neck sweater was for Cyrus, knitted in coarse aubergine mohair. It stuck to her damp skin. She had pulled it out of a trunk just an hour ago, at a loss for something to do. It was a project she'd started the winter she was pregnant with 'Licia, and Chad was so clingy. Two days had passed since Petrus Leshoa's arrival. She'd started calling him Petrus in her head. Things had been quiet and dark.

When they got home from the airport Thursday night, Petrus asked only for a strong cup of tea and a slice of bread. He then washed and went straight to sleep. There was a small porch bedroom, which Cyrus had set up for his dad, installing cheap, white blinds to give him privacy. The next morning, Cy went to check on his father. The bed was still made up. His father lay stretched out covered only by a small, green blanket he'd brought from home. Chlaris was furious and asked why he could not sleep in the bed they'd prepared for him. Cyrus sat down heavily on a kitchen chair and explained it was customary for traveling men to carry their own covers.

Chlaris worked the whole of the Friday, as she did every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Cyrus consulted from home on these days, scheduling appointments between walking Chad to and from school. That evening when she returned from the office, Petrus stood in the kitchen talking with his son. As she came in, Chlaris slipped off her linen jacket, wiggled off her high heels, and undid the silk scarf holding her fine hair back. Then she rolled a tube of drawings onto the kitchen counter and kissed Cyrus, who was frying onions.

"Hello, my Sister Golden Hair," he said to her, sliding an arm around her shoulder. He brushed a few strands from her cheek with the back of his hand. Chlaris turned to greet Petrus, who was still standing. He seemed to be looking right through her.

"Please sit," she said. "Please be at home."

And so it had been. Moments of politeness, gestures of awkward grace. That night they ate the kind of food Cyrus occasionally made "from home"—stiff cornmeal porridge, and beef smothered in tomato and onions. The children ate pizza.

Chlaris woke the next morning feeling strangely light and buoyant. After breakfast, they all climbed into the pale green station wagon to go sightseeing. She sat with the children, her hair blowing out over the back seat, watching Cy's eyes in the rear-view mirror. They looked peaceably back at her, then straight ahead out at the traffic, then sideways over to his father. As they drove through Stanley Park the firs loomed over their heads, shading the road. Cy's father looked mostly across

the water, out past Siwash Rock, past Prospect Point. It was the first time he'd seen the ocean. Cyrus asked him quick questions Chlaris could not understand. Petrus turned occasionally, making simple observations for her benefit in English: The water, it looks so... In Keimoes, not so many clouds... This is a very good car. Chlaris was pleased, if a little embarrassed by the effort. He'd started smiling at Chad and Alicia too.

When they returned, Cyrus went downstairs into the office. He was one of the few counselors in the city who scheduled weekend hours because it gave him a chance during the week to spend time with his children. By lunchtime, all the clouds had disappeared, and the sun was high and hot. Chlaris put on a loose-fitting sundress and went out into the back garden where she found Petrus watching the two kids climb the arbutus next to the split-pole fence.

"This tree," he said to her, rolling his sleeves back fold upon fold, "should be in Keimoes."

Chlaris looked at the colours of the tree, the peeling bark, and saw exactly what he meant. She'd seen pictures of the dry, inland terrain. They stood a while and watched Chad hang upside-down from a sturdy branch. Alicia rode her tricycle in small circles around his head. Petrus chuckled. Chlaris smiled.

She sat now, half watching a TV game show in the living room. Her needles clicked just out of sync with the tick-tock timer on the show; the buzzer rang. Petrus sat on the long, tan sofa to her left. He, too, had come in from the heat. She wondered briefly what he thought of what he saw on the screen. The man with the broad, striped tie had just won five thousand dollars. He shouted and pumped his fists above his head. Then he leaned over, grabbed and kissed the game-show assistant, a brunette with Lady Diana hair and a strapless mauve dress. Petrus shifted slightly in his seat. He folded his hands over his lap.

When Chlaris first saw him, she too had stood and stared. Petrus looked almost exactly like his son, but thinner and two or so shades darker. This was partly due to working in the sun all his life. It was also because Cyrus had been born with his mother's complexion, a pale cardamom brown. Other children teased Cy when he was young, said his nose looked like that of a chicken, and that he should go back where his mother was from—to coolie town. Cyrus told her this once as she kissed a bare shoulder and traced the shape of his face with her eyes open. He never mentioned it again.

Chlaris was startled by a high cry; baby Julius was waking. She set the knitting aside, went through to his crib. When she brought him back into the living room she found Chad and 'Licia, sitting on either side of Petrus. A flat, green Lego board balanced on his knees and the two were taking turns passing him bricks of varying colours. Petrus sorted them slowly in

his big, flat hand, then laid them one by one, layer by layer.

"This is how the door opens," said Alicia, pinching the little doorknob between her thumb and forefinger. Petrus tried to open it himself, but his thumb was too big and rough and pushed the yellow door in. Chad pressed it back in place and offered to show his grandfather how to make the sloping, red roof. Petrus Leshoa had never seen a roof made of bricks.

***

Late Sunday morning Cyrus took his father down to Fitson's Lumber World. At breakfast they'd argued whether the store would be open or not. Cyrus insisted *he* should know. Inside Fitson's his father walked slowly behind, looking from left to right, touching ornate handles and sets of shiny screwdrivers, calling to his son who walked quickly ahead to get what he needed. They'd come for cement.

The low stone wall was to run along the back length of the small property. It would end just under the arbutus tree. Cyrus wanted a concrete and wood bench built right into the corner. He watched his father's face as a young man with a blonde ponytail wheeled a dolly load of cement up to the cash register.

"Do you need a hand out to your car, sir?" Cyrus shook his head and hand, turned to pay the cashier.

"That'll be fifty-eight seventy-five," she said. As he reached down into his pants, his father put a heavy brass doorknob down on the wooden counter and reached into his pocket also.

"What you want with this?" Cyrus picked it up.

"It is to take home. I like this one. It is for my house...the house in Keimoes."

Cyrus shook his head.

"Will that be together?" the cashier asked.

"Yes, yes...together," muttered Cy. "Both together." He waved his father's hand away and gave the woman his credit card. In the car going home Petrus grumbled that he had his own money. Not for buying doorknobs with, Cyrus replied.

Chlaris and the children had left earlier that morning to spend the day with her parents in Sechelt. They would all return in the early evening to barbecue together. Her mother and father were looking forward to meeting Petrus Leshoa.

Cy took his father down into the basement. The old man was intrigued by this other layer, down below the rest of the house. Cy showed him through the laundry room and into his office. He pointed out the tall shelves of psychology books and reference manuals, the telephone answering machine with its blinking red light. Petrus nodded, looked unimpressed. What interested him most was that the house was made of wood. Cyrus took him to a spot on the laundry room ceiling where the drywall had

been stripped away. Petrus ran his thick fingers along the pipes running above his head, then laid a hand on a low-hanging beam as he ducked underneath and into the garage.

"This wood here, it is not level," he said to Cyrus, patting the beam. Cy grunted. Petrus stood to one side, closed an eye and squinted along the length of it. "Can we make this thing straight?" Cyrus did not hear him. He stood staring at the plastic sheeting covering the pile of stones he'd had delivered the week before. "I am telling you, this is not level," insisted Petrus. Cyrus looked up at his father. "It is not straight. Your house is not straight."

Cyrus pulled his pants higher up his thighs and bent down on his haunches. "Nothing in this place is level, Pa. Nothing is straight," then added, "These houses, they are all old." Petrus nodded. Cy pulled back the sheeting.

Later they stood looking at the problem; the soil was layered with old oyster shells. When they began, just a little after two, Cyrus asked whether they would need a sketch to work from. His father chuckled, shook his head, asked for a ball of string and a hammer. Then he took an armful of short kindling from the woodpile under the deck.

"Just show me how you want it," he said. Twenty minutes later, the whole thing was pegged out, and the two men began digging, each from one end. Half a foot down, the shells began to show. Cyrus could feel his shovel hitting them, chipping their edges, breaking them apart. He bent down and picked one up. On the outside it was rough, on the inside pearly smooth. When he turned it over in the light he saw faint touches of pink and blue and green.

"Your mother," said his father. Cyrus looked up from the shell to his father bent down low. "Your mother, she always wanted me to make a house." Cyrus stood still and breathed slowly through his nose, hearing the words in his native language. He remembered living with his grandfather at the Keimoes Mission—how everything smelled of floor wax and paraffin. Beyond this, he remembered nothing of a home. "She wanted a house built away from the others." Over the years Cyrus had come to doubt this mother ever existed. Still, he knew there must have been a woman who birthed him into the world, who fed him at her breast, perhaps sang him songs she knew.

"What was her name?"

His father stood up slowly, put his foot down on the blade of his shovel, leaned over on the handle. He stared at the round tip of his gumboot for a long time. "Her name was Saira Patel." Cyrus sat down on the grass.

***

When Chlaris returned home with her parents and children, her husband took hold of her shoulders in his muddy hands and kissed her hard. Her

mother hugged Cyrus's middle and teased that he was putting on weight, then gathered up her two eldest grandchildren to put them in the bathtub.

Cyrus put out his hand to her dad. "Come through to the back and meet my father, Bill." Chlaris smiled. Cyrus had learned to meet force with force when it came to her father. Bill Strumble had spent his life working in the battle zones of the world as a logistician—Cambodia, Afghanistan, South America, the Horn of Africa. Her mother had sometimes gone with him. Once, after the birth of her first grandchild and two gin and tonics, Felicity whispered loudly to Cyrus that Chlaris was conceived in a pup-tent on Lake Malawi. The humour of this revelation—the vision of her parents fumbling under the African stars—had been lost on Cyrus. Chlaris wondered, as she tore lettuce into a colander, why there were things parents felt they could not say to their children.

Through the kitchen window she now watched Petrus struggle to his feet to greet her father. They were, she knew, roughly the same age. The discussion, from where she stood, soon seemed to turn to the half-dug pit along the back fence. Chlaris noticed a great deal of nodding, pointing and hands set on hips. Her father began pacing up and down the yard counting, his short, bowed body a curious shape next to the two tall men. Cyrus interjected, strode along the same line and counted out louder; she could hear the numbers now. Petrus took two steps back and leaned on the fence.

The following morning, Cyrus was gone before Chlaris or the baby woke up. Pale sunlight streamed in the laundry window. On the kitchen counter lay the remains of the night before. Chad and Alicia were still asleep. Chlaris made coffee and went out into the garden barefoot.

"I did not hear you coming."

"I know," said Chlaris. "I didn't see you 'till I lifted my head." The two smiled. Petrus stood up straight, his eyes caught in a band of sunshine. She stepped lightly over the string boundary and wiped the wetness off a low arbutus branch. She often sat out here summer mornings when the air was cool and moist. "I am sorry about my dad." Petrus nodded, and inched his shovel under an unyielding shell. He struggled to pry it loose. "I'm afraid that's the way he is," she said.

The shovel slipped. Petrus let out a gasp. "Gah! This thing is too hard." Chlaris frowned. He began again. "It's not much more now," he said, chipping away bit by bit. He looked up at her sitting in the early light filtering through the leaves. "This digging...will make a strong underneath."

She put her head to one side, looked along the length of the hole. "The foundation?"

"Ja." And after a while. "That name—the name that my son has for you."

Chlaris turned to face him in the dappled light, and thought for a bit. "Sister Golden Hair?" She laughed. "It's from a song...the night I met Cyrus—

long time ago now."

"Long time?"

Chlaris shrugged. For a while, there was only the sound of the spade chopping soil. Then he spoke.

"This tree...does it give fruit?"

"This one? This tree?" she asked. "The arbutus?" Petrus nodded, carried on chopping. "Not that you can eat. Why do you ask?"

"You look like the spirit of my wife." The chopping stopped dead.

Petrus Leshoa stood up tall. "When I married my wife, I was waiting to marry her for eight years. I keep her face in front of my eyes. When I saw you in the airport...when I see you now..." He sniffed, tapped the spade three times on its side to loosen a clump of soil. "In the back yard of my father's church there was a tree. When I married Cyrus's mother, her family would not see her anymore. We could not live in the Indian houses...she could not live in the black location. Only at this church. Every day...when I am coming home, I see her there, under that tree...the one that gives figs. Every evening with the baby on her lap, when I come home." Chlaris stood up from the tree, walked towards her husband's father. "That is the picture I see of Saira. This is how I see my wife and my son."

***

Years later, Cyrus would remember coming home that evening to find Chlaris and his father together at the kitchen table, laughing and drinking strong tea. His father's eyes were bright as he told a story of small Cyrus climbing under his grandfather's robes during an Easter service. Petrus told the story, gesturing with hands that would turn ashen days later as they mixed cement for the stone wall.

The wall was not completed within those three months. When Cyrus slipped into the porch room with the white blinds one afternoon, his father lay dead under the small, green blanket.

Over the years, when the family sat out on the lawn in the summer, Cyrus would lean back against the low garden wall and look up into the trees. When the house finally became too small for the Leshoas and their growing teenagers, the couple who bought it had only one question: Why would anyone sink a brass door handle into the armrest of a garden bench?

K.D. Miller

Brebeuf and Lalemant

"Your head's like a stove element," my mother says, touching my hair. "Put your hat on." Then she spots a bump on the ground that she's missed. She goes to it and starts stabbing at it with her fork. She'll go over the whole field that way, digging for a minute, straightening up, spotting some new patch and running over to dig there.

My father is different. And not just because of his leg, either. Even if he had two legs, he would probably still pick one place, sit himself down, mark out a square of dirt, then sift through every inch of it with his spoon until it was time to go.

It won't be time to go for hours yet. The bug that buzzes when it's hot is doing it right now. It's the *fif*teenth day of the *eighth* month of the year one *thou*sand nine *hun*dred and *six*ty. That's how Walter Cronkite says it on TV. I wonder if Walter Cronkite talks that way at home. Would you *kind*ly *pass* the pot*at*oes *please*.

I don't want to think about Walter Cronkite. I brought along a whole stack of Little Lulus and Caspers and Little Lottas to get me through the day, but I've already read them all. I almost wish Ted was here. But he's at scout camp. There's nothing to do but sit and watch my mother and father dig up the field, her with her fork and him with his spoon. I don't know which of them finds more stuff. But they both think that their way is the only way to look.

I never look for anything. But I once found a little tube that my father said was part of a pipe stem. And another time I found a round clay bead. It was lopsided and had a hole poked through the middle for a string. No, for a rawhide, Ted said when I showed him.

I don't know how I find things. Sometimes I just get a feeling that I'm going to see something before I see it. So I look down, and there it is. A shape that doesn't fit. Like finding a four-leaf clover.

My father has found something. Just now. I can tell, even though he doesn't move or make a sound. And in a second my mother can tell too. She looks at him, then looks again, then says, "Bill? Bill, what is it?"

"Come and see." His mouth sounds like it's all sticky inside.

We go and look down at his square of dirt. "Oh, *Bill!*" my mother whispers. "It's all in one piece!"

The rim of a clay pot is sticking up about half an inch out of the ground.

The clay is the exact same colour as the dirt, so you have to look twice to see it. But it's there, and it really is all in one piece.

Most of what we find is broken, because the field we're digging up was once ploughed. Grass and wildflowers are growing in again, but if you stand on the little hill at one end and squint, you can still make out the marks of the plough.

Ted takes the broken pieces we find and wires them to boards painted white. Then he labels every piece in black india ink, so it looks just like something in a museum. My bead is wired to a board now, with *Clay Bead, Probably Huron* printed underneath.

Now I wonder what Ted's going to do with a pot that's all in one piece. At least it will be, if my father can get it out of the ground without breaking it.

Very slowly, my father pokes his spoon into the dirt inside the rim. He pries up a spoonful of dirt and lifts it out.

"Be careful!" my mother whispers.

"I intend to be, June." He takes a spoonful of dirt from outside the rim, just as slowly as he took the one from the centre. Then he takes from the centre again, then from the outside, from a spot right across from the first spoonful.

My mother says, "Why don't you just hollow it out? The way you're going, it'll take you all day." She isn't whispering any more. "That's what I would do. Hollow it out. See what I'm dealing with, for heaven's sake. How deep it is. What shape it is."

"Right, June, and you'd end up with a pile of broken pieces."

"Oh, I would *not*. The earth around the outside would hold it together, and you know it."

"That's where you're wrong," my father says in that slow way that I know drives her crazy. "The earth around the outside would cave it in. When something's been in the ground this long, you have to keep the inner pressure and the outer pressure equal, or else you'll—"

"Sure, sure, listen to the expert." She feels my head again, just to ignore my father. "Daisy, didn't I tell you to put on your hat?" She makes a show of spotting another bump in the ground, going to it and stabbing it with her fork. She pulls up clumps of grass, and the tearing roots make a ripping, popping sound. Then she straightens up, shades her eyes with her hand and heads for another bump farther away.

"No system," my father says, shaking his head and keeping his eyes on what he's doing. He's back to the middle again, prying up another spoonful of packed dirt, steadying it with his fingers. "You can't just go off half cocked with this kind of thing. You tear into it like a kid on Christmas morning, and you'll wreck it."

I don't know whether my father is talking to himself or to me. And I don't know whether I should listen or not. But in a little while I'll follow after my

mother and listen to her complain about him, so maybe it all evens out.

Probably nobody else's parents would fight about how to dig up a pot. Mine can fight about anything. My mother talks and waves her arms and stomps around when she fights. But my father just gets very quiet and still. Maybe because he can't stomp.

I asked him once if his leg hurt, the leg that got cut off when he was a boy. He said it hurt once a long time ago, but not any more. Lots of things have happened to my father, but you would never guess it to look at him. Except about the leg. His little brother Theodore died. That's who Ted's named after. And his mother died when he was only fourteen. I asked my mother once why my father never cried about all the things that have happened to him, and she said that he was crying all the time on the inside.

Right now he's whistling *Would You Like to Swing on a Star,* a song that drives me nuts when it comes on the radio. I try to block it out and just watch what he's doing, but what he's doing is so boring I don't know how he can stand it, how he can face a whole day of spooning dirt, even if he is going to have a clay pot all in one piece at the end of it.

We've been coming to this field since before I can remember. That's why I'm the only kid in my class who knows words like petrified and relic and fleur-de-lis. I can tell if a rock is just a rock or if it was once a skinning stone. And I've felt how sharp a flint edge is, even after it's been buried for hundreds of years.

My father glances up from his spooning. "I thought I heard your mother telling you to put your hat on."

"It's not that hot," I say, feeling the top of my head. The bug that buzzes is buzzing louder. My head really is pretty hot, but not as hot as my mother says, not like a stove element. I know how hot a stove element is. I touched one once when it was bright orange, just to find out. I snatched my finger back right away, but it was already red, and a blister was filling up.

I did it because I was thinking about Brebeuf and Lalemant again. I was wondering what it would feel like to have a necklace of red hot tomahawks put around your neck, so that they stuck to your bare chest. My mother had told me to stop thinking about Brebeuf and Lalemant. She said I *dwelled* on things.

This all started the day I asked her whether, if somebody cut your heart out and ate it, you would still be alive. She had a Dad's Oatmeal Cookie halfway to her mouth, but she put it down and said, "Good God, what are you reading *now?*"

I was reading my reader from school. I was reading ahead to the Indians section. We're not supposed to read ahead of where the class is. But I always do, and then when the class catches up to where I am, I just pretend to be reading it all for the first time again.

The Indians section had *Hiawatha* and *The Song My Paddle Sings* and a

story about the Maid of the Mist, and *The Huron Indian Carol,* by Father Jean de Brebeuf. Under the carol there was a painting of Brebeuf and Lalemant being tortured to death, and a list of the things the Iroquois did to them. That's how I knew about the tomahawks, and about the heart business.

I found the same painting, only big and framed, in the museum at the Martyrs' Shrine in Midland, where we went last summer. I stood in front of it until my mother said, "Come away from there. Why would you want to stand and look at something like that, anyway?"

I don't know why. And it's not that I want to look at it. Not exactly. It's more that I can't *not* look at it.

My mother likes to look at quill boxes and beadwork and little clay dolls. She doesn't mind looking at arrowheads and skinning stones, she says, as long as she doesn't think about what they're for. One time on a dig she handed my father something she had dug up with her fork. "Bill? What would this be, do you think?" It looked like wood, but it was shaped like something made of clay. He took a good look at it, weighed it in his palm and gave it back to her. "It's the rim of an eyesocket," he said. "With a bit of cheekbone attached.

"Yaaah!" She sent the thing flying. "Why did you have to *tell* me?"

"Because you *asked,* June. You *asked.*"

I went looking all around where my mother had thrown the piece of skull, but I couldn't find it. I didn't know why I was looking, or what I was going to do with it if I did find it. I couldn't imagine Rebecca Goldsmith or any of the other girls in my class trying to find an eyesocket. When I told Rebecca about digging up relics, she wrinkled her face and said, "Don't you get *dirty?*"

My father has taken a few inches of dirt out of the pot, and the same from around the outside. The mouth of the pot is wide, but the neck is narrow. There are markings in the clay. It looks like somebody has taken a twig and poked little holes to make a spiral design, going round and round into a centre, then round and round back out again.

"Somebody's put a lot of work into this," my father says, pulling his cap off, scrunching it, swabbing his forehead with it, then putting it back on.

I should have asked my father about cutting out a person's heart and eating it. No matter what I ask him, even if he's having supper, he just finishes chewing, swallows and answers.

In my reader, it says that Brebeuf didn't move or make a sound the whole time he was being tortured. That's why the Iroquois ate his heart, because they wanted to be brave like him. But Lalemant was smaller and weaker, and they knew it. So they made him watch them do things to Brebeuf before they did the same things to him.

I'm *dwelling* on things again, just like my mother says. But I can't help it.

I want to know how Brebeuf could stand still and not make a sound. Especially since I hopped around and shook my hand for a whole minute when I burned my finger. And that's nothing compared to a necklace of red hot tomahawks. If I was tortured, Brebeuf is the one I'd want to be like. But I'd probably end up more like Lalemant.

In the painting, Lalemant is looking up at a pot of boiling water somebody's about to pour on him, and his eyes are as big as two eggs. But Brebeuf just stands straight as a tree, wearing his necklace of tomahawks as if he's proud of them.

Brebeuf even sounds like *brave*. But *Lalemant* is a name like butterflies, like *fa la la*.

There are butterflies all around us in the field. Most of them are plain little white ones, but sometimes there's a black and orange monarch, and I call "King Billy!" and point until either my father or my mother looks up and nods.

You're supposed to share a King Billy, the way you're supposed to make butter under somebody's chin with a dandelion, then flick off its head with your thumbnail and say the rhyme about Queen Mary. And there's something else you're supposed to do with Queen Anne's lace, but I forget what.

It's time to visit my mother. The pot is starting to get interesting, but it'll be ages before I can really see it. And I'm wondering if my mother has hurt feelings because I stayed with my father after she left. But if I'd gone with her right away, maybe now my father would have hurt feelings.

"You hurt my feelings when you didn't stand beside me in choir!" That's what Rebecca Goldsmith said to me last Christmas. Miss French had decided that our class would wear Indian costumes and sing the Huron Carol for the Christmas assembly. She made each of us sing doh to a note she blew on her pitchpipe, and that decided where we would stand in the choir. The best dohs were in the front row, most of the boys were in the back, and Rebecca Goldsmith and I were in the middle, but at different ends.

"I can't help it if Miss French puts me miles away from you," I said. But Rebecca decided she had hurt feelings anyway, because it was her turn.

After a couple of days, when she was tired of having hurt feelings, she shared her recess cookies with me and said, "I bet you just *hate* having to stand beside Angela Lumley in the choir." So I told her that Angela's breath smelled like devilled egg, and she couldn't say her R's, and I kept hearing, "A wagged wobe of wabbit skin enwapped His beauty wound."

Then about a week later, when it's my turn, I said to Rebecca, "You hurt my feelings when you said I hurt *your* feelings!" We went back and forth like this all year.

"Have you found anything yet?" I ask my mother. She has just straightened up from forking a tuft of grass, and is pressing her hands to her back.

"Just this." She pulls something out of the pocket of her slacks and hands it to me. "There. That could be something, couldn't it?" I look at the thing she has found. It's a splintery bit of wood, shaped sort of like a capital T. "I mean, if a piece has broken off the top there, then it could be a little cross, couldn't it?"

"Uh huh. I guess it could." But she can probably tell I'm just saying that to be nice.

She takes the bit of wood back from me. "There were Jesuits all around here," she says, sounding *so-there.* "Teaching the Huron. They probably made all kinds of little crosses for them to wear."

Maybe she's jealous of my father for finding the pot. I hope she finds something today. If I do, I'll drop it near her where she'll be bound to see it. Right now I look all around where I've sat down, but nothing jumps out at me. Nothing gives me that feeling I get when I'm just about to find something.

I haven't had that feeling since I was in the museum at the Martyrs' Shrine and my mother managed to get me away from the painting of Brebeuf and Lalemant. We walked into a room where a bunch of people were standing around a glass case. Even before we got near it, I had that feeling. I knew there was something in the glass case that I'd never forget. I wanted to see it, and I was afraid to, all at the same time.

My mother got there before I did and said, "Oh my God. Out of the frying pan."

I didn't know what she meant until I saw what was in the glass case. It was worse than the painting of Brebeuf and Lalemant. So I knew I'd end up *dwelling* on it. Parts of it weren't so bad, but it hurt to look at the face, especially the teeth. My eyes kept jerking away, then jerking back again. There was a ball of black hair under the skull. The hands were just a tangle of little bones, and the feet were inside moccasins.

A card on the glass said this was an Algonquin maiden, about ten years old. The decorations on her clothing and the number of toys and gifts that were buried with her suggested she might have been a chief's daughter.

There were beads all over her dress, kind of like the one I found. I wondered if her mother had sewn them on. My mother sewed my Indian costume for the Christmas assembly out of burlap, and she put coloured beads on it from the hobby store. Rebecca's mother took apart old necklaces, so her costume was covered with pearls, white and pale pink and pale blue.

You couldn't tell what colour the Algonquin girl's beads were any more. I looked up at my mother. I wondered how she could stand looking at the skeleton inside the glass case, when touching the eyesocket had made her scream.

"Is your father still digging up that pot?" she says now, sounding like she

doesn't want to ask, but can't help it.

"Uh huh. He's about halfway down."

She shakes her head. "If I'd found something like that," she starts, then doesn't finish the sentence. "But not your father. The only time I've ever seen him really excited about anything was once when we were driving along the highway and his hat blew off."

I can't imagine my father even getting excited about that. But my mother gets excited at least once a day. She gets excited about things she hears on the radio, or about tomatoes on sale, or about rain starting the minute she finishes hanging out the wash.

Now she says, "Have you gone and lost your hat? Is that why you won't put it on?"

"Nope. It's over there with my comic books." She glances where I point, and sees my father. She shakes her head again, bends over and begins forking another tuft.

Maybe my parents take turns hurting each others' feelings, the way Rebecca Goldsmith and I do. I told my mother all about Rebecca, especially about her hair. It's in little tiny curls, even the short bits, and her mother doesn't have to put it in curlers or anything, because it just grows that way.

"That's because she's a little Jewish girl," my mother said, making her voice go soft on the word *Jewish.* She does that with other words too, like *Negro* and *elderly* and *hard of hearing.* "Jewish people always have beautiful children. With curly hair and lovely big sad eyes."

I didn't know Rebecca was Jewish. But she had to be, because she looked just like my mother said. "Does that make it all right to be Jewish?" I asked. "Because if you're Jewish you have beautiful children?"

"What do you mean?" My mother sounded mad all of a sudden. "There's nothing wrong with being Jewish! No one in this house has ever told you there's anything wrong with being Jewish!" She thought for a second, then said, "*Jesus* was Jewish!"

I begin to wonder now if there really are little wooden crosses all over the place, the way my mother says. I start picking up bits of wood and sorting them into two piles, might-be-a-cross and couldn't-be-a-cross. After a while I have two might-be's and a whole bunch of couldn'ts. I give the might-be's a second look, put them on the couldn'ts pile and dust my hands.

I don't like the idea of Brebeuf and Lalemant making little wooden crosses and handing them out to the Huron to wear around their necks. I just think it would look kind of funny or wrong or something for the Indians to have crosses slapping against their bare chests when they ran through the forest or did their dances.

I saw Indians doing dances last fall at the Rockton Fair. They were real Indians, from a real reservation. A bunch of them sat around a big drum and beat on it with sticks and sang, and another bunch did a shuffling kind of

dance, bent over at the waist and looking at the ground. Every now and then an announcer dressed like a cowboy told us through a microphone that this was Moose Dance or Quail Dance or Bear Dance.

Watching them made me remember the Algonquin girl in the glass case. There was nothing on the card about how long ago she had died, or how long she had been in the museum with everybody looking at her.

When we were there I touched my mother's arm and said, "If I was buried, would somebody come and dig me up?" I thought I was whispering, but the people standing around the glass case heard me and smiled. Then a man said, "Oh, so you think *you* should be in a museum too, do you?" And that made them all laugh.

"This is Corn Dance," the cowboy announcer said into his microphone. "A dance of rejoicing for the harvest." The Indians danced on and on, and the same guys beat the drum just like before. Even their singing was the same. It didn't sound like rejoicing to me. It was a loud, sad wailing sound that made me think of winter.

'Twas in the moon of wintertime,
When all the birds had fled...

The Huron Carol is the only Christmas carol I can stand to think about, let alone sing, in the summer. I sing it now very softly, almost in a whisper, and I leave long pauses between the lines.

That mighty Gitchi-Manitou
Sent angel choirs instead...

My father is at the other end of the field, digging up his pot. My mother has wandered away again, forking bits of ground closer and closer to him. Nobody knows I'm singing.

Before their light the stars grew dim,
And wond'ring hunters heard the hymn...

"This is how Father Brebeuf made it easy for the Huron to understand the Christmas story," Miss French told us at choir practice. "He turned the shepherds into hunters and the wise men into chiefs. And he made the stable into a lodge of broken bark, and he told them that the baby Jesus was wrapped in a robe of rabbit skin, instead of in swaddling clothes."

Sometimes at choir practice I would look over at Rebecca Goldsmith. She sang too, just like everybody else. But I wondered if being Jewish meant that she could never understand the Christmas story, not even if somebody like Father Brebeuf came along and

changed everything for her.

"She can understand it," my father said. I asked him, because I thought Rebecca might decide to get hurt feelings if I asked her, and it wasn't her turn. "She just doesn't believe in it."

"Do I believe in it?"

"Of course you do!" my mother said, sounding the way she did when I asked if it was all right to be Jewish.

"Father Brebeuf filled the carol full of things that the Huron saw every day," Miss French said. "Because he knew they had never seen a stable or a manger or a shepherd or even a sheep."

I've never seen a stable or a manger or a shepherd either, except in pictures in Sunday School. But I have seen a sheep, at the sheep dog trials at the Rockton Fair. I guess I was expecting to see little woolly white lambs like the one Jesus is holding in the picture on the wall at Sunday School. But these sheep were great big things, and they were really dirty, especially at the back.

"Father Brebeuf even let the Huron sing about their own Gitchi-Manitou," Miss French went on, "because of course they had never heard of God." Her *God* was all soft, like my mother's *hard of hearing.*

Oh children of the forest free,
Oh sons of Manitou...

This is my favourite part, so I sing it over a few times. Manitou sounds more like God's name than God does.

Oh children of the forest free,
Oh sons of Manitou...

That could be a song all by itself, just those two lines. It's almost as if when I sing them, I'm calling to the children of the forest free. Calling to their ghosts.

All of a sudden I wonder if their ghosts are here. Watching me. Maybe they've been here for hundreds of years, watching their stuff get buried, watching the plough break it into pieces, then the grass and wildflowers growing over, then us coming and digging up the pieces and taking them home. Then Ted wiring them to boards. Maybe the ghost of the Algonquin girl is right here beside me. Maybe she watched herself being dug up and taken to the museum.

I'm not supposed to believe in ghosts, because there's no such thing. But I'm supposed to believe in the Holy Ghost, because he's everywhere, all the time. That's what Miss Urquhart says in Sunday School. I don't understand how anything can be everywhere all the time. But I can under-

stand how the ghosts of the Indians could be right here, right now. Because they're giving me goose pimples.

I won't sing those two lines with Manitou in them again. I'll sing what comes after them instead, even though I don't like it as much.

The Holy Child of earth and heaven
Is born today for you.
Come kneel before the radiant Boy
Who brings you beauty, peace and joy...

Miss Urquhart says it hurts Jesus' feelings if we don't believe in him with our whole hearts. I don't want to make Jesus any sadder than he already is. He always looks so sad in the pictures I've seen of him.

Maybe the Huron worried about making Manitou sad too, when they started learning the words to the Christmas carol. So maybe they went right on believing in Manitou, and just kind of made room for God and Jesus. Because they didn't want to hurt Brebeuf's and Lalemant's feelings either.

Jesus your king is born,
Jesus is born,
In excelsus gloria!

There. That's the whole carol I've sung now. I think I'll go see my parents. They've gotten back together over by the pot. My mother is pointing and saying something, and my father is nodding. I'm halfway there when my mother waves to me to hurry up. She's excited again. When I get closer, I see why. The pot is standing free.

I stop and just look at it. It's like some wonderful, strange flower that's grown up out of the ground. And I have that feeling, that funny kind of ache. I want to look at the pot forever, and I want to run away and never see it again.

Very slowly, my father puts his hands on either side of it. Very slowly, he brings them together. He almost touches the pot, then doesn't, then almost touches it, then doesn't, then almost touches it, then does.

That's when I know what's going to happen.

Too late, I put my hand out to stop my father.

He fumbles to catch the pieces.

One of them stays together when it hits the ground.

The other two smash.

"Shit!" my father yells. He picks up his spoon and stabs it into the ground. "Shit!" He stabs again, then throws the spoon. He takes his cap off and slams it down, picks it up and slams it again. He scrunches it, looks like he's going to throw it after the spoon, but then puts it back on his head. He wipes

his nose with the back of his hand, inhales some dirt and sneezes. He sneezes again and yells, "Dammit, dammit, dammit to hell!"

When he starts to look like he's going to cry, I get scared. I think he's going to come apart the way the pot did, and all the crying he's been doing inside is going to come out in a flood. I wonder if my mother's as scared as I am. She's just standing very still, not making a sound.

He doesn't cry. And he doesn't come apart. In a little while, when he's just breathing hard, my mother crouches down beside him. She puts her hand on his shoulder. He shrugs, not hard enough to shake it off.

"You were careful," she says. "You were as careful as you could be. It must have been when it was moved. Maybe just that little bit of movement did it. Maybe even just the air passing over it, after all this time."

"Yeah," he says at last. "It was probably cracked. There were probably hairline cracks all through the damned thing."

"Of course there were. Nobody could have gotten it out of the ground in one piece. Not you, not anybody."

I've never heard her talk that way to my father. Almost as if he was a little kid. She even looks older and bigger than he does. I don't like it. I don't want to see my parents acting that way. As if I wasn't there. As if they've jumped back to a time before I or even Ted was born.

I start to walk away, eyes on the ground, not sure what I'm looking for until I find it. Then I pick the spoon up and take it with me to the little hill at the end of the field. From there, I can see the old marks of the plough.

Oh children of the forest free,
Oh sons of Manitou...

I sing those two lines over and over while I dig a hole with the spoon my father threw. I don't know why, just that it feels good to dig.

The bug is buzzing again. I imagine the ghosts of the Indians watching me. Jesus is there too, and the ghost of little Theodore, my father's brother who died. And the Algonquin maiden.

It feels like putting toys around a table for a tea party, the way I used to do. So I let the Holy Ghost come, and God and Manitou. And Brebeuf and Lalemant, and the Iroquois who tortured them. And they all watch me dig.

I still don't know what I'm digging for. When I finish, I haven't found anything. All I have is a hole, and you're supposed to put something in a hole. So I put the spoon in, because that's all I have. Then I push the dirt back over it and pat it as flat as it will go.

My father is picking up the pieces of the pot. And my mother is calling to me that it's time to go home.

Kate Small

Audhumla's Breath

"Thirty-five!" We are counting shooting stars. One September night we counted sixty-seven in an hour, our record. Her eyesight is better than mine, she can follow the paths of meteorites after they cease to glow.

"Go to law school Laxmi," she says, squinting up.

"No," I say to my mother. I am nineteen.

She points: this one splashes through the sky, slows, fades. If her eyesight was this good twenty years ago, if everything else had been different, she could have been an astronomer. I record the date, the clouds, the time of sunrise. We fall asleep under blankets on lawn chairs for a few hours. Wind stirs the pages of my notebook. It starts to rain.

"Get up, Amala," I say in English, "I have to go."

"To college," she says in Hindi, "you should go to college." She stretches and settles. Her house is warm but she likes the rain on her face.

I walk to the bus-stop. There's enough oil on my skin for the water to bead like drops of glue. It smears and runs off my elbows. My fingers leave little afterimages on my wrists.

"*Bird steps,*" Heng-Jin called these marks, she'd tell me about the swallow-tail kites which nest around the *Tonle Sap,* which means *great lake* in Cambodian. During monsoon, the Mekong River floods back up to the lake. The rice comes, the birds leave.

"But sometimes you think you hear them," Heng-Jin said.

The bus rolls past my father's combination liquor-store/restaurant. On either of its sides, you can rent one of this week's shipment of Bombay videos. Every surface is covered with cheap green curry. The chafing trays are filled with warm frozen peas, beveled carrots, bulk-supply fish chunks. Six tired *samosas* wait forever under a fluorescent tube. All of it served with the same slotted spoon, dolloped into styrofoam boxes with plastic forks taped to the sides. A college girl stands behind the counter. If I worked there, he wouldn't have to pay anyone.

"You're not doing anything," he says. My mother wants me to live at home.

"But get out of restaurants," she says.

Baptist God Lady is yelling about the Bible through a plastic megaphone on 14th, where all the condos start. I open the bus window. She's loud, but

nobody in Portland listens.

"I saw a NINETY foot Jesus," she shouts.

"What did it say?" I ask, but the wind's blowing the wrong way and Baptist God Lady doesn't hear. I wonder if she ever sees me, framed by a dirty square, out of the corner of her eye. I crane around. She's got a postal worker by the lapel, she's balancing the megaphone between her knees. The bus goes around a corner and she gets smaller, fishing with her free hand for something in her pocket.

The condos are cracking, and everyone on the bus looks grey. My neighbour says it's too much sulfur in the ground and that's why our fingernails are turning yellow. Whole clumps of condos cluster up overnight around fresh empty cul-de-sacs, waiting for inhabitants with flimsy mortgages.

"The grass is straw *and* wet," my neighbour says as I walk up. He shakes his head, he rolls a clump between his fingers like over-permed hair. He's huge. He was a prison guard in California for fourteen years, now he's a beautician. He reaches into his coat. He's got some mail for me, a postcard from Macy's. *All About Lips!* it says, *Miracle Gloss with Any Purchase.*

My boss is talking to the answering machine when I unbolt my door.

"I am needing you for a double," he says—I can tell he's doing something else with his hands, probably fiddling with Microwave #4—the door's crooked.

"The fan's going to be hit by some shit," he whispers, not to me but someone behind him. Trung speaks American expressions like they're prayers. I can hear the other night waitress yelling about lettuce. I pick up the phone as he's saying good-bye.

"Okay," I say. I change my clothes and head back to the bus.

When I sit down, the two women in the seat behind me stop talking for a few seconds, then they go on.

"What kind of penis did he have?" one of them says. The other one thinks about it.

"I guess it was pretty much a blend-into-the-crowd kind of dick," she says. Then they talk about the crows. I put my head on the window. It starts to rain again, the window vibrates like it's being pelted with corn. The bus steams up. Next to me there's a newspaper with a picture of a smiling girl scout in braids, she's wearing slippers and she's attached to an I.V. pole. Even though she needs a kidney, she's selling cookies in the hospital. *Because that's my job!* the caption says beneath her. She has a brown beanie, and a sash with embroidered badges over her pajamas. Next to her there's an article about a water-mold which invades the roots

of flowering plants, causing abnormal growth. The newspaper is sponsoring a contest for the name of a new, mutated lily. It looks like a cobwebby crane standing in a lake.

I get off and walk a few blocks so I can smoke. I hear the crows coming in for the night, they've moved from the downtown Safeway parking lot to the mall. They chatter so much nobody sleeps where they settle, and the sidewalk gets slippery with shit. People write suggestions to the newspaper, like blowing giant fans at the crows, setting off fog-horns, grinding up sleeping pills and leaving them in the grass. The crows fly pretty close to you. They start looking at your hair, your eyeballs, your buttons. Someone tied a couple of dogs to the base of a tree where they nest. The dogs whined and the crows barked back. It rained and the dogs shivered and there was a picture of them in the paper. *Dog Days,* it said.

"This could change your life," the cosmetics salesgirl mutters. She's holding a mascara wand. We went to the same high-school.

"I thought you were going to Harvard or somewhere," she says. Her whole face looks like a bruise. It seems like the Macy's just opened, but now it's about to close. The entire mall was built fast on drained swamp, acres were paved over, runoff boiled up, pipes are breaking, walls are sinking.

The salesgirl is desolate. The cosmetics cases are jammed, but the clothes racks are empty and the escalator's shut off. I shrug. My mother wants the free lip-gloss.

"Oh well, okay," the salesgirl says.

The mannequins are keeping a stiff upper lip. Some of them are bald and their fingers are crumbling but they smile, heads cocked toward something underground.

"Let's talk about wax," the salesgirl says. She's trying to rally.

I think about depilation. I think about paring down. No edges and you don't catch on anything. Wax yourself, slide through a grip like an oiled mouse, a small fish—something that slithers and knows how to swim. I sniff the lip-gloss. *Tropical Fruit*—Asha will like it. The mannequins have snappy shoes painted on their feet, pumps and loafers, but they're dressed in men's bathrobes.

"This stuff rips the fuzz off your knuckles."

I look at my hands, my fingers.

"Yeah, *zip,*" the salesgirl says, but her voice trails off. Her heart's not in it.

I buy some tweezers. Maybe I'll give them to my mother, she's always frowning at her eyebrows in the mirror.

Trung believes in the 24-hour franchise like it's a no-fly-zone bunker. I've never seen him not in uniform—he'd get one for his kid, Pho, if they made them small enough. Maybe that would keep her safe.

"It seems like a lot of children go missing around here," he says. "They'll be out bouncing a ball, then *poof.*"

The only time I've ever seen Trung away from Denny's was across from the bus-stop on 19th in a Christmas tree lot. Pho wanted one of those flocked trees. It was warm but there was snow, gusts of pink and yellow asbestos. Everybody was waving their arms, Pho wanted something the tree guy didn't have. Pho wanted a tree flocked green. The tree guy shook his head and the wind shifted, the word *no* came across the street through the traffic noise.

"A tree sprayed green is *redundant,*" the tree-guy yelled, "and green is not a primary colour." I could see his lips form around a one-word insult.

"Sticks and stones will break my nose," Trung declared and waved his hand dismissively.

"People in glass houses shouldn't lean on the walls," Pho added. She decided she wanted a blue tree after all. She was wearing a pale T-shirt that swallows her, it said *Captain Quaaludes.* I guess Trung doesn't knows what that means.

I don't love Denny's. Last New Year's Eve Trung brought in some homemade appetizers for me and the dishwasher. Shrimp poised like birds on cucumbers.

"*Garudas,* a mythical bird of your Hindu religion," he said, "but visiting Cambodia." He tried to smile. I don't know where he got them because his wife Heng-Jin was already dead and take-out Cambodian is not the most available thing in Portland. Trung wasn't sure about the shrimp gift, he thought he might be doing something not right, a broken rule, a wrong gesture. He kept shaking his head. Maybe to him, they looked shriveled next to the combo platters laminated into the menu. To me the food here tastes like it smells, like something in the sink, damp toast and chicken-fried steak. Trung eats all his meals here. Pho only eats the breakfast-links and milkshakes.

The graveyard wait-staff can't say fuck you to frat boys because we can't afford it. Every night there's a new pack, amazed at their own spontaneity and the idea of pancakes for dinner. They can hardly sit on the chairs.

"*Pardon me but would you have any Grey Poupon?*" They high-five how funny this is, I've heard it seven, eight times this week. They clink their forks on their glasses. They want more cokes, more butter. The other waitress is on a break, I can see her smoking in the parking lot. The frats start little sword fights with their steak knives. Talking in an English accent is hilarious. I'm trying to fill little paper cups with whipped pancake spread, my hands are greasy, the glasses slick. The frats laugh

because the drinks rattle and slop and I have to walk slowly. The other waitress comes in, flips the frats off behind their backs and signs that she'll cover for a few minutes. I go to sit on the clothes dryer in a cubicle behind the kitchen. It's warm and the sound drowns out almost everything.

My uniform is too small, I think that's part of why the Regional Manager comes in after me and pulls the door shut behind him. He touches my breast. I can hear Trung's daughter singing on the other side of the wall. She's colouring, filling in her fifth or sixth placemat that night. She's listening to a Walkman and humming *Row Row Row Your Boat.* Once in a while I can hear the high parts when I'm working. "*Merrily, merrily,*" she sings, "*life's a butter stream.*" I pull back from the Regional Manager but there's nowhere to go. We freeze, like two people trying to take a bite out of the same pear. For a second I think I'm going to end up on the floor, but there isn't room. I feel heat from his clothes, his legs, I gauge the thickness of polyester between us. I think about how our bodies are 92% percent water. The Regional Manager is the kind of person who waves a red baseball cap at everybody when he's riding the lawnmower. I turn my face to the side, my ear is pressed to some fake wood-grain on a cupboard. I smell the fryer in his shirt, and cut grass. I think of the Buddha statue, maybe two feet away from my head on the other side of the wall. It's on top of a file cabinet, there's usually a candle and oranges. I hear my breath come out in squishes, I see parts of me, a hip, an elbow—I look enormous and stiff like one of those inflatable sex dolls. I see Trung's face framed in the tiny door-window, frozen in anguish. He doesn't help me.

The Regional Manager's name tag tangles on mine. It's awkward, like something happening to shy people at a party. The tweezers in my pocket poke my thigh, later I find a row of tiny blue dots on my hip. I shut my eyes and imagine myself in rubberized hip-waders. I knee the district manager in the groin as hard as I can. He doubles over, just like in the movies.

"Don't even think about firing me," I say.

Maybe four minutes have gone by since I took the frats their drinks. I rub my hands on my apron and take them a check. They didn't see anything, but they make Denny's *Grand-Slam* jokes, "*Barn, Ma'am,*" etc. My ears are ringing, my head is floppy on my neck. I try to clear the table. The dishes, my hands, get heavy like platters of snow. I can see Trung at the cash-register out of the corner of my eye. His arms are trembling. The other waitress is filling salt shakers but she stares at me, then Trung. She puts down the salt shakers and opens her mouth, but I shake my head, and this one time I walk out. I hear the frats mugging at Trung.

"See ya later Charlie Chan!" they scream, and explode with laughter in the parking lot. I'm down the block before they break up like a squall of

gulls. There's an inch of new rain running oily in the gutters but none coming out of the sky.

At five in the morning 14th is empty but the bus lumbers to a stop at every corner like a tired cow. I feel like a wheel could fall off any second, my legs are sandbags and I think about guns. Baptist God Lady is out there by the condos at first crack without an umbrella. She's soaked to the skin but her hair keeps its dippity-do shape. She's standing in front of *The House of Truth,* the church where I vote. It's built out of cinder blocks and used to be a buffet-type restaurant. They put a stained glass decal on one of the windows, but the Apostles' feet are cut off, and the window bars leave stripes on Baby Jesus's torso. Mary's face is blacked out. When I get home I sleep for thirteen hours.

"The girl scout who needed a kidney died," my neighbour says the next day. "Guess what of; meningitis." He thinks it was a micro-organism in the ground water. "It'll cause a rampant virus if it hasn't already. Hydrocephalus," he says as he soaps my head in his sink. "Fluid in the skull." He's careful to avoid my ears. "You know, water presses on your brain and your head swells up." He steers me to the middle of the room. He works at a salon with a sign outside that says *Sculpting Friendships in Hair,* but he buzzes mine down and bleaches it for free in his kitchen.

"Make it lighter," I say.

"It's pretty light already," he says, "pretty soon it'll be clear." He goes on about the water. "It's gonna be Biblical," he says, "I hope you have a raft." He wraps my head in foil.

I go back to work a couple of days later after that. Trung summons me to the cash register. He focuses on the mints and gum in the case. He doesn't apologize, it's worse than that, for him. He points a finger at his own chest.

"Shame," he whispers. "Bad."

"Yeah," I say.

He looks up at me, "Don't forgive, okay?" His eyes are red.

"Okay," I say.

He nods. Out of politeness we don't look at each other. I can see Pho outside, hopping around the dumpster. She has her boots on the wrong feet. "*A sleeping dog never flies,*" she chants to somebody in her Walkman. Maybe it's the unemployed mannequins. Pho jumps out of sight, onto the median strip where the grass is sweating. Inside I've got two tables of lawyers. I'm serving coffee when the cosmetics sales girl comes in for a job application. Her eyes look like sunken olives. I give her a coke.

"If a woman is alert," my mother says, "she will find patterns in the arrival of meteors, she will see order in full and partial eclipses."

We are standing on the roof, looking at the sky. The shingles creak, my father bangs up at us from below with a broomstick.

"An alert woman," Asha says, "will recognize the shapes evident in the clouds." She bends both her wrists into the flying lotus of Indian classical dance.

My father stomps out of the house in his bathrobe, shakes his fist, and lights a cigar.

"It's too cold for you," my mother yells down in Hindi.

"The sounds of *Shangri*-frigging-*la* up there," he yells back.

He speaks English to us when we need to be punished or when he wants to tell a lengthy joke which demonstrates his understanding of American puns. For his favorite, he gets out a map. He traces US 26 from Portland to a tiny inland dot.

"Madras *Oregon*!" he says, "and I am a man from Madras!"

They sleep in separate beds now, thousands of nights between them and the one in which I drifted from my room to theirs, to find my mother enduring a kind of motion I had never imagined for her. I was nine, I thought I heard crying. I thought she would snap in two. It was dark but I could see strain in the curl of her lip. I could see the damp on his bare back. They suspended when they heard my silence, it was my eye that my mother's eye met. I could see that she was grateful, to me, for the interruption. He grabbed the hem of my night-gown.

"You are two quarts of shit in a one-quart jar!" he said.

I was mostly invisible, but once he saw something in my face which prompted him to the garage, to make for me my science class insect model. There where he wired and arc-welded broken restaurant parts, he delivered of the torch a perfect dragonfly, an immaculate tassel-tail about to shinny up a grass stem for its last exodus. My laughing father, who loved fragile things and the possibility of crushing them, left it on my pillow. As though he'd picked up the kaleidoscope filled with the same broken glass that I saw as gaping mandibles, gave it a half turn, and saw wings. My father, who liked to tell the story of capturing my mother while sharpening the fish knives.

"*Watan,*" My mother says, up on the roof. "Is it where you come from, or where you end *up?*" She shrugs. She bends her knees, turns on the ball of one arched foot. She squints at the sky again, and pulls a shawl around her shoulders. My mother always knows where Venus is.

Trung is very polite so this is terrible for him. I don't know if he has a word for it, and that makes it worse. I can see his eyes checking the dim finger marks on my neck, three days in a row. I look at the cuffs on his 50/50 cotton-poly khakis, he's hemmed them himself. I see how he didn't quite match the thread. I see the stitches of someone who knows he's sinking, someone who peered over the edge of a boat for days, someone who

thought after a war and weeks at sea, this was dry land. He wants to offer me a raise, but this is undignified.

"You gave Heng-Jin a fern," he finally chokes out, "and she watered it." I decide to smile at him, I need to get him off the hook.

"Trung," I begin. He is visibly thankful to hear me say his name, he looks like he's going to cry.

"Pho shouldn't be here all the time," I say.

"Thank-you," he says. Pho is watching us from the office doorway, pushing milk duds into her nose.

When I was nine I traced a constellation on the end of a shoebox, then punched holes through with a nail. A flashlight went inside the box, stars appeared on he walls and frisked over the shutters. I put my head inside with the flashlight. The riddle was not the projected image, but the box: *who* held the flashlight, *who* pierced the stars. I fingered the furry holes, pulled at felty bits of lint. I knew that when I lay in the grass, what I saw at the other side of the sky was the other side of the container.

"A shoebox isn't right," I said to my father, "we're really on the inside of an egg."

"That's backwards," he said. "*You!* You don't know your body's place." He waved his welder's torch at me.

Trung asks me to baby-sit. This is the deepest apology he can think of.

"Okay," I say. Pho is inking the bus route on the office floor with a laundry pen again. Heng-Jin rubbed the last one out with bleach. Pho is on her knees, tracing its path, not the bus's, but Heng-Jin's sponge.

"Maybe a Chlorox bottle would make a better model," my mother says to me on the roof, twenty years later. "Its curves would be the rounded edges of horizon which cradles us in. You can see it when you lie in a flat place and stare directly up."

"There's still the problem of what's outside the ball through the holes of the stars," I say.

"That's what astronauts are for," Amala says, "to be shot through the openings."

A Euclidian line, though it doesn't exist in the real world, is the truest thing.

I would put my giant's face on the bedspread and squint through the closest pinprick. Frayed holes haloed the table and books, the roses on my pillowcase. I wondered what would happen to the pillowcase in the heat-death of the universe. I tried to imagine a world crumpled, a total imploding, a violent crunching and blackness. I wondered whether, if vigilant, I might see a

meteor squeezing through one of the holes, so as to step aside and watch what would happen if it landed on my father, for example. I wondered if he would leave a tiny charred imprint in the grass once I pushed the cooled boulder aside. I can still imagine a meteor, but I cannot summon a workable image for the hand of god.

I ring the doorbell, Pho opens it a crack. She hands me a margarine tub with something pasty in it.

"You look like you need some frosting," she says. I follow her to the TV. She's eating an apple and considering the large face of a televangelist.

"Why are all the churches around here called Bingo?" she asks, but doesn't wait for an answer.

"Here." She hands me one of those fake peanut cans with the trick springs in it. I open it. She stuffs them back in, I open it again. We do this fifty times. The televangelist has his arm around the shoulder of a woman standing in the audience.

"When is your birthday?" Pho asks.

"In four months," I say.

"You can have this," she says, and hands me the peanut can. The televangelist is singing now, still touching the woman. His face, gums, and tongue look orange. The camera shifts to a Bible on a pedestal opened to bright white pages.

"Bingo," Pho says.

Yesterday Baptist God Lady tells me she was hit in the stomach with a snow-shovel back East and lost her spleen.

"But what is a spleen?" she says. I've seen her shoplifting at Lucky's, canned peaches, *Lady Lee* brand. She's wearing a wig. I offer her a dollar.

"Not one thin dime from you baby." She adjusts her hat. We watch a couple of cars go by.

"I wonder what happens to the milk carton missing," I say.

"Falling down to no underground railroad," she says, looking into her purse. She reaches out and touches the fuzz on my head.

"You got angel coloured hair, honey," she whispers. I hear *thin dime, thin dime,* and turn it over on my tongue like a boiled penny.

"You know," she says leaning closer, she's nearly inaudible, "I was meant for more than this—I'm a rocket bolted down to a crappy launch pad."

On my day off I take Pho down US 26 from Portland to Madras Oregon. It used to be a homesteader's trading dump, but drought and depression brought it three dams and four man-made lakes. All the water is impounded from somewhere else, but the hatchery-grown trout is locally famous.

"Lets dig something up," I say to Pho.

"A cat?" Pho asks.

"Fossils," I say, "snails, ferns, minnows maybe."

There's a little bit of prehistoric lake-bed still dry ten miles north, though most of them have been flooded and cinched by reservoirs.

"There's two towns called *Madras,*" I say, driving onto a dirt road.

"Which is the real one," Pho says.

"Maybe the disappeared fall through slits in the road," Baptist God Lady says to me, "or get sucked into the swamp through the sewer drains."

"Maybe they slip through chasms in their cracking houses," I say, "maybe somebody picks them up and takes them to drier ground." We light cigarettes.

"Like that Lindberg baby," Baptist God Lady says, "the crime of the century."

"Or LaBrea tar-pit woman," I say.

"Exactly!" she says, "you have to wonder what happened to *them.*"

"I found it in the crawl-space," Pho says. She shows me a delicate, dried, half-grown dead cat, one paw outstretched, the mouth parted in the freeze-frame agony of Pompeii. Pho has it nested it in a towel, in a shoebox.

"Keep it in a dark place," I say. I plug in *Fantasia* and head for work.

Trung dumps a hundred round dinner rolls out of a bag onto the counter.

"You know about the cat?" I say. A couple of crustless balls bounce to the floor and I kick them to the garbage. The prep cook slices each one and pushes them to the cosmetics sales-girl, who assembles them in plastic baskets, split and yawning for the butter pat. Trung pulls open a crate of iceberg lettuce.

"Pho needs to go to school," I say. Trung puts a tray of canned whipcream by the walk-in. I go to the dining room and set up for the buffet.

I work a double and when I get home, my neighbour and my mother are standing in front of his house, looking up.

"How about that sky," my neighbour says, "grey, but I think it's gonna fair up."

"What kind of legs would you need in a marsh?" my mother says.

"We're all in the same boat alone," my neighbour says, "what a country."

"I am homesick," my mother says.

"Sea legs," I say.

"You're not my mother," Pho says. I am babysitting. We nap, lightly nested, listening to the laundry clack. Her back vibrates because she is singing. Our two left hands meet round her chest. There is down on the back of

her neck.

"No," I say. Our breath synchronizes.

"My body is not yet," Pho says.

"God's face shines through like a fish under ice," Baptist God Lady whispered to me, today, through her megaphone. Pho stretches. I can feel in sheer heat the inevitability of her S curve. She tumbles off the bed. She is pretending that the points of her rib-cage are breasts. Her hipbone slope is surfacing.

I told Baptist God Lady about Audhumla the cow.

"She breathes on the ice," I said, "and everybody stuck in it thaws out."

"Sometimes you think something's north, but it's *south,*" Pho says.

I learned my body's place from a *National Geographic* map, from tiny cartoon figures in native dress, dotting the world, pinned to the wall. I stood on the couch's back, my fingerprints crept up the continents until the whole world was dappled in grey flower petals.

"Get off my furniture," my father said.

It's an us and them world on which I sought the bare breasts, I rubbed soft the Hula girls and African natives whose lips and nipples matched. It's those pendants of flesh, not the stretched ears and bone-pierced faces which make the stranger. A boy carries things, boats and spears. I saw my own coming shape.

"Water lily is a freshwater perennial herb," I say to Pho, "it has large shield-shaped leaves, and fragrant blossoms."

"*Heng-Jin,*" Pho says, "that would be a good name for the new flower."

The child's unmarked body is always already lost, but there's almost a moment beyond the blueprint—I try to wing my way out of the fatherland, a closed province, cubed and oxygen low, my chin, my forehead smacks hard cartography like the stupid sparrows in the skylight—this bruise on my collarbone is a little piece of resistance.

"You need to go to school, Pho," I say.

"Yeah," Pho says. "It takes a village."

I wish she were a dog, or deer, something with a hide.

"You need to go to Madras," Pho says.

John Lavery

The Premier's New Pyjamas

I was dreaming about a man wearing boxing gloves as red and thick as kidneys.

That is to say, I was writing a speech for the premier about a boxer who was being inducted into the State of Missouri Sports Hall of Fame. An excellent American who, as it happened, was not only born in one of Canada's ten provinces, but had even lived the first three years of his life there.

The premier of the province in question was, therefore, invited to Saint Louis to attend the induction dinner and, of course, to say a few hundred words.

Which I, the premier's speech writer, was in the process of preparing.

It was not yet seven in the morning. I had been working for some time, I started before five usually, writing myself hoarse even before the daily tide of press releases, letters, toasts and endorsements submerged the stony beach of my discursive reason.

Each item was a dream. Thirty seconds after writing it, I could not remember a single word. If I remember the dream about the Saint Louis boxer's kidney-gloves, it is because I was roused in the middle of writing it by a tintamarre of people stamping and singing their way down the corridor outside my door.

I opened the door. A young woman made a sour face at me as she passed by. She had a sleeping bag draped across her shoulders. They all had sleeping bags, or blankets and pillows, they were all wearing Mountie hats with toy provincial flags poked into the points, they were clacking their thermos bottles, or their foil plates, or their folding garden chairs. I closed the door, turned, and there he was.

The premier.

"I can't be here," he said.

And I, my surprise undermining my generally dependable sense of fawning deference, "How did *you* get in?"

"Ahhhh," he said, a gleam in his voice. And then, "The place is crawling with students. I can't be here. Have you got your car parked downstairs?"

Early '70s, by the way. A meagre time, in my estimation. Deceitful. Inept. The assassinators, after a string of glorious successes, had managed only to disable as motionless a target as George Wallace. And the student movement was still staging sit-ins, still straining drily for attention.

"Yes," I said. "Sir."

"Prepare to leave. I'll be back in a matter of minutes, no more."

He pressed his thumb into the wall then, there was a muted click, and a concealed door opened. He looked at me without the trace of a smile, raised his eyebrows slyly once, and disappeared through the doorway. I found the button he had pressed; the door clicked open, I closed it again, opened it, stuck my head through into the penumbra where a dim, carpeted staircase descended indolently, and closed the door again, my throat thick already with dreams of sexual encounters.

When the premier reappeared, he was wearing a wig with sideburns, a false moustache, and a pair of black-rimmed glasses with rectangular lenses.

"Ready?" he said. And down the carpeted staircase we went, along a turning, footlit corridor to a heavy door which the premier shouldered open cautiously. The standard spring-time sunlight ricocheted off the chrome of the cars parked in the lot outside, skimmed past us sideways, and disappeared down the corridor.

"What kind of car do you drive?" he whispered.

"A Sprite."

He nodded knowingly, it not being permitted for the premier to admit ignorance on any topic whatsoever.

"Lead the way," he said. "Don't hurry."

He was a little excited fitting himself into my car, which was very small. He wriggled and huffed. The seat springs cursed under their breath.

"We'll take the Algord Road," he said.

And so we did. The sky was stuffed with several atmospheres of blue. The leaves on the poplars lining the road applauded as we passed by. There was adventure in the premier's presence, so close beside me, the thick, vegetable odour of sleep still clinging to the beard he had not shaved.

"Have you had breakfast?" he said.

"Not really, no."

So we stopped to eat, and after the waitress had brought the coffee, the premier pulled a flask out of his jacket pocket. He topped up first mine, then his own cup.

"Ever live in a comic strip before?" he said.

"You mean the moustache and glasses? You don't look so comical."

He raised his eyebrows in doubt.

"If anything you look more like a premier."

"Speech writer," he said, snorting. And then, assuming his disguise extended to me, which perhaps it did, "Have you ever traveled incognito before?"

"Wale now," said I, talking Texas, "ever' day."

I am homosexual. Was, I suppose. McCorkingdale, my constant and best,

my prickly companion, my bippy, bowsprit and organ of non-reproduction, McC. stays to himself pretty much now. I ain't gay. I go back far too far. Just good and queer.

Gays are great, but. Gay families like with kids and all? Yikes. I always thought families were horrible things full of perfumed hatred and fragrant jealousy, even when they weren't full of screaming and tears.

I thought, no doubt ingenuously, that gentlemen preferred men, that homosexual relationships were, therefore, as fugitive as tenderness, unetched by snarling, or snooping, or teaming up.

I thought that joy, by nature, is more joyous in the closet than parading in the streets. No?

At any rate, I was, in my time, a subversive. Nobody knew me. I cultivated the vocabulary, the humours of men, so I could navigate among them, hail them, listen to the clatter of their winches, the creaking of their hulls. All men. Square, squeamish, dainty or crude, bad-breathing, flaccid or beau. Their handshakes thrilled me, their queer jokes made me laugh and laugh, me and McC.

Which, out of so many, were, like me, the fairies with their wings tied down? Which were the sleight of heart men? Which? This simple question informed all: all my meetings, jostlings, left me deliciously perplexed, expectant, irrationally so. If I suspected my interlocutor of giving me so much as the ghost of a look, I was stiflingly happy. I shot off immediately a box of many-coloured flares hoping to see at least one reflected in his eye. I seldom did.

Oh, I studied physiognomy hard under every kind of light, and dark, but I never really learned to spot another queer.

I had fairly good ideas, of course.

I had a fairly good idea about the premier.

He ate a little toast with his jam, the premier did. The jam he fed himself by the tablespoonful, directly from the jar. He ordered me another coffee, slipped me his flask, and went off to phone. Twenty minutes later, he came skulking back, tapping his leg with a rolled up newspaper.

"Ready?" he said.

We walked together to the cash, he looking nervously at the floor, I fumbling for my wallet.

Outside he said, "I don't have any money with me. I don't usually carry any."

"No problem."

"I don't have a driver's license either." And then, reasserting no doubt his exceptional identity, "I do have my will. It's folded in seven and taped to my thigh."

"I'll drive carefully anyway."

And drive we did. The new cornfields, planted as systematically as a doll's scalp, parted for us endlessly. Far back floated the white clusters of buildings that would in another ten weeks be hidden by the deepening crops.

"It is on days like these," said the premier, his false moustache bobbing, "that I most enjoy being the central administrative figure of this province. If I could, I would take every school child for a drive down this road, and many others like it."

"May I point out," said I, "that it is the school children, the university-age children, who are undermining your administrative program. Who do not apparently believe in the defining principles of our society. Or any other society known to man."

"But," said the Premier, "that is what I find so exciting. It is not true to say the students do not accept our society. They want something, yes. But they also think they can get it. Doesn't our society define success as finding a way to get what you want? I like people who want. I want them."

I want them. The words sniffed at McCorkingdale like the shiny nose-leather of a substantial dog. "The students," I said, reddening, "don't know what it is to want. They've gotten too used to getting."

"As you say, children who get make adults who want."

"I said that?"

"Adults though, unlike children, have to keep thinking up things to want to get themselves. Lack of necessity is the father of creativity. Hoo, I've read so many of your speeches, I'm starting to sound like you."

There was, of course, nothing I could say to this.

It is not without bemusement that I report my part in this conversation. I did, in fact, support the students to a considerable extent. Note, however, that the vast majority of my verbal production tumbled into existence through the mouths of others. Always distorted. If not by the speaker's grafting his own lexis onto mine, then by faulty microphones, by the sound of saliva mixing with trout inside the mouths of eating listeners, by the wind. So that I did not often pay attention to the distortions of my voice when it tumbled out of my own mouth. In any case, the premier, by now, was on another tack.

"Myrtleville," he said. "A remarkable town. The deciduous treeline cuts right through here. You can see it perfectly from the air, poplar and aspen on the south, conifers on the north. Look! Some of the white pines are four hundred years old. We should pay a visit to Alfie Gallant. His farm is off Markham Road, just past the creamery."

Alfie Gallant. Unbeatable. Every January, a hundred or so short-headed snowshoers raced headlong some thirty-three miles up the frozen Massapatawquish River to a clearing, built a fire there only large enough to make tea and raced right back again. Frostbite was part of the fun. And

Alfie Gallant was unbeatable.

"Every year," said the premier, "as I stand at the finish line, I'm afraid Alfie will win again. I think to myself, this will be the year when, at last, he'll turn into the braggart. And every year he manages to contain his barn-sized ego inside his half-way smile. His farmer's smile. When the rain falls, at last."

I was flattered that he was talking to me in this way, not as speech writer, but as apprentice say, conveying to me the nature of his province, the province of his own government-high ego.

"And every year," he said, "I'm afraid Alfie will not be first."

On and on we drove, the premier dozing, knees wedged against the dashboard, head tilted back, glasses over his forehead.

"When I was a student," he muttered, "I didn't have the slightest idea what I wanted to do. I knew a lot of things I didn't want to do, so I eliminated all those—the list got longer and longer, until all that was left was premier. You?"

You? The question licked at me hesitantly, seeking encouragement.

"Me?" I said. "Oh I eliminated premier right off the bat."

And he, yawning, "Wise man."

"Are you going to sleep now?"

"Might."

"Do you want me just to keep driving then till we get to Paraguay?"

"You can if you like. Or you can stop at Eleanor's."

"Eleanor's is a restaurant somewhere? A motel?"

"No, Eleanor is my mother. Eleanor's is where she lives."

"My, my, my," she said, "what are *you* doing here?"

She was a short woman, Eleanor was, humourously short beside her tall son. The undercurl of her dry hair brushed her shoulders when she turned her head. Her skin was grainy from long hours spent not so much in the sun, as in the open. She wore a shirtwaist dress, the lowest buttons left undone to reveal her legs, sturdy and balanced, the strong calves curved like overturned dinghies.

Striking legs. McCorkingdale, self-willed as ever, craned to catch a glimpse.

"A horde of university students," said the premier, "are crawling over my desk at this very moment. Haven't you heard?"

"Yes." Her voice was as husky as her skin. "I also heard somewhere that you were the central administrative figure of this province and that your place was, therefore, in the capital city. I may have misheard."

"You may have. I am, in fact, the premier."

"Ah," pausing, looking directly into his eyes. "And this gentleman is...?"

"Mr. Watson. No, no. Mr. Gilfillan. What was I thinking of to make me say Watson? Mr. Gilfillan. My speech writer."

"Aaaahhhh. You'll be able to deliver a speech in the kitchen then."

"Or the greenhouse, or the lava-tree, wherever. The bedroom if you like."

"I think I may have had enough bedroom speeches for one lifetime. Unless... Are you particularly good at bedroom speeches Mr. Wa...?"

"Gilfillan," said the premier quickly.

"I'm sorry. Mr. Gilfillan. Mr. Gilfillan looks like he has been driving a car for several hours and would like something to eat. Come." She hooked her arm into mine. "Tell me how it is you manage to make my son sound as though he had learned something at school, and not simply studied law."

Watson. What was he thinking of to make him say Watson? Oh I knew, I knew. The sly puss-'n-boots. I trembled with the familiar ebullience. The frothy darkness pushed itself into my eyes, I could hear my hand knock once and once only, could feel them all breathing.

"My son, you see," continued Eleanor, leading us into a well-appointed kitchen with a thickset, not to say corpulent, wooden table, blazing with varnish, "my son is of the old school, the Old King Cole school. He believes political leaders should give the impression that good God himself inflated their little lungs at birth, licked his thumb and touched it to their forehead, that they should be dignified, up-beat, meat pie with gravy?...be alright?...conniving, bursting with probity and hot air, and entirely without talent. Or children. Surely a man in such a position could arrange to have children. A daughter-in-law I don't require. But children, grandchildren..."

Watson's. My dear Watson's. Although it may have been a slip. He did not, perhaps, know about Watson's.

"He does not," she went on, "seem to be aware," no, he knew, he did, he was sitting on the table now eating olives, "that while he doubtless makes a rare prime rib of a minister, dolled up in his shimmering eye-talian civvies," holding the pits in his hand, My Dear Watson's, where you went down to the mens' room, the oven door clanging shut, "it does not last forever, his body is increasingly ovoid, his nose is getting puffier and puffier with long drinks and circumlocution," the premier squeezing his nose to see if it were swollen, his good humour attenuated with consternation, "one must eventually *do* something with one's life, musn't one, what point is there in history scratching its head to remember a name that no one else does, except me, and who is to remember me, except he," the gravy caramelizing on the stove, Eleanor's pebbly voice glinting across the table, and I, I was dreaming about Watson's, an Englishy pub with leatherette seats, pictures of London in the rain at night, waiters in Sherlock Holmes hats, My Dear Watson's to the heavy-smelling blackguards of queerdom, down you went to the men's room, you did not go in mind you, you went past it to the next door, your

hand trembling as you knocked lightly once and once only, the door no sooner open than the darkness behind it sucked you inside, you could see nothing but you could hear the humid, lupine breathing of a dozen men, not a word, not a word, but the pulse in your neck like a trapped insect, you were taken hold of then, you were hoisted over the heads of the dozen men, you floated on their quick, unhurried, invading hands pulling your clothes away, you dipped and rolled, but they would not put you down, you shuddered and arched on their palping, kissing hands, you were drowning in your own, you were awful, awful, and they would not put you down, you merely woke up alone, if you were me, in your corner, ill with exhaustion, naked, sticky, your underwear still stopping your mouth, your genitals aching, until someone knocked lightly once and once only, the door opened wide enough only for a hand to reach in and turn on the lights.

"Goodness, Mr. Gilfillan," said Eleanor, "do you always eat like three horses?"

You were in a storeroom, there were huge jars of mustard, of instant gravy powder, tubs of shortening, a bundle of clothes smelling of fabric softener was thrown in to you quickly, and the door was closed.

"And are you always as quiet as a carp?"

Is there, thought I, any way to shut this woman up?

"Well now," said the premier, "the students, like everyone else in the province, think I'm on my way to Saint Louis, and to get me to come back quick, they will have to all go quietly home. Of this they have been made abundantly aware. Now as I see it, the boy students will not sleep tonight for agonizing over the accessability of the sweet bodies breathing beside them, the girls will not sleep for being constantly on the alert to yank the boys' hands out of their sleeping bags, there will be those of course, very likely a plurality, who will not sleep for finding the parliament building too exotic a location to resist, they will all, tomorrow, be tired and testy and faced with the cold thought that fun is fun, but to get what they want they need me."

"Premiers," said Eleanor, "like to feel needed."

"I think," said the premier, "one night should do it. Two at the most. Feel like staying a night or two, Derek?"

Derek was me.

"I'm sure," said Eleanor, "Mr. Gilfillan has better things to do with his days. Has he clothes with him? Pyjamas?"

"I bought half a dozen pairs of new pyjamas the last time I was here," said the premier. "I haven't even opened half of them. I'll put a box on the bed. So."

He finished his coffee standing up, waved, and was gone.

There was a moment, a band of silence. And then Eleanor swept her arm across the table in front of her, bowl and plate, utensils, glass and place mat all sent soaring, rushing up to the ceiling where they floated and circled with the unbearable slowness of ships in a sea port seen from the air. Until the tears welling up in her lower lids compelled her at last to blink, and down crashed the dishes onto the red-tiled floor, the place mat gliding obliquely into the sink.

"Shhhh!" she hissed at me fiercely. "Listen. You can still hear his footsteps climbing the stairs."

I confess I could not. I can not fathom the ability of women to hear the faintest sounds in their houses. She sputtered and fustigated, my astonished ears heard the word "faggot" squeak out of the side of her mouth like a breathy note from a cold flute. She took, from out of the cupboard under the sink, a dustpan and whisk.

"Let me do that for you," I said, getting up smartly.

"Over my dead body!" she snapped.

I do not remember the bedroom well. There were a lot of wooden things, there were magazines and Chivas. The bedspread I do remember. It was as green as green, and served as a field for the sleek black and gold box lying on it casually.

I drank and waited. The intense, country silence clung to me, moved when I moved. I waited. And drank.

Until I could no longer put it off. Undress I must. Open the box I must, I must. Open the box I did.

The black and gold box, which was empty.

The sly puss-'n-boots.

I lay in the dark, dressed only in the premier's new pyjamas, shivering between the glossy sheets, awaiting his majesty's silk-draped flesh to enter by some secret door and have at me, I was twisting with sex, I was tired, tired, I had driven too far, I had eaten too much, the whiskey was turning to acid in my intestines, and Eleanor insisted on dancing over me, Eleanor, dancing over my dead body, her shirtwaist dress knifing through the night so close to my face, snicking at my nose, her stoney legs opening in silence, opening to reveal the crown of his-majesty-to-be, I lay shaking between the sheet-metal sheets, I wanted to sleep, only to sleep, but the premier was coming, and I could not stop crying.

The door opened. The tiger lept.

McCorkingdale stood hard to attention.

In poked a head.

Enter, enter, murmured McCorkingdale. Bring on the body politic.

But it was not the premier.

"Sleep well?" said Eleanor.

"Sleep? What time is it?" said I, instantly awake, rolling onto my side to hide McC.

"Ten past seven. Did you find the pyjamas?"

"Ahh, yes."

She sat on the edge of the bed, sending a ripple through the mattress that made McC. tingle. She looked vaguely in the direction of the window.

"He left during the night," she said.

"Who did?"

"He did. With his cabinet chief and the minister of transports of delight."

"Pardon me?"

"His pals."

"Oh. When did all this take place?"

"Two-thirty. Three."

"I didn't hear anything," I said, piqued, foolishly.

She turned towards me then.

"You're a very good speech writer, Mr. Derek Gilfillan." She placed her palm on the bed beside me. McCorkingdale, fascinated, strained towards her.

I thought, for a moment, that it was snowing in the bedroom.

"Goodness," she said. But it was not snow that was falling. She had a freckle on her colourless lip. It was dust perhaps. Particles of dust swollen with light, it may have been that.

"You are not very substantial for a man who eats like three horses." Sequins or spangles or tiny Venetian coins.

"He's a bit of a murderer in his way," she said. "I know." Venetian chocolate coins tossed into the sunlight from the Rialto bridge. "We have only one life," she said, "but one life that is wrapped in so many existences. It's good to get murdered every now and then, to kill off an outer existence or two. They get dry and papery and peel away, and then we are a little closer at least to our life. Of course we are also white and juicy and ready for more murder." Or words, palatal glides and fricatives for all I know, or seeds perhaps, dandelions. "Nothing murders like not being loved very much. But then, when you are not loved, you are not anyone. So you can become...anyone. Every big ambition begins with a small murder." Or meteorites, quite possibly meteorites, but they were not actually falling. "Look at all these bourgeois silverfish who sleep with their windows locked and never dare try manslaughter unless it is brought to them by Kellogg's. Bfff." It was the light slowly turning that made them appear to fall. "Look at them with their precious existences interlarded with bulletproof foam. Bfff." A parti-coloured particular ray shot occasionally into my eye. "You are not one of them, Derek." They were floating, they must have been, because they did not accumulate on the floor, it was the light slowly turning, it was the light that accumu-

lated. "The three horses you eat like have wings," said Eleanor, her hand on my knee, her palping, kissing words washing like smoke over McCorkingdale, turning the particulate air into solid light, I could not see for it all, I could not breathe, I was awful, awful, is there not, I pleaded, *any* way to shut this woman up?

So we got out of bed, we did. McCorkingdale and I.

"Mmn," said Eleanor, "Very nice. The pj's. Just your colour."

"Eleanor," I said, dressing, "you're very good at speeches. Very. I write his. That's all. Sometimes he even reads them. I do his press releases. I answer his letters, of which, by the way, an astonishing number are from women, of a confessional nature, often intimate, usually intelligent. I enjoy it. I forget everything thirty seconds afterwards. Everything."

I drove back then, and as I did so, I heard Eleanor's words over and over, felt McCorkingdale rise towards her husky voice.

And when I arrived, there were squads of cleaners in the otherwise empty corridors. I slid my key into the knob of my office door, but before I had time to turn it, the door was opened from the inside.

"You made good time," whispered the premier. He slid one of his prestigious buttocks onto the edge of my desk, drank coffee, high-octane presumably, from a paper cup. Anita Devlin, the student leader, quite high-octane herself with her hair as straight as water and her mouth full of braces, was reading intently in my chair.

"You knew I was on my way?"

"Eleanor phoned to say you were coming. She keeps tabs on us all." He leaned toward me. "She called the papers," he murmured, strong with coffee and cologne, "in the middle of the night. Pretended to be one of the neighbours. Said I'd been seen at her house."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course. She told me. We'd have been better off staying at Alfie Gallant's, eh. You are to come any time, by the way, and not wait for me to invite you."

"Miss Devlin!" he said then. Miss Devlin looked up, high matters in her eyes, entirely, I would say, under the premier's power. "I'd like you to meet my speech writer, Derek Gilfillan. Hot awful good on his good days. Look at this. It's the dinner speech I was to give tonight in Saint Louis."

"What are the drawings in the margin?" said Miss D. "They look like kidneys."

"Kidneys?" said I.

"Now that you're here, Derek," said the premier, "we'll give you your office back."

He pressed his thumb into the wall then, there was a muted click, and

the concealed door opened.

"Oohh," said Miss D., duly sarcastic, duly impressed, "secret passsages and all."

The premier guided her past him into the dim, carpeted penumbra.

"Eh!" he said suddenly.

"What's up?" said I.

"The pyjamas."

"The pyjamas?"

"I was going to leave a box of new pyjamas on the bed for you, wasn't I?"

"You did."

"I did?"

"There was a box."

"There was. Eleanor must have put it there for you then. Good for her. What *would* we do without Eleanor." He looked at me without the trace of a smile, raised his eyebrows slyly once, and disappeared through the doorway.

Jilted I was. Murdered. Just as Eleanor said. Jilted, jealous. But in love, in love.

"Faggot!" I squeaked out of the side of my mouth, to prove it. McC. was feeling forgotten. Weren't you, McC.? But what do you know about love?

"*Faggot!*" Joyously.

A one-word speech of course. A curt dream.

Sinclair James

Dogheart

I can't eat, I can't sleep, I am vibrating like a string for Dogheart. This morning I got up at three, tired as a bone, well-chewed, the marrow sucked clean out of me, and came to sit on the yellow sofa by the wood stove. I had never warmed up in my bed, even after a hot bath and extra blankets. The cold in me came from inside and radiated out, like the freeze they put on unsightly growths, a clamped-down, oxygenated burn that is meant to purify. From the sofa the woodstove was still too far away, so I sat on the hearth with my back to it. I had cracked the door and at last it began to crank up. It is like a live thing, so touchy and responsive, and within minutes the sound of its nominal tick tick tick changed to a crackling like that of a million tiny insects racing up the chimney and banging the sides with their hard shells. Curled up as I was, a blanket wrapped around my shivering body like an old woman in a sweat lodge, I watched the curious play of the flames on the wall. The yellow plaster caught and refracted them like a prism all the way up into the high curving corner of the ceiling, making a wild sound and light show for me alone. Eventually my eyes strayed to the right, to the window, and in it I saw a stranger thing still: a small living picture of the burning wood. It had begun its severe process of reduction and was turning to embers. The logs were red hot crocodiles, scales sizzling like incantations, deeper and deeper into themselves, always more unified and potent. Watching, I fell into a trance of Dogheart, remembering him not only as he had been that very night, but as I had known him from the beginning.

I haven't had a dog in five years, I told him as we stood on the steps of my husband's house saying good-bye. He pointed questions at me, his brow raised in wrinkled accent marks, grave and acute. My husband hates them, I reminded him. Dogheart's homely face relaxed into empathy. Mine were Golden Retrievers, he said. Beautiful dogs. I loved them so. But, as you know, where I will be living now animals are not allowed. Have a good summer, good trip, he said, beginning to walk away. I have a house, my own house, right here in town, I called after him—but he was now already in his car, and I hung on the doorjamb watching him drive away, embarrassed and sick with love.

What had moved me most about Dogheart was his devotion to me. The

moment he met me he looked at me with longing. It flowed out of him in a pure, unfiltered stream. The week he spent at my husband's—his new landlord's—house while he was between apartments (the old one being recarpeted before the new tenants arrived, the new one ready only for the fall, when he returned from his annual summer trip to the Caribbean), he would pace the floor each evening, anxious for my arrival. Several times he greeted me with small gifts he had driven miles to hunt down, hand-dipped chocolates or perfume, things he thought of as permissible expressions of gratitude for his future landlord's hospitality. He was originally from Spain, a chivalric country, and was completely unaware of how his attentions to me stood out.

That summer, three weeks after I met Dogheart and said good-bye to him on the steps, my husband and I flew to Detroit for the christening of his infant granddaughter. I had known his ex-wife would be there, a woman I had always hated and feared, a state beauty queen who had left him years before to marry five other times. In my stepdaughter's kitchen, on the morning of the christening, we two wives eyed each other over coffee and told haircut stories. Your hair would look better short, she said. Mine was shoulder length until Tom, my third, and I split up, but that very day I walked into a strange beauty parlor and told them I wanted something completely new.

Now, as in all the photographs I'd seen of her, the ones my husband kept hidden around his house and glanced at furtively from time to time when he thought I wasn't looking, her hair was cut in a curved arch around her dainty ears and snipped into an appealing point at the nape of her neck. "That is exactly when a woman cuts her hair," I told her.

By July we were in Naples for a four-day professional conference on the great mystical theologian Schleiermacher. While my husband attended scholarly presentations I roamed the cramped, sewerless streets with an eye to purchasing something reckless. On the last day I happened upon a posh hairdresser's shop in the diplomatic district. Only a name—*Pacco Elio*—was stenciled on the door in clean, clear letters, but through the window I could see the empty pedestal chairs. I walked in and instantly deft young men began to assist me. One washed my hair, another dried it, and still another combed it out, but Signor Elio himself came forward to do the cutting. He was an elder statesman, silver hair undulating back from his forehead in elegant waves. Corti, I said, corti, corti, corti. He used a small instrument with a razor edge to hack the hair off evenly and close to my head. When he had finished, it lay on the floor around the base of my chair like live brown snakes. At dinner that night my husband didn't recognize me at first.

The following day we traveled north, to the ancient, excavated city of

Herculaneum. I had seen nothing like it before, sad clusters of low-ceilinged buildings, family lives frozen in lava. In one, a wedding scene painted on a wall in ocher and brown. My husband scoured the ruins slowly, following his guide book, taking archeological photos for his private collection, and at last I went ahead without him, wandering in and out of rooms and courtyards at whim. Inside one of the partially-roofed habitations I found a large litter of nine puppies nesting comfortably in a heap. Outside on a grassless knoll the mother, a dehydrated yellow bitch, lay on her side sleeping at a distance from her brood. I went in amongst the puppies, stroking and handling them, wanting to take them home with me. People frowned and whispered as they passed me by, some even venturing to suggest that the dogs might be diseased, but I took the risk with a daring heart, sensing a protection sheltering me as wide and deep as the roof of sky above my head. Before I left Italy I allowed myself to send Dogheart a postcard, only one, knowing that he would not receive it until the end of the summer when he returned from his own travels. In it I described the puppies of Herculaneum. When I left the ruins that day I found a rest room in a bar two blocks away and scrubbed my hands with disinfectant soap.

The only real risk I ran was that he might, for reasons of his own, choose not to contact me. Nothing that I could think of as any kind of declaration had ever passed between us. I swished the possibility of never seeing him again around in my mouth all summer until I had gotten the full taste of it. I could count on nothing, that much I understood.

My husband's house was a foxhole into which I sank each evening, weary from all kinds of battle, surrounded by the books and trophies of his past. Even before I married him I could not live without him. Season to season, night after night, our warm or cool flesh was laid out lengthwise like overlapping slices of bacon in the hot pan of his bed. Every morning when I rose, long after he was gone for the day, I would dress, and go to my own house. It had the air of an abandoned, dusty stage and contained no items of comfort. I had not been able to bring myself to rent it out. By nightfall I had crept back to him again. The oscillation of this routine dulled my senses like the narcotic swing of a hammock: I did not smell his mistress coming by, one day in late winter, to introduce herself to me, but I tried to pretend I had. I'm leaving him, she said. I can't take this anymore. This? I said. She shrugged. I'm dying of cancer—female cancer—very contagious. It began as warts. I thought you should know.

And so I gave up that dogless marriage, dancing in my empty house as upon a great tribal table in the wilderness, waking every morning from dreams of dogs, until they invaded my mind like snatches of old songs. For a long time I had harbored a secret passion for Border Collies and now I

began to fan it into flame. A recent bestseller had named them the most intelligent breed, Golden Retrievers ranking only third. I had a yen for a deeply intelligent animal, one who would combine generous affection and loyalty with the bright cocking of the head that indicates a large brain. Overnight I became an amateur scout for the Border Collie, calling around to area vets and searching newspaper ads, unable to feel a sincere interest in any other breed. One evening, on impulse, I followed a van with a personalized license place that said Doglvr into the parking lot of a pizza restaurant. The woman driving it raised German Shepherds but said she knew of a breeder of Border Collies in Connecticut, warning me that they were very selective. I jotted down the address and went home to mail off an SASE with cover letter and references.

On the very afternoon I received a letter, addressed to me in my own handwriting, telling me that a litter of pups would be weaned and available within the month, Dogheart showed up on my front steps. I gasped when I saw him and ushered him panting in. He wagged his head from side to side in mild survey as he walked me briskly through to the kitchen. Nothing was as tidy as I would have made it had I known he was coming. We sat at my breakfast table strewn with open newspapers and drank weak coffee laced with milk. He asked after my husband, but words failed me and I could not bring myself to explain that I had left him for good. I saw in his quiet eyes that he wondered if I still returned to him at night. That evening we met by casual agreement at the movies, but our itchy hands remained in our separate laps.

The day after his visit he dropped a gift off for me when I was not at home. It was a set of homemade beauty products he had purchased in the Dominican Republic. Hurt that he had not made a point of coming by when I was there, I still lined them up in a neat row in my bathroom. They were nothing I would have bought for myself: conditioning shampoo laced with garlic; skin cream concocted from a base of turtle oil that claimed it would eradicate stretch marks; a packet of strange smelling bath salts and a small, pungent bottle of liniment. I called and briefly thanked him but he did not linger over the conversation or suggest another meeting. In the days that followed, when I did not succeed in running into him on the street or even at any of his favored haunts, I came to feel that he had disappeared from my life. I was stymied, also doing nothing about the Border Collies.

In the end, the solution came to me by instinct. I began, nightly, to take a long hot bath in which I dissolved the brown herbal crystals I thought must be a muscle soak (my uncertainty was because of the Spanish labeling), then I washed my hair with the garlic shampoo, afterwards rubbing stretch mark cream over my entire body, even the face and the toes. Within a week I had a call from a friend saying she had run into Dogheart and that he had asked after me. This was what I had been expecting. I decided an official

note of thanks would not be amiss:

A note to express once again my appreciation for your gift of cosmetics from the Dominican Republic. Most helpful of all has been a tiny bottle of liniment, the smallest of all you left. I have taken to applying it to ease a pain in the neck that has troubled me for years. As a result, I can at last say that I sleep peacefully at night without it, and for this I owe you my heartfelt thanks.

With great faith, then, I began to prepare my life for Dogheart. I cleaned my house and bought new sheets for the bed. He came by on an afternoon that turned out to be damp and cool, two days earlier than I had expected, walking in without knocking and drinking me up in a long draught, the kind he had not allowed himself since the previous spring. We sat on my yellow sofa in front of the woodstove, not touching, and spoke candidly of the pain of love, of dogs, of ungenerous people. When it began to grow dark, he took his leave, brushing my lips lightly with his moustache. The following day, when I was not at home, he left on loan three books about Labrador Retrievers which I took to bed with me that night and read straight through. I knew he fancied the idea of a black one. Border Collies are wonderful, he had said to me, but their long hair is an insurmountable problem.

For our first real date I wore a close cut outfit of black velveteen, combed my hair back behind my ears, and lined my eyes extravagantly in the fashion I knew he admired. After dinner at a nice restaurant we returned to my house, to the yellow sofa. On it Dogheart kissed me, as gently at first as a dry leaf falling from a tree, and then fiercely, with all the pent up energy of thwarted emotion. Where can I bite you? he begged, but I refused him at first, understanding the science of desire. He growled, he licked my chin, my ears, my nostrils. I should have mentioned, I said, that I might be coming down with a cold. My feeling is, he said, kissing me again, you have to be immune. I examined his head, all the peculiar details of it: the small lashless eyes merry as embers in his wrinkled face, the tiny tags of flesh on his neck, the long, heavy, angular nose, the pouting lips hidden in his sparse beard. Best of all I loved his ears, which were large, pointed, and flat as rhododendron leaves. I took one in my mouth as proof of my undiluted acceptance and nipped it lightly, causing him to moan.

Because I had lived a thousand days in my mind with Dogheart and knew that I had given myself to him as surely as if he had courted me with small gifts and compliments for years, I agreed when he begged me to take to him to my bed. I insisted that he help me with the new sheets and he was inconvenienced by this at first, straining at the leash until his manners got the best of him. As we walked around the bed at diagonals from one another, I mentioned the disease my husband's mistress had contracted. Dogheart was attentive but continued his tucking and pulling, smoothing

down layer after layer. What I never told her, I explained, is that she caught it from me. Dogheart's face grew still as stone, on point. It's not anything a man could die of, I begged, only a woman.

Dogheart laid me down on the new bed, turned me over toward him, and kissed me gently on the lips, then removed his clothes and allowed me to explore his body, never touching me. See, he said, the same as anyone else, as though this might make me desire it less. Then he put his clothes on again and went home.

Sitting here by the fire, I am able in my mind to trace the contours of Dogheart's body, to feel the silk of flesh never exposed to the sun, delicate as the inside of a dog's ear. In my mind it is paralyzing, exotic and potent, nameless and bewitching, this love that washes over me, eroding the banks of my river, washing away the roots of all previous trees. It is a kind of salvation, a feeling as pure and flammable as oxygen, as heady as perfume, as numbing as morphine.

Barbara Mulstein

A Day's Walk

Catherine awoke to a powerful vision. A hypnopompic vision, the now tiny academic voice inside of her whispered. She rolled over. It was summertime. She was close to the ground, looking up the street on which she had lived for most of her life. It was still—that summertime stillness that she remembered from her childhood. Nothing moved, not a person or car or animal. At that moment, she was the only thing outside. Some part of her recognized that she hadn't experienced stillness like that for years. In the vision, her face seemed close to the ground. It was a strange perspective. She looked west and saw the air dancing with heat. There were details. Lilac trees dipping with the weight of their blossoms, a red lawn mower sitting on the grass. A blue sky, a yellow hydrant. A pink rose bush, a stretch of grey gravel. Then the hum started, that loud comfortable summertime hum, and that hum seemed to bring Catherine's mind to full consciousness. She was awake, awakened by that sound in her head, a hum that she had only imagined.

"What makes that hum, cicadas or telephone wires?" the tiny academic voice wondered. She sat up. The next half-hour of the day was always the worst for Catherine. She was not a person who woke up well. Morning things were things she dreaded. Pulling herself from the warmth of her bed into the under-heated expanse of the apartment. Walking the long walk across icy grey tiles from the bedroom to the bathroom. The physical feelings—the muddled heavy head, the aching back, the powerful body call for a cigarette. That first frightening look in the mirror each morning. The knowledge that there was really no reason to get up at all.

Catherine squinted at herself in the bathroom mirror. She had not aged well. At age thirty-one she could have, at best, passed for a youngish looking forty-year-old. It was all those years of smoking, she supposed. And now, even though she had quit (one month and three days exactly) the damage was done. What had once been almost an attractive white-pink face now looked unappealingly fleshy. Looks were something she had never considered while she had them, but now that they were gone it seemed of vital importance that they be reclaimed. She, who had always prided herself on her choice of priorities, now went through a series of morning ablutions as embarrassing to her mind as they were necessary to her vanity. This was part of what she hated most about mornings. She began

each new day vainly exfoliating, scrubbing, cleansing, patting, liposmearing, lotionating, biohydralomoisturizing, all of it, she knew, having absolutely no effect, while one panic stricken voice in her head shouted: you didn't make the world it's a cruel cruel place you have to play by its rules, while the other voice, the one of calm reason, the academic voice, simply said: Catherine you are an idiot.

That morning ,while she rubbed some pink viscous liquid into her face, Catherine's mind travelled back to her vision. Memory followed remembrance and Catherine suddenly understood the strange perspective of her dream, and why she had seen the street from so low an angle. As a child she had in fact used to sit cross-legged on the rustic gravel shoulder of the road in front of her house, sifting through the pebbles and stones, looking for worm fossils and pieces of sparkling quartz and the occasional tar bubble to break open. She would sit there, her face close to the ground, picking through the rocks, alone and happy, sometimes looking up the quiet street, while the wires hummed or cicadas chanted, feeling safe in the quiet of the big city summer heat. A yearning for that feeling of security came over Catherine with such aching strength that she had to stop kneading her face for a moment.

Catherine was ready for her life to be over. She wasn't suicidal, she simply felt that it had been as good as it was going to get and that realistically, everything from that point on would be less, not more. She didn't yearn for an end, but she was prepared for it. She had no friends. Her thoughts always seemed too esoteric for most people. Women disliked her because she wouldn't gossip and was too full of the philosophical. Men liked her better, but men always drifted away as they got married, their wives laying down the universal law. She had no children—she and Richard had made a responsible choice. She had no pets—Richard hated the idea. Of course, she had Richard. She heard a sliding whoosh from the kitchen. He was up.

She couldn't precisely pinpoint when things had started to go wrong for them. She could still recall that heart-stopping moment in time, that first discovery that she did nothing for him, that he didn't even really like her. She had been discussing some fine point, some idea she had about spirituality, and he had looked at her, and she had known. He wanted a woman who was grounded, sensible, one who made money. Back then, she remembered they still had fights and they still made love; their period of attempted salvage. It had changed quickly though, changed to steady bickering and only occasional lovemaking. Now they had nothing; a passing wordlessness, a recognition of presence, an understanding based on sound and movement. Familiar patterns that were comforting in the sense of being familiar, but comforting in no other way. A pattern of things understood and recognized and despised.

Every morning Catherine waited for that whoosh—the sound of Richard sliding something from one spot to another. From her spot to his spot. It might be the garbage bag on the floor, the coffee maker from one end of the counter to the other, a plant from one side of the windowsill to the other side. And every day, after he had left for work, she whooshed whatever it was back again.

Catherine padded into the kitchen and poured out a bowl of cereal; some new Yuppie mix of grains and nuts that Richard had bought. She sat down at the table where he was drinking his coffee.

"Good morning." Catherine's mother had placed a high value on politeness. Richard made a noise, perhaps acknowledgement, perhaps rebuttal. Catherine watched, fascinated, as Richard loosened up grapefruit sections for himself, his dainty specialty knife tracing the contours of the pulp, his delicate hands guiding the thin blade in and out. She continued to watch as he moved the tiny silver spoon from mouth to grapefruit to mouth to cereal to mouth to coffee, marveling at the complexity of all things, even breakfast.

"I've decided not to go in today." Catherine had been saying that a lot lately. Work on her thesis had slowed to almost a standstill.

Richard looked up from his grapefruit. "Again?"

"There's no great hurry, really." Catherine spoke over the deafening crunch of kamut and quinoa.

"What are you talking about? I thought you said the deadline was the end of the month?"

"It is." Guilt made Catherine terse.

Richard looked at her, then turned back to his grapefruit. "It's your neck".

It *was* her neck. She knew it. But she kept hearing a voice in her head and the voice was saying: "You have more important things to do, more important things to do."

Richard would have asked: what could be more important than finally finishing that damned thing off and finally getting a job and finally making a little money? And really, what could be more important? She wasn't quite sure herself, only she somehow knew that it had to do with the book.

Finally finished, Richard pushed himself off from the table and moved to the front door.

"I'll be late tonight."

Catherine watched him from the kitchen as he moved to look at himself in the hall mirror. She had once found him devastating—thin neck and large head, rounded features, delicate, expressive hands. She watched him now as he smoothed his hair back and adjusted his tie. It was just as his body turned, eyes still fixed on his reflection in the mirror, that one of his hands gently brushed across his crotch. She recognized that gesture—he

was checking to make sure he had remembered to take that thing which he would need later that day. Wallet left hand pocket, keys right, manhood dead center. Catherine knew then with certainty that he was going to be with another woman.

"You should say something," the voice inside her head urged.

The front door closed and he was gone.

"You have more important things to do." The voice rose up again now and she moved slowly to clean off the table, wiping up the cereal Richard had spilled, putting his dishes in the sink. It was a habit that would never be broken, that comfortable pattern of damage and repair. They both had their roles, however small.

"More important things to do." She drifted down the hall toward her bedroom. She and Richard no longer slept together in the same room. On more adventurous days she would walk through his bedroom like a wondering visitor to the Congo, marveling at the exotic strangeness of it all. It took a certain intrepidity, for it was really only during these visits that she knew with certainty they should no longer be together. His room was neat. Everything in its allotted place—he called it the Zen of bedroom maintenance. That idea that had once appealed to her; now it only disturbed. His books were all self-motivational: how to make money, how to succeed in business and life, how to manage others effectively. His clothes were evenly folded. The bed was tightly made. The pictures on the wall were to Catherine the strangest things of all—neatly cut from magazines—photos of Bill Gates, Donald Trump, Howard Hughes and others she did not recognize. There was more to wonder at. Plastic things made specifically for men and their desks, motivational posters, brass things made specifically for men and their desks, a video cassette rewinder in the shape of a sportscar, a peculiar lamp that had most certainly come from a hotel room somewhere. Things Catherine used to see in stores and giggle at and ask: who would ever buy these things? The odd unfathomable incongruity—a length of string tied from the bedpost to the lamp, a tiny switchblade open and stuck into the wood of his dresser. Catherine wondered why they were there. The gulf between them widened with every stroll through his room.

Before their marriage. Before her marriage, Catherine had been so much in love. Friends had laughed, mothers had rejoiced, strangers had recognized. In every gesture of his there had been a promise. "I'll love you until I'm incontinent" had been his words and the words had won her. She had believed them; she had found them no less beautiful for being crass.

They had married, and for a while it was glorious—a perfect matching of breath to breath and thought to thought. But in their unity, she thought she heard his wishes. She understood him to say: we don't need others, we are such a perfect One. And so, though he never openly asked her for it,

they gradually began to see less of the world. They stayed at home. She knew he wanted that. She grew used to it, to this going without. They had no children, they had no pets, they had no debts. Responsible choices, Richard had said. And finally there came a time when she could no longer oil the wheel of sociability; when she had forgotten how to speak to people. They existed just as two. They were completely alone, but in fact she was more alone—and now he was poised to leave.

Catherine entered her own room—a room that had the feeling of prolificacy—books in piles, papers on every surface, unfinished paintings done before her marriage, half-eaten apples and unruly plants, colourful bits of broken pottery and bright squares of pillow now rhomboid from age.

"You have more important things to do." She heard that inner voice again and went to find the book. It was something she had picked up a few weeks earlier, marked down in a discount bin at her favourite bookstore. She had been attracted by the bright cover showing a 19th century lithograph of Jacob the Wonder Mule performing his many wondrous feats. Jacob walking a tightrope, Jacob climbing on a chair. Jacob genuflecting, Jacob blindfolded and balancing on milk bottles. The book itself was dedicated to the unique, the bizarre and the amazing. It was irresistible.

In the weeks since she had bought the book work on her thesis had slowed to a standstill. Catherine pored over descriptions of attenuating men—men who could appear to grow at will. She read with affection about the prestidigitators, the frog swallowers and the mind readers, the horses that did card tricks and the pigs that could predict the future. Catherine treated the book as a secret shame and secret delight. That Richard would not understand—that was her delight. That the book had become more important than her studies—her shame.

There arose a ritual. Catherine would close her curtains to create a certain light, that magical light of the theatre just before opening act. She would climb under the covers with the book and a small pocket flashlight, just as she used to do at night as a child. There was no reason to hide like that, no reason other than the creation of that exquisite moment—a perfect combination of secrecy, discovery and mystery. It reminded her of the times she and her sister had constructed a sultan's tent using two blankets and some chairs. They would sit cross-legged under the red and blue canopy, taking sustenance from a miniature teapot and two tiny china cups filled with the wondrous concoction of hot tap water and peppermint candies. Under the warm tent they had whispered to each other stories of princesses and kings. They had sipped their peppermint tea and, hidden from the world, they had felt safe and strong.

The book. Her book. The extraordinary, the bizarre, the unconventional. The strange, the brave, the shunned. All form of creature, man and animal, united by uniqueness. All form of creature surviving by the dance,

the pirouette, the curtsy, the lie, the truth, the one-act play. Through shame and out of shame they had forged their lives. Under her blanket, Catherine opened the book and looked for those chapters that mattered to her most, the ones she read again and again—those chapters on the extraordinary women of the past who danced that particular dance.

CHAPTER 7—TRIAL BY FIRE
Signora Carmelita Firelli

The redoubtable Signora Carmelita Firelli arrived in Chicago from Rome in the year 1815, to much publicity and a great fanfare of public expectation. It was not only word of the Signora's amazing feats with fire that had preceded her, but also stories of her great beauty and personal charms that so excited public interest. The Chicago Herald, always ready to promote the spectacular, ran a column almost daily for a week after her arrival, describing her as the "Goddess of the Inferno" and "That Divine Lady of Fire". Her claims to being a force of nature were repeated, and confirmed by most of the city's newspapers.

The Signora's act, which drew huge crowds to the Sussex Theatre in the first few months, included dropping hot candle wax onto her tongue, pouring molten lead into her mouth, and unflinchingly passing small flames under her arms. She amazed crowds, and the occasional audience member was even said to have fainted, when she held boiling oil in her hands and then proceeded to walk barefoot over red-hot coals.

Signora Firelli's performance bill, posted on buildings and lamp posts throughout the city, showed a tiny-looking woman with large dark eyes stepping unscathed from a burning building. It read: "That Petite and FIRE PROOF Lady, the Signora Firelli, without the suffering of Injury, or Bodily Harm, and with Natural Forces and through the PHENOMENON OF FIRE, will ASTOUND and AMAZE with FIERY FEATS and OCCULT POWERS using BOILING LEAD and FIRE and FLAMES."

Despite her initial success, it did not take long before skeptics and detractors began publishing articles denouncing her as a fraud. The most notable was the rather acerbic columnist for the Herald, Franklin P. White.

In his January 12, 1815 article entitled "The Deception of Madame Fireli (sic)" White wrote:

"No Supernatural Gift or Skill, only the Chicanery of the Signora Fireli (sic): How any man or woman may perform Similar Feats." His article proceeded to describe how, using a complicated mixture of elements ground in just the right proportions, one could create a salve which would render one temporarily immune to the effects of a great heat. His summation read:

"One can see that there is nothing wonderful, extraordinary or even

magical about this Lady".

Once this article was published, interest in the Signora dropped sharply, and she vanished from the public spotlight. She died in relative obscurity at the age of fifty-seven, having returned to her beloved Rome. Her obituary was printed in only one newspaper of the time, the Chicago Herald, the same paper that had printed the article destroying her career many years earlier.

There had been a time when Catherine had enjoyed painting, had even thought it important to her well being. That she never considered a painting truly finished was, she knew, a common feeling among artists.

Her paintings were all very similar. A wash of paint, usually burnt umber or black or sienna. Subtle, but alive with an iridescence of creamy cotton canvas making its presence felt. Upon this background there always lay a small box, a tiny window onto a world filled with frenzied brush strokes of vibrant colour. Showing her work had never even been considered, but it gave Catherine great satisfaction to look upon her large canvases and the incongruity of the tiny but complex spaces that floated on their earthy ground. The paintings seemed to say something about her, although Catherine was not sure what that something was.

When she had first started dating Richard, Catherine had refused to show him her work. They had met at a University pub-crawl. This was not something she had ever done before, or something she had ever really wanted to do, but Catherine, anxious to cultivate a girlfriend of any sort, had taken on the habit of never refusing an invitation. She still had visions from her youth—a vista of pyjama parties, and giggling secrets and shopping excursions for feminine things that meant she must keep trying. That particular girl, Catherine remembered, without remembering her name, had been a fellow student in one of her Anthropology classes, and had been the possessor of great vivacity and even more impressive persuasive powers.

"If you don't go, *I* will know, and so will all my friends, that you really do consider yourself above all this," the girl had said. The "all this," Catherine took to mean not only University social life but, by the wave of the girl's hands, the whole world in general. And so Catherine had gone.

When she finally met Richard that evening, Catherine and the group of people she was with had already visited three pubs. She was not a person who held her liquor well. Not that she ever became incoherent or unruly or even drunk. It was just that a sort of weariness would creep over her, a weariness more of spirit than body, a fatigue caused by the sameness of action, the sameness of place, the sameness of people. To raise a drink to one's lips, to do it over and over, to watch with each successive drink the barriers break down to the point where silence had always to be broken by

raucous laughter and unprovoked merriment, always put her into a tired stupor which lasted for days.

She had stood up to go to the washroom, hoping there to find the momentum born of a moment's quiet, and was just pulling her body past the crowds that had clustered by the long wooden bar, when she and Richard had met. Catherine had sensed a someone, a face on a barstool turned toward her, but nothing more. As she had moved past him, he had reached out and held her arm, not roughly or suggestively, but rather gently, as a child might hold an Easter egg.

"You should go home," he had said.

At another time or place, Catherine might have thought him presumptuous. But there, in that smoky bar, with ELO blaring from the jukebox, and that weariness of spirit making her move like an elderly woman, Catherine was struck simply by the absolute truth of it. More than that, it seemed to speak a tender concern that could only arise from a kindness of heart. It had never occurred to Catherine that humanity and self-promotion might, on occasion, be sips of water from the same well.

They had talked together the rest of the evening, the friends she so longed to cultivate completely forgotten, and he had come back to her apartment that same night. At Catherine's request, he waited in the hallway for a few minutes, a hallway so common to student residences—walls spotty from tiny cockroach smudges, carpets filthy with years of student congress and transgress, smells stale from a mixture of marijuana and dirty sheets.

Her time in the apartment while Richard waited outside was spent not in tidying or studying her face in the mirror to see if the weariness of the evening had left its mark. That time was spent collecting together and covering with an old Hudson's Bay blanket, every one of her paintings. She told herself that there would be plenty of time to show him her work. That her paintings needed an explanation, the preamble of her personality, before they could be understood.

A few months later, when she and Richard were finally in love, and her tiny complex windows of colour had become her own life, Catherine had finally taken the blanket off of her work and had shown him her paintings.

She had waited with a breathlessness for his words, knowing all the while that she was being ridiculous. That if he said the right things, that if he liked them or loved them or simply understood them, it would change nothing at all. And that even if he said the wrong things, and hated them or looked at them with confusion or boredom, that she would still forgive. At the beginning, inconsequentials had seemed to matter, but now, now that she had learned to love the quiet of Richard's hands, it seemed to Catherine that no response could be wrong.

The cover had come off, and Richard had flipped through them as

though flipping through a deck of cards.

"You're quite prolific, aren't you? I've always thought abstracts must be pretty easy to do. That's *my* problem. You'll have to educate me."

Later Catherine wondered how there could have been a wrong answer and how there being one, he could have found it. But she suddenly saw that it was true, that abstracts were very easy to do. What were they, after all, but paintings for the technically challenged? And suddenly, seeing herself through Richard's eyes, knowing that she was not extraordinary, Catherine had stopped painting. And as Catherine had expected, she forgave. But never fully.

CHAPTER 9—HOG-FACED WOMEN
Mistress Lily Tanner

It was said that the mother of Lily Tanner had been frightened by a pig while her child was in the womb. Others claimed that the unborn child was bewitched by an angry maid who had cursed her well-to-do mistress with the words: "Thy child shall live as ye hath wrought. As the mother be swinish so shall be the child within."

This was said to have been the cause of the birth of the incredible hog-faced woman, Lily Tanner, in the year 1634 in the small town of Tiverton, England.

Several anonymous works of the time described Lily as normal and perfectly formed, with a symmetrical figure and pleasing body, but for the hideous face of a pig. It was a face that so frightened those who looked upon it that Lily was forced to wear a cloth bag over her head in the presence of others and to live out her days in the seclusion of her parents' large estate. It was also said that her speech, though intelligible to those who knew her, was infrequent and resembled, more than anything, the gruntings and muzzlings of a pig.

Lily's parents, anxious to secure their daughter's happiness, attempted to encourage suitors with the promise of a huge dowry. A procession of men duly arrived, little fazed by Lily's inability to speak, or by her pig-like face. Said one fortune hunter: "'Tis an advantage indeed, for if she cannot speak, then she most certainly cannot compleyn." Said another: "In darkened bed chamber, with bagge over her head and candles snuffed, what difference betwixt her and other women?"

Great surprise was engendered at the time by Lily's refusal to wed any of her suitors. Those who wrote of her explained this as the natural result of a heart that matched the person; a heart that was cold and swinish and malformed.

"Why do you love me?"

It was a question that all women asked at some point. Yet, predictable as she knew she was being, Catherine still had to ask.

She and Richard were sitting in a café, her favourite sort of place; a tiny room with crowded tables and art on the walls and a well-worn wooden floor. The sun streamed in through multi-paned windows as they sipped their coffees, between them, a plate holding one piece of chocolate cake, neatly bisected. Catherine blamed the cake for her mood. There was something so touching about that tiny wedge of chocolate, so carefully divided so as to be enough for two, so equal and fair in its perfect division. As most things did these days, it held a promise, a glimpse of the future. They would be the kind of couple who, unashamed, sampled each other's food at restaurants. Who shared their salad and sipped a taste of each other's drinks. They would be the kind of couple who, as their bones lost matter and their eyes grew dim, would hold each other's hands to keep them warm and button each other's coats when days were chilly.

"Why do you love me?"

She had not repeated the question, and yet felt as though she had. She still heard her words, soft in the air, bouncing gently off the china and the crimson flower that sat on their table, making a slight ripple in her coffee and a flutter in her heart as they finally rose to meet Richard.

Richard did not answer immediately. She knew he would not. There were things too important for haste, too precious to be available on demand.

"Why do I love you...?"

Catherine watched Richard's face. She felt it important to do so. She wanted to see that look of concentration that she knew so well, a look so different from the looks on other people's faces. A look that never failed to give her pleasure.

"I love you because you're normal. I love you because you don't have the hang-ups other people do. Because you're attractive. Because you've never embarrassed me. For all kinds of reasons."

The coffee in her china cup shook and sloshed against the sides, as Catherine picked it up to take a sip.

CHAPTER 11—SWORD SWALLOWERS & MAGICIANS
Mrs. Helena Smith

Nee Helena Humphrey, the premier sword swallower of the 19th century was born in Newark, New Jersey in the year 1881. By the year 1897, Helena had joined the Barnum and Bailey Circus and continued to tour with them for more than a decade. Not only could Miss Humphrey swallow

many different types and sizes of sword and knife, but she amazed crowds in Europe and the United States with her ability to swallow all kinds of other unusual objects, including scissors, rocks and stones, pieces of rope and, perhaps most incredibly, a jagged-edged saw some two feet in length.

The records of the time show that she married her husband, a Mr. George Smith, in the year 1899, at the age of 18. Mr. Smith, his only part in her performance being to hand her those things which she would then proceed to swallow, always, and without exception, received equal billing to his extraordinary wife.

Mrs. Smith (the former Miss Humphrey) retired from performing at the age of 30, and lived in relative obscurity in Newark, until her brutal slaying at the hands of an unknown assailant. Her murder was blamed on the foolhardiness of her own actions, for she had ventured into a part of town known to be dangerous. Papers of the time noted that she was murdered with a knife not dissimilar to one that she had swallowed many years before.

It was one of the few dinner parties she and Richard were ever to give. They had been married just three months, and when Richard came to her and suggested that they invite some of his co-workers from the office, Catherine had felt it her duty to say yes. She was still under the sway of that ceremony; that wonderful day of organza and white, of things that had sparkled, of waves of public approbation that had lifted her train and tousled her veil. They had seen so few people since their marriage that she was, in fact, looking forward to it. She envisioned a night of tiny successes, a roast praised, a wineglass lifted in toast, a golden light, a civilized chink of silver plate against china.

She began preparing a full two weeks beforehand. Lacy tablecloths were unfurled and inspected for stains. Her mother's silver-plated serving dishes, which she had at one time tried to refuse with the assurance that they would never be used, and which had lain sullen and tarnished in a lower drawer of her buffet, she now brought out and energetically polished. She searched desperately through a dozen cook books, looking for the most suitable preprandial, and spent nearly half an hour in the liquor store questioning a bored salesperson about the relative merits of dry or sweet.

That tiny voice that now commanded her to do more important things had, even back then, not been entirely silent. It had arisen and nagged at her, not stridently or with conviction, but rather as the low rumbling that heralds an earthquake. Then, it had asked her "why?" and she had answered it, depending on the time or place, in ways she thought irrefutable. It had asked her "why" as she had tried to clean off spots of rust from every ancient pot and well-used pan, and she had answered: *Because these are the things of which life is made.* It had asked her "why" as she reeled from

noxious fumes that promised to vanquish her dirty toaster-oven, and she had answered: *Because these are the things done by the good, the diligent, the caring.* And it had asked her "why," as she lay on her belly, tiny handi-vac in hand, sucking up the dust and hair that she and Richard had so creatively shed, and she had answered: *Because Richard wants it so.*

When the night finally came, and eight perfect places were set at eight perfect points of her table, when the delicious smell of garlic, and meat and cooked apple permeated her clothes and perfumed her skin, when the four white tapered candles were lit and cast a shy light on her well-ordered centerpiece, Catherine felt proud. Not so much proud of what she had wrought, but proud rather that she was now part of a tradition, part of a continuum of women who, since the beginning of time, were able to make the hearth glow brighter, the hem sit straighter, the pillow feel fluffier.

As their guests arrived, Catherine greeted them easily. She thought she saw Richard look at her with approbation and, feeling warmed by his admiration, took courage from it. It made it possible for her to waft from kitchen to table with the ease of a headwaiter, allowed her serve out large dollops of sticky yam and pineapple with completely steady hand, and even meant that she could pour out crimson streams of wine throughout the evening without spilling a drop.

As the night progressed, the chitchat and laughter and camaraderie became a palimpsest of happiness to Catherine. She knew this was to be her life. A steady stream of visitors, happy to be there, happy to eat her food and sit at her table, happy to be fed and coddled and pampered in her home. People who were thankful to her, people who, because of her, would sit in their cars on their way home and say: "Wasn't that a wonderful evening?"

Catherine was clearing away the main course dishes. All had complimented, all had praised, when one of her guests, a blue-eyed young woman had asked:

"Catherine, your potatoes were wonderful. Could I get the recipe?"

People said this at dinner parties—it was a mere matter of politeness, of form. Catherine knew that. Yet she could not help turning pink with pride and, flustered for the first time that evening went to find pen and paper in order to write it down. When she returned to the room, Richard was speaking.

"You should have seen her place when we first met. I've never seen so much mess. Papers everywhere, clothes, paints on the floor, nothing in the fridge. I've been the civilizing force here. You really have *me* to thank for the dinner."

It was said jocularly, a mere throwaway, an obvious joke. Men had laughed and women had disclaimed. There was much banter about chauvinism and

ego, much mock disgust and shaking of the head. Catherine had smiled with the rest, had said something about men which made the women laugh, and had turned to write down the recipe, trying hard to focus on teaspoons of nutmeg, on ratios of cream to potato, on baking times and oven temperatures, while her hands shook.

Years later, when they had already begun their rocky slide, when that avalanche of slights and misdemeanors had left them lost, Richard had said: "What do you think of a woman who does nothing for her husband? Who only makes a place a home when other people come?"

Catherine had not been able to answer. That cluster of images she still held as fond remembrance, that now slight and somewhat fuzzy memory of gleaming silverware and rosy faces, of irises nestled among sprays of Queen Anne's lace, of tables glistening with lemon and paraffin, all suddenly focused and coalesced, becoming one sharp, very sharp thought, a thought that travelled through her being and pierced her in places she thought invulnerable. A thought that finally smote her.

CHAPTER 18—MIRACLES & MUMMERY
Marie Veriault

In the year 1737, a certain Marie Veriault, housewife in Vence, France, claimed to have been raped by a large white rabbit as she walked home through a secluded stretch of wood. Her husband, Jean Veriault, assured his wife that this was merely a mad delusion, but was forced to reconsider when, over the next year, Marie gave birth to a number of small white rabbits. Word of this miraculous event spread throughout the country and Marie became something of a celebrity, with many making the trip to Vence in order to view the miraculous brood. When, however, Marie once again claimed to be pregnant by the same white rabbit, her husband was this time quick to act, and she was immediately removed from her home and placed in an institution for the insane. There, threatened with an abortion, Marie confessed that it had all been a lie. When asked why she would have perpetrated such a scandalous hoax, it is said that Marie responded: "I wished to be allowed to keep rabbits."

Children and babies held little interest for Catherine. She had never been one for whom the mere sight of a child meant pleasure and longing. She had often seen groups of women clustered around well-outfitted baby carriages or little girls in pinafores, making throaty sounds, cooing their delight and appreciation. Catherine knew they had an ability, the ability to see only the present: the tiny hand, the pink rounded head, the sleeper sprinkled with pansies, the firmly held teddy bear. Catherine wished that she had that gift, but she could never look at a child without seeing an entirety

of being stretching ahead twenty years or so. In one moment's glance, Catherine would feel the cry, the wail, all manner of things scatological, the laundry, the sleeplessness, the protective fear, the constant terror that the world would be cruel, the slamming of the bedroom door, the preteen shout of "I hate," the child walking swiftly away, disavowal in his or her speed to be gone.

Richard's reasons for not wanting children were better than her own. He talked of world populations and limited resources and personal responsibility. And yet, he could look, as she could not, with appreciation. He could dimple at babies, and point them out to her with a laugh of delight. He could bend down so as to be face-to-face, and talk earnestly to them. He could call them *adorable* and *sweet* and in doing so, please mother and father and child alike.

It had been a stinging December day when these things had changed. Catherine had been to buy oranges. She often bought them not only because they were needed, but also because she loved the summertime feel of a half-dozen orange spheres in a brown paper sack, and later, the look of them in a pale green bowl by a frosted wintry window.

She had been walking along a busy street, inexpensive Christmas greenery and tinsel making all that was run-down look festive, her brown paper bag clutched to her chest as protection against the wind, when she had seen her. A tiny Chinese girl and her parents, stopped at the street light, waiting for it to change. The little girl was dressed in a snowsuit, her arms and legs protruding from her body like the tiny fins on a puffer fish, her hair hidden under a bright red jester's hat, its pointed ends decorated with shiny silver bells. Catherine had suddenly lost her breath in wonder and longing. Others had stopped to look and admire too, the usual cluster of appreciative women and their spouses. The little girl had looked up and then they had looked at each other, adult and child. As Catherine's heartbeat and breath slowly returned, an insistent I want I want I want began to rhythmically resound within her and finally pushed her forward and home.

Later that night, when Richard was sitting in his chair reading his newspaper, Catherine had begun that which was so hard for her begin.

"Maybe we should have a baby."

Richard had looked up, not saying anything.

"Maybe we should have a baby." Catherine repeated, not knowing what else to say. Richard put down his paper, frustration not yet making him unfriendly.

"We always agreed on that point. You know how I feel about it."

Catherine did know. But she could not stop herself from continuing and she spoke all the usual reasons, none of which seemed really good, none of which could come close to the I want I want I want of that afternoon. It would give them a purpose as a couple, it was important to have someone to love,

they had the means and space and energy, it was selfish not to, there would be someone to look after them in their old age.

"You'd make a great father," was her feeble finale, though Catherine really didn't know whether or not it was true. It didn't seem to matter.

"We agreed," he said. "We both always agreed that we weren't going that route. It's a decision that both parties have to make. If one doesn't want it, it can't happen." And then, after a pause, "I'm sorry."

Catherine had recognized that I'm sorry for what it was, not really an apology at all, but rather a final coda, a closing argument, an end to the discussion. She said nothing else. She knew she had seen the solution somewhere, maybe in a book read many years ago, maybe in a TV movie of the week, she could not remember which. But she found it comforting that there were precedents, fictional or not. As she snubbed those little pink pills so happily arrayed in their perfect circle, the I want, I want I want finally became: I want, I will have, I deserve.

When months later she finally told Richard that she was pregnant, an awful silence had come down around them, a silence so thorough that she thought she heard his eyes close. He had gone to her purse and taken out her birth control pills, moving not like one betrayed, not with purpose or anger, but with a nod of the head, as though he had known all along that such a thing was coming.

"You stopped taking these, right?"

Catherine knew she could have lied. Knew that he would not know, that those little pills were as incomprehensible to him as she was. Knew she could have quoted statistics about the fallibility of birth control, talked of an accident that must now be lived with, could have cried and spoken of fate and making the best of things but, instead, she told him the truth.

"I thought we were a couple," Richard had said, and she hadn't the strength to disagree.

Later, as she lay on a sofa in the clinic, and that tiny seed that had promised her completion was no longer with her, Richard had gently stroked her hair, and asked her why she had done something so unthinking, so mad. Now she would have said, "Because I wished to be allowed to keep rabbits," but then, then she had only closed her eyes and said *I'm sorry.*

Catherine was in her bedroom, not under the covers this time, but looking out the window, when Richard returned. He came to her immediately, as she knew he would, and before he could say the words he needed to say in order to leave, before his sentence was complete, she broke apart. Their long silence finally broken, the gusts of her anguish blew him away, far away, and she watched him finally leave.

"Why?" Catherine knowing still had to ask.

"Because she is extraordinary."

And because I am not, Catherine's mind told her, because I am not.

After he had packed a bag and left, and her long night began to wander into day, Catherine knew that it was finally time. "You have more important things to do," her mind told her again, and she closed her eyes in order to do them.

Catherine stood in the middle of the circle. A large circle of women that had no end. She saw her mother and her mother's mother and her mother before that. Thousands of women in a circle, some of them standing, some on horses, some flying through the air, some lying on the ground. Women who played with fire. Women who walked on coals. Some had no hands or feet. Many were gagged and bound. Some had swallowed swords and knives. Many more were pierced by them.

"You have more important things to do" the women's voices rang out, and to silence them, Catherine finally did what she was meant to do.

Where woman met woman and history turned to meet itself, the circle shifted and re-formed, and Catherine moved to take her proper place among the suffering.

Kate Small

Strange Cold Storm

I don't worry that no one will choose Asha, her skin is light.
"I am a green and yellow bird!" she sings about herself, spinning by the sink. She is eight. There is a small row of shops in a corner of South London—*India Sweet House, Paradise Saris, Ganesh Books*—this is where I find things for her. I cut up my two *saris,* re-dyed and embroidered them, I have added edges from two pillowcases. She thinks she smells blossoms or incense on me when I come home from the shops, but it is bus fumes and sweat, and the dogs.

My daughter has learned to stay alone in our room. When I come home, her reward is to talk—to talk as if her tongue will be frozen the next day. I have taught her to read, I tell her as many stories as I can, *The Panchantatra, The Kalpa Sutra,* but I am tired, I am beginning to forget. I make some of it up and she adds to what I tell. Her stories yeast during her hours alone, they become the warm and round ones to which we return. She is much too bright and I must keep her in. Hindi streams from her mouth, the accent strange, it comes from no region.

My daughter is born here, an English girl, a smear in my belly, carried through guns and cracking fires, past bodies doused in kerosene, past burns on the ground where children roasted. Someone gave us flags, we waved them as we ran. It was raining and the farmhouses were full of water. In the cities people rushed out of shops with stolen armloads of sewing machines and food. I left beautiful kites. I must be thirty-one.

Dogs approach me in the street because they smell themselves on the pants and coat I wear. I muck the track kennels, I pick up what falls below the grand-stand, I swab the ground around the wager-box. It is 1957.

"Audhumla lived on a frosty plain," Asha says when I get home, "she made the world." It is late, only six hours before I leave to feed the dogs, but I show her how to make *appalam* and *raita.* She chatters while she watches. I am pressing flour—I shut my eyes for a second, and see the tunnels under this city—how she could get lost below these British days which don't begin in the morning, but one minute past midnight.

"Her breath was sweet but her milk was bitter," my daughter says about Audhumla the cow. Above us a bare bulb swings and casts its light on cracked walls.

I am Hindu but there is a word in Punjabi, *watan.* It is difficult to translate.

It can mean home, country, land—all and any of them. When Punjabis speak of their *watan,* they are expressing a longing for the place they feel they belong. Asha's *watan* has become *India,* but vague and un-villaged, a paper place which exists only in her stories. Mine would be the sky. An open field near a large body of water. A plain two-stick kite, lashed and wrapped. Breezes and light wind. Where I can study the smoke from fires and chimneys, and the movement of the clouds. There is too much to teach her. She asks me, what is the game of *chaukhat,* but I can't remember. I put her to bed.

I sit with a candle low in the bathroom. There is a vertical column of bathrooms in the building flush to ours, down the sides of the fire-steps. He takes a bath in the middle of the night. He smokes, he opens the window all the way, even in the snow. He holds a hand out, palm up to flakes. I hold him in my mind like a ghost.

Asha has her eyes shut, she is standing in the middle of the bed.

"My wings are this long," she says, "I am a *garuda,* only real." Sometimes I can't smile at these things, but I have brought her everything to make *kali dal.*

"I fly over all the temples. You are frowning. I wave at you."

I set out beans, onions and ginger, yoghurt, cumin and *ghee.*

He sits with his face in his hands, his shoulders pull tight the skin on his back. He drinks tea, or small cups of coffee. He has hair the colour they call red here, but it is cooked yams and paprika. Saffron dusted on his skin. He is young. He folds small pieces of paper carefully over the water, he dries his fingers quickly on a towel by his elbow.

I cut a picture out of a newspaper left on the ground near the judging-stand. It is a map of India woven into a *Kashmiri* shawl, embroidered for an English queen. Someday I will take Asha to see it, hanging in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The photograph makes all the coloured threads of the landmass gray, the borders vague. The provinces are suddenly wrong now, but rivers don't change so I point to these. *Watan,* I say to Asha, I draw a dot for a town no longer there; she invents a myth about a fish. She dances on the bed to Glenn Miller and Count Basie and Louis Armstrong.

The dogs are bred to pursue live game by sight rather than scent. They stretch toward me with overgrown eyes, gaping like broken wells. When I reach up to stuff my braid back into my hood, the movement makes them cringe and piss. *Never look at their tails,* someone told me, *Never touch their bodies.* I keep my eyes away from theirs.

I think of the skin on his back like the surface of thin dishes. I am too old to get married, and too dark. My skin is pocked black, my teeth big and yellow. I am too tall. There is a Malay kite with a convex bow, the spine is a keel, it keeps the bird's surface shape ready to catch the wind.

I have been gone fifteen hours but Asha sings me in the door, just off the ten-thirty from Victoria. I am dripping with a stench not mine but she is warm. I don't explain about the stones and ice-pops full of piss lobbed at me by bored schoolboys from the Secondary Modern, just as I don't tell her about the smoke-streaked buildings of *home,* shredded wash hanging from balconies and the sour steam that never goes away. She sees small pink houses with morning glories, terraced squares of green, horses and lakes with clouds flashing past. Banquets.

"Whole potatoes in Spicy Gravy," she says, "and buttered cabbage." I spoon her cinnamon basmati and peaches. I help her build a tiny kite, broom-straw and thin tissue, "to be flown with number one-hundred thread," I say.

"It is just as easy to make a kite that will fly," she says, repeating me, "as it is to make one that will not." She frowns and nods.

"In order to judge the direction of the air's movement," I say, "put a mirror on the ground, face up, mark the directions on it with bits of gummed paper."

I would fly two at a time over a dried pond, where I could see the heated air quivering up. One of my kites would always climb and break away. I'd find it in a field later, studied by cows.

"Smoke and clouds in the mirror move in the same compass-direction as the smoke and clouds in the sky," I say.

"The best kites fly in the lightest of breezes," Asha says.

I was always careful not to block the mirror with my face.

Sometimes he laughs. I can't hear it, but he tips his head back, he shakes it from side to side, and slides down deeper in the tub. His hair spikes up damp. His hand is like a person itself, or my daughter's *garuda* bird—his hand is like my daughter. Tiny paper cranes are perched around the tub.

She knows the dogs exhaust me, their hopeful, speechless tails, four-footed starvation quivering towards a piece of bloody pelt.

"We must make offerings of henna and black chickens to *Laxmi,*" she says petting our small goddess statue. I don't know where she has read this. I don't have time to read.

She cares more about cooking than the sky and I tell myself this is better, that she doesn't crave the way a kite tugs at its string like a living thing. I will carry the dreams which keep coming at night, about how I

would tie a box of confetti to a tail and pull it open. I used to read the air currents this way. I fixed pipes and whistles on streamers and the wind blew music through them. Only for a few seconds, and only when I sleep, these middle-of-the-night kites are pushed away by the dogfeet in my head, by the small grey bitch who circles an invisible bed, and my own body, jolted awake by the pitched boredom which makes them chew their tails. I can hear the wailing. *To make a kite that will dance,* I chant to myself; *smooth or glazed paper is best, held to the match-stick with tapioca paste.*

"I need to keep my mind blank in constant effortless meditation," Asha says to me when I get home. She has been writing in a notebook for days.

"A princess whose family came on horseback to the old British mill station of Murree, in the north of Pakistan." She makes up a past for me. We are standing in one dirty room in Brixton, two walls backed to the railway line.

"Her life, a cool river of balmy distraction," my little daughter dreams about this imagined mother. I am framed by yellow walls and a gas fire, and on my face I wear my worry about the pipes. They are frozen and it's not yet December. Dogs race under my eyelids. I think about string. *Carpet and button yarn. White warp or a good grade of wrapping twine. Linen shoe thread. Silk makes a wonderful cord for a few minutes, but the fibers slip past each other so easily that a firm pull from the kite will break them all.*

I keep the window barely cracked. He pulls his shirt over his chest, settles into the water gingerly. Lately he is teaching himself something. He reads a small book. His lips move, he shuts his eyes, opens them again. I am not close enough to see the hair on his arms, but I imagine it. Some nights he holds himself with both hands.

"*Salamba Sirsasana* revives and maintains a spirit of youthfulness," my daughter says to me in Hindi at eight. "An asset beyond price, it is wonderful to know that you are ready to face up to life and extract from it all the real joy it has to offer." She is leaning in a closet.

She is reading Bombay pulp while I shovel the shit away from my frail, hungry prisoners. I don't like these tales of run-away wives, too-small dowries, adultery among the rich of Bombay, but I don't have time to go to the book shop. I stop quickly at a small Pakistani place, I step over tins and cartons and buy any reading I can find. The man there is always shivering and wears fingerless gloves. Outside are boxes of pale vegetables. *Orange and lemon crates are made of sawed boards and make good kite sticks.* It's dark but I see the birds, fish and dragons I painted—it is impossible to say how high any of them went because I only ever had a thousand feet of string.

"They went to school in a horse-drawn rickshaw," she reads to me.

"They played cricket and tennis on the family court. The servants were ball-boys. The matches were against the British and you had to let them win." It is cold and I can see her breath in the air.

I find my daughter in the bath at midnight, plaster crumbling off the walls, most of the ceiling dumped on the floor and the Ascot heater glowing dangerous as a land-mine. I feed her bread and apples from a brown paper bag. Words from the street outside ring in my ears, *wog* and *nig* and *Paki.* Asha splashes out of the tub and pulls from the oven *kebabs* coated with mango chutney and wrapped in *chapati.*

"I cooked!" she yells, and jumps up and down.

I would tuck something between the back of his neck and the rim of the tub, if I were there. I don't know the colour of his eyes. He shaves. He twists away from the window, his neck wet and white like the plane of my soap. He hugs his knees. I have never seen a man's chest so pale, all the white men I have seen were red, and dirty. Probably blue.

She is so light, I think she could run on snow and leave no footprints. But I live even closer to the hard part of London than the track at its edge. At night they roam the streets, beating Asians and shoving shit and burning rags through our letter boxes. White, hating faces in a Union Jacks parade, protected by the police. I keep my daughter in the tub, I feed her books. I keep buckets of water around our bed in case we are firebombed in the night. Meanwhile she learns how to roast onions and chilies, how to sweat the brown juice out of meat and ladle it over peppers. She scalds her fingers and burns the pans. I hurry from the track to a tea shop in the High Street to see what blends they have so that I might keep her tongue from boredom. *Curryface* some child yells, he throws snot and chalk and wood shavings at my coat. I come in and she is reading *Great Expectations* in Hindi. *Nothing has changed,* I want to say to Dickens. Yesterday someone pissed over my shoes, traffic speeds up when we're in the street. But here in our room she has made a tiny feast of tomatoes stuffed with raisins.

The man has not bathed at night in six days. I don't think I have ever seen him on the street, but I can't be sure.

When I come home I find Asha in the hallway outside the door. I don't want to scold but I see her feet are wet. I take her wrists and shake her. She has tucked a bunch of grass in her sleeve. My daughter lives in a closet. I must lead her out, but not here. The next continent—at least two continents away from the bloated corpses still floating in the canals, and overbred dogs, muscled up by starvation.

How my mouth, my lips would swell with moisture. The moment of opening, the first meeting of tongue. Once he dropped a paper bird out the window. It fell gently, but down and away, it fell with the force of the mechanical lure, yanking ahead of desire and gaping beggars. I am the grey bitch pinned to the starting box.

"She met a polished English gentleman lawyer and accomplished ballroom dancer."

Let her remake it as a love story. She needn't know his bald scalp was dappled with iodine and ring-worm, that he was some kind of minor English criminal turned expatriate, who'd learned handfuls of Hindi and Punjabi wandering, until he found an empty hut sided with hammered tin cans. She doesn't need to see his greasy white whiskers, or smell the rancid olive oil on his *jellaba.* I was starving and he was sucking a length of cut sugar cane, drawing the syrup out of the soft white inside and spitting out the pale fibre sucked dry. I had never tasted it.

"Grey hair is nothing to be ashamed of; it shows patience, forbearance, a long life," he said with yellow teeth. He had cotton wool dipped in oil held behind his ear, and began telling me of the jackals and ghosts that haunt the highways, robbers who carried silk handkerchiefs to strangle their victims. I slept by him because I was so tired, on an open patch of ground by the train sheds. I remember nothing of it, except the sky, and a vast dump of garbage, groups of people hacking at the ground with picks, sewers running, a series of concrete towers beyond. Around us bodies lay in ditches, crows and dogs eating them. The next day electric power to the city was cut, there were riots all the way to the lake which belched methane from its bed of shit and silt, people herded past it for miles, I saw them crawling around in the rusting pipes of a sewage scheme that never got built. I saw three boys on roller-skates slipping and falling on shit, laughing—they'd burned someone, but I already knew what this looks like. A woman on fire gets up, falls, runs, falls. Oil drips from her limbs, the whites of her eyes engulf the pupils, then there is white underneath everything. "We'll go to England," Asha's father said. We went through Morocco in a truck freighting newspaper rolls.

"Laxmi blessed their radiant love with luck and doves and cake," Asha sings.

When we first got here rationing was still on, but for one day we ate corned-beef sandwiches. He talked about the Catford dog track and Epsom Downs. He talked about pigeon racing. *Wait here,* he said to me in front of a club called the Croyden Greyhound, but never came out. Outside it was foggy and the prostitutes around Hyde Park yelled *go away.*

How we would look for the water, in each other. Love the stripes of fat in my hip like Japanese paper ribboned with mulberry, like polished linen. He'd trace the webs with the back of one finger. He'd look at my face and he wouldn't look away.

His hand like a messenger-kite in the snow.

Tonight I will buy a white tablecloth and napkins, I will buy Asha a sandalwood garland. I will inhale it on the bus and push away the smell of thoroughbred despair, steaming up from dogs whose bodies are worth thousands of pounds more than mine. I will forget the slower ones, let loose in a Liverpool street. They always smell their way back to a track, somewhere. I will tell her that many forces make a kite's flight successful. Soaring birds balance themselves on rising columns of air. The strange cold storms of the Indian sea are descending, these suck a kite down. The wind which whips around a street corner is deceptive—buildings make contrary currents, they cause a kite to dart. There are electric wires, there is traffic. There is the life we get when we are not fast enough, when we are born with other legs.

Sue Walsh

China

I have graceful lines, Gary. The night I first took you up into my flat in Hillbrow and it was raining, you stood in front of the glossy black-and-whites I nailed to the brick wall and you cried.

I said, "Look at them. Look at their eyes—no hope. Just a couple cents and a bottle of glue." You sniffed, shook your head. "It's not that, Phillip. It's not that at all. Look at the lines," you said. "Those beautiful sympathetic lines. It's got nothing to do with the little bastards at all. It's you, sweet boy. Your eye for lines."

So now you call from back East where things are happening. "I'm mounting a gorgeous show," you say and I hear you turn and nod, your beard hair scratching the mouthpiece. "Xao Zheng's my fresh, new boy," you say. "A sweet radical from Beijing. He has a new series of chromoprints taken in the Tibetan wilderness. It's a brave new thing."

I remember being the latest thing—dressed all in black, sipping Ontario Chenin Blanc and talking to the President of the Toronto Arts Council at my own gala opening. 1988, and the *Globe and Mail* raved: "Phillip Hayworth represents all that is wrong with the Apartheid system; his work represents all that is right about dismantling it—frame by frame." And there they hung, my boys. In a straight line around the room. Each head in a frame.

You didn't ask what I'm doing now. Spoke instead about the coming winter. Asked only how much I was smoking—"Your voice sounds dreadful!" And about the length of my hair, which was always important to you. "That fabulous mane of yours, Philip?" You would sound awful too if you smoked cheap American cigarettes.

Let me tell you what I'm taking pictures of. Let me tell you, Gary. Today I did a session with the mayor of Port Coquitlam's wife in her crushed-cranberry merry widow. She kept asking me, "It's such a rich colour, don't you think, Mr. Hayworth? Crushed cranberry. Can I call you Phillip?"

Yes. Crushed cranberry. I caught two buses out to her nouveau stucco this morning and she met me at the front door with a glass of scotch in her hand. She's lumpy and in her fifties, Gary. A woman like that doesn't look good in high-cut lingerie. There *are* no sympathetic lines.

Maybe you did ask "Still keeping busy, dear?" and before I could answer, you were onto your spring exhibition line-up. The galleries out here have no money. The press agency calls once, maybe twice a month. One-off

jobs. I've been thinking about starting up a newsstand again, a mobile cart. Doing espressos on the side and brownie bars, cling-wrapped muffins. But I need capital. I have nothing to begin.

The day we met, you bought a newspaper and a pack of mints from me on the corner of Klein and Esselen Street. I sold you a *Rand Daily Mail* and you took your time taking the change out of my hand. You looked up at the Hillbrow Tower and smirked—said, "How phallic," and then had to explain. I was that green. "Johannesburg's a sexy place," you said, and then asked what you should call me.

Twelve years have passed since then. Call me China, Gary. Don't call me Phillip anymore. I am not Phillip Andrew and my surname is not Hayworth. I am far from the Hayworths—God bless them both, wherever you have stuffed them in your heaven. Little Mom and big old Dad. Take care of them both, God. Bless also the beauty who was my blood mother, my beautiful black whore mother. Dark lips drawing men like magnets, hair twisted up and held with combs on the top of her head. They say she was tall and slim, curved like a question mark. Sophina?

Sophina Sophina Sophinasophinasophina...like a walking musical, a living diva, a dying dame. That was her name, and they told me she had a way of looking down on men that kept them close at her stiletto heels. Kept them coming back, again and again.

No one remembers the man who was my father. I imagine he slid in one night in a sleek foreign embassy car. I think he wore a custom-cut suit the colour and sheen of silverfish. He put his two fat fingers out the window and called her over. A smouldering cigar. I think he came for her often like that, I think he came for her every night he could. They say she was a beautiful chocolate of a woman, a girl men wanted to unwrap. I think he took her up to the top of the revolving Carlton Hotel and undid her. I am my brown mother. I am also my China father. When I step out of the shower at night, depending on the way the light falls, I see her shape reflected in the glass door. Other times, he is there, staring back at me like a stranger I want to know. Call me China, Gary. Don't call me Phillip. Don't call me Phillip anymore.

There was a stupid song on the radio in the late seventies. I was thirteen or fourteen and all the kids were singing it at school. I told you this story once years ago as we sat smoking, slipping my proofs and negatives into sleeves to bring to Canada. I stood up on a packing crate and sang the song for you, like this: "You've gotto go for the gap, go for the gap, go for the gap, my China." You laughed. I sang it again. You didn't understand. "Is this meant to be a sex thing, Phillip?" "No," I said, "—yes. Well, both. Back then, going for the gap meant coming south from Rhodesia—all the white farmers escaping from the fighting. Running away from the war." "Is that what you're doing, Phillip? Are you going for the gap?" Your eyes were doing that

little piggy twitch behind your glasses. "That's not the point of the song, Gary, it's not the fucking point. They just sang it because the song said "China" and I looked Chinese. Do I have to do the semantics? China means 'buddy,' means 'pal.' It means 'mate!' Fucking mate! Mate—in the Australian sense of the word. Do you get it?" "So what's the fuss?" you said, dragging long on your Gauloise. "The fuss, Gary, is that I wasn't their bloody mate. That's just it. I was the only fucking oriental in the whole Johannesburg Arts Academy and every time I spoke to a girl or went into the darkroom with one to develop negatives or print proofs, somebody would start singing that bloody song. Over and over again—go for the gap, go for the gap... It was hugely fucking annoying." "I'm sure it was," you said, took another drag.

I was a freak, Gary. A slit-eyed, acne-faced, coffee-skinned freak. I was a freak in a house of freaks. Mom and Dad Hayworth started the Bethel Home for Mongoloid Children. That was where I grew up, in a bloody home for Mongoloid Children, and as far as I knew I was just like Toady with his short fat neck and all the others. It was *you* who told me I was beautiful, *you* who told me I was tall and elegant and had good lines. And I laughed. I didn't believe you because you'd never seen Toady or any of the other kids. You never *saw* us going out in the big white van for ice-creams or to the zoo. I imagined I was just like them because they were the closest thing I had to brothers and sisters, and we were all freaks then. People would stare at us as we drove by—and there was Mom, peering obliviously over the steering wheel.

Mom Hayworth was the smallest woman I've ever seen. Tiny, pale and quivering. She wore brown crimpelene trousers and Georgette blouses that billowed around her bony elbows. When I think of her, I see the shadow of hair above her top lip she never thought to bleach; she never saw it there. It was Mom who called me Phillip—as in Philadelphia, because she was from there and she believed in love. I never told you about Philadelphia because you would have found something clever to say. It was something I kept for myself.

Mom schooled me at home with text books from the American Missionary Society. I remember the AMS stamp in an oval on the book spines. While Dad taught the other kids in a separate room with low tables and chairs, Mom was at the high kitchen table with me. She hovered around the room like a small greasy sparrow. I did long division while she washed dishes, read about aborigines making fire in the Australian Outback while she peeled carrots. I remember two-page spreads—photographs of wheat fields in far away Sas-kat-che-wan. "Say it again, Phillip. Sas-kat-che-wan." I put my finger on the red tractor and moved along the horizon line between the dark blue sky and the yellow land. Once, when I was much smaller, she wiped her red hands on a towel and drew me a pencil sketch of an Igloo on

a square of white paper towel. Igloo, Phillip. Eskimo.

This also I never told you. The first time I ventured out of the Home was when Dad signed me up for Cub Scouts. He bought me the right khaki shorts, the short-sleeved shirt, the green scarf tie. We got my hair buzzed short-back-and-sides at the barber shop on Friesen Street and I practiced the cub salute in my parents' bedroom mirror. Studied the small cloth-backed book 'till I knew all the words. Mom took me to the first pack meeting and sat outside in the Peugeot while I went in alone. All the boys stood in a circle: "A-ke-la, we'll do our best! *Cubs do your best.* We *will* do our best!" "Phillip Hayworth?" I stepped forward. "Phillip Hayworth?" I saluted. That evening there was a phone call from Akela. I was too tall, she said, too big a boy for Cub Scouts. "Mature for his age" was the phrase. Coffee skinned? Slit-eyed?

Not long after, Mom decided to teach me ballroom dancing. She said a tall boy needed to stand up straight and hold himself right—that men always got along better if they could move gracefully at social occasions. She pushed back the corduroy sofa and put Jim Reeves on the record player. We began with a slow waltz, me with my big boy's hand on the flat of her back and she, tiny and looking up at me, breathing the counts. "Forward, two, three...back, two, three...right...and left..." Her eyes beady with eagerness. "You lead now, Phil. You lead, my boy." I counted out loud with her, turned my head so I could breathe and not cry. "How Great Thou Art" had no three-four I could make out.

You took me to a club just off Church Street the week I arrived in Toronto. I was barely twenty-two and I remember thinking it was a good thing all these grown men weren't waltzing. How would they decide who should lead? Instead they stood very close-shifted to a nice little rumba, only their hips and legs moving.

I sat on a tall barstool under a golden pot light, talking to the bartender, a young guy from Honduras...Felice?...Felipé? Something exotic. My hair was freshly washed, still damp, and I remember feeling as though everything was new and shining. Everything clean and no one knew me. We had been shopping all day for clothes for me, ate lunch at a sushi bar, had all my split ends trimmed. We shopped only for black because you insisted it was my colour. "You cut a curious line in black," you said, teasing.

That night in the bar you stood at the toilet door, under an artificial fern. You spoke closely with a big man who had ears full of rings, a scruffy beard and warm eyes. Later you introduced us under the pot lights: "Brant, this is Phillip Andrew Hayworth, my latest boy, and he's going to be wonderful—bringing the beauty of Africa to our cold and dismal climes. Brant is originally from Cape Town, Phillip. He's been here many, many years." And you winked at each other.

My dad, Ron Hayworth, was a big whale of a guy. He grew up just outside

Port Elizabeth and had a wavy shock of red hair running across the top of his head. After the cub scout episode, he came home with a second-hand box camera and a pile of hand-rolled film. "Now, there's a lot of film here, Phil." I was eight or nine and he sat on the end of my bed with the camera in his lap. "You can take pictures of anything you like, my boy, but it's better to choose your shots carefully. Look for just the right shapes inside the frame, yes? It's black-and-white, so don't worry about the colours. You want the composition to tell the story. Take your time."

Dad and I caught the bus into town one Saturday afternoon, walked the few blocks to Joubert Park and bought a packet of hot chips to share. I lay on the grass with my camera for half an hour, the smell of salt and vinegar still on my fingers. I took four careful frames of the brass springboks leaping in a perfect arch over the fountain. Then I lay on my back and focussed carefully to catch the water spraying up and hitting their shining bellies, their tiny feet dripping.

It began here, Gary. In Joubert Park, taking pictures of the leaping springbok. Graceful lines? Yes, they were graceful. But when I found my way back to Hillbrow at nineteen, all alone, I walked through that same park every night. The springbok were shadows in the dark then—too dim to make out feet. They switched off the fountain at night. So I went instead to the park benches, where dirty men and filthy children slept wrapped up in rags, covered in the day's discarded newspapers. I took pictures of them while they slept: Pull back the paper. FLASH! Run like hell before they wake up. Too often, they lay dead still as I took multiple shots, their feet hanging at a slight angle over the edge. Morgue shots: bloated faces, gaping toothless mouths like open garbage cans. Boys like birds, frozen in the mid-Jo'burg winter, stuck to the metal bench rungs. I kept every one of these pictures, showed them one by one to you that first night and you put every one aside. You preferred the shots in the slick alleys and car parks. The black-and-whites of big-headed children with lustrous eyes, high on wood glue and drunk on methalated spirits. Noses running snot straight into the corners of their mouths. You were exuberant about these. You loved them because of the shape of the head, the sliver of side-light, defining the skull. The artful lines.

I know all about lines. When I went to the Academy they taught me all about fucking lines. An apple, an overripe pear and a plastic banana set up in a cut-away box. Lamp eight feet away casting diffused side light. "Ten minutes to sketch it—get down the essence. The lines defining the form."

Bugger Cézanne. I wish I had never seen lines, wish I'd never understood shapes. I wish my studio teacher Mrs. Fourie had dragged a drunk in off the streets and sat him down, saying, "Draw only the eyes." Wish I could have brought Toady and sat him down in the middle of the studio with his stupid Archie comics and said, "Here, all you perfect little pricks, draw my

brother's neck. Draw only the pimples on the side of his fat neck." Instead, I learned to see the lines. I drew quietly and fluidly. Pages and pages of charcoal-beautiful lines.

When I first came out to the West Coast, I brought a dead crow into the classroom. I hung it up by its feet from the rafters on a strip of yellow police tape: KEEP OUT—VANCOUVER CITY POLICE—KEEP OUT—VANCOUVER CITY POL— My students came into class that Monday morning. "Wow, that's so cool! That's so...full of death. You're so great, Phillip!" "Now, draw only the feet," I told them. "What?! You must be kidding! What about those gorgeous wings?" One kid grabbed the wingtips, pulled them out on either side and ran her fingers along the smooth bones. "I love these wings, Phillip. And look at the shape of the head." "Draw only the feet, I said!"

Emily Carr College of Art and Design for six months. It was your idea and I shouldn't have listened. "You need to diversify, Phillip. Teaching is good. I have a friend in Vancouver...you remember Brant van Heerden?" And so I taught. Basic Elements of Photography and Studio Level One. I became impatient. "Gary, I think I ought to come back. I need to get working. These kids are a pain in the ass. I want to come back, Gary." "No need, Phillip. Not much happening here," you said. "Stay out there for a while. Relax. Enjoy the West Coast. Go camping, for God's sakes. See a bit of Canada. I'll call the agency—see if they have anything for you."

Three years, and I'm still enjoying the West Coast, Gary. Not quite living like we used to—no money for lattes or bagels and lox, no specialty bookstores or Internet cafes around the corner. I moved two months ago into a crappy tenement right where Chinatown meets not-so-good East Van. A place in between places. This building is called the Royal Coachman Inn. The fat guy across the hall, who says he's half-Greek and half-Ukrainian calls it the Royal Roachman Inn, and he's not far off. There is a Vietnamese take-out kitty corner that sells half-price stir fry after ten p.m. and a Chinese video rental just around the corner. I buy cheap cigarettes there and think about coming a long way.

This neighbourhood is like Hillbrow on a Saturday morning. I sit on a bench and watch the stylish shoppers in their tapered black duds, walking down past the Chinese grocers, and I am back in Jo'burg central. I am working my newsstand, camera on a strap around my neck, leaping out in front of a stylish couple or a pair of sisters coming arm-in-arm down the pavement. A flick of the heads. FLASH! "You want to buy your picture, Madam? This is my card. Philip Hayworth, Professional Photographer. You'll love it when you see it. I caught your head just right, hey? Such a lovely walk you have there, madam. Madam?"

Mom and Dad would have died to see me doing that. They never did see me doing that. Ducking my head under the low shop awnings, walking

along-side people, selling my pictures like a cheap street whore. Every Friday, when he picked me up from the Academy for the weekend, Dad wanted to see the new pictures. Photographs, sketches, contés—it didn't matter. We drove back along the old highway out to the suburbs and he always had one eye on the lane in front of him, the other on what I had to show him. "Hmm. Yes. Fine composition. Very nice indeed." And then about the first series I did of the streets. "Well now, that's interesting, Phil. Who are these people? Good perspective with the cars, though. Interesting perspective, that's for sure."

They died on that highway, coming in to Jo'burg to see my graduating exhibition. I waited. My parents never came. The adjudicator made his speech and we all drank tea, and still they never came. I went back to my dorm room, pulled the door closed behind me and waited. They never came. At three o'clock that afternoon, a visit from the police. "Phillip Hayworth? We're very sorry..."

They were side-swiped by a transport lorry trying to overtake another car. Their vehicle smashed into a pillar under the overpass. The police took me to the see the bodies that day just as it was getting dark. Mom was so small she'd been crumpled into the space where you'd normally put your feet. They had to unroll her. Dad's face was swollen and cut. Bloodied. He went smack into the windshield with his big, flat head. There was a file with pictures of them, black and whites. No colour. Not a single good line. No subtle side-lighting.

I was nineteen years old—beyond the age of legal care, and so I found my way back to the streets of Hillbrow with my camera. Back to Joubert Park and the dark shadows of leaping springbok, frozen stiff in the night air. Back to the slick-wet brick alleys with their piss-stained walls and the young street kids and the sound of stiletto heels clicking late into the night. I roomed for a while with an old hooker called Sandy, who had known my mother and was riddled with drugs. I lay on a mattress on her living room floor and watched the shadows of women passing as they slipped by the window panes, the slow drive-by of car headlights. Lights and shadows.

I did a shoot in the new section of the Vancouver Airport last month. Photographed a big Native sculpture, all done in pale green glass. It is a mythical bird, a hulking eagle of a thing and I could see right through it. See the neon lights right through it. And when I came home, I stood at the window and smoked until it went dark. I looked out and up at the flat, grey sky. Vancouver feels like a waiting room, a departure lounge. I stand there in Departures and see my plane taxi in. I walk up to the counter and the woman takes my ticket and says, "I'm sorry, sir, but you haven't paid yet," and I say, "You see, I have no money," and she says, "I'm sorry, sir—if you have no money, you have no ticket." She closes the gate firmly and leans over to the handset on the wall to make an announcement: "Ladies and

Gentlemen. This is the last call for flight Z028 to the Hillbrow Tower. We are going home, folks." I turn and leave the airport building. Sitting on the Transit bus, waiting to head back downtown, I see my plane take off. The jumbo does a loop in the sky and spells out my name: China...Hayworth...

I have been thinking about your new boy, Gary. Your fresh new boy with his pictures of Tibet. I read a feature this week in the *Georgia Straight* about an exiled monk. A small, oval man with bags under his eyes and no teeth. No hair. The head was shaved clean and the teeth had been pulled. He said in the story how he'd been held and tormented, his teeth taken one by one with a pair of pliers. That the Chinese opened his mouth and singed his tongue with a cattle prod. There was a picture of him with his mouth open, showing no teeth. This is black-and-white. There are no saffron robes, no lustrous mahogany beads.

You tell me your new boy's prints are in glorious colour, in Cibachrome. And I smile to myself, Gary. I smile at the black-and-white monk who smiles back at me showing no teeth from the pile of newspapers in the corner of my room. Your new man must have beautiful lines. He must take glossies of smooth, barren landscapes and deserted monasteries that barely echo the ringing of bells. I'm sure he has the lines you love. I stand at the window and look down on the darkened street. I see a man and a woman walking in opposite directions in the falling rain, and I throw back my hair, sleek as a sheet. You can't touch it anymore.

Contributors

Greg Hollingshead has published two novels and three collections of stories, the first of which was *Famous Players* (1982). His story collection *White Buick* (1992) won the Howard O'Hagen Award and his novel *Spin Dry* (1992) the George Bugnet Award. His story collection *The Roaring Girl* (1995)—also published in Britain, the US, Germany, and China—won the Howard O'Hagen Award and the Governor General's Award for Fiction. His novel *The Healer* (1998), also published in the US and Britain, won the Rogers Communications Fiction Prize and the George Bugnet Award, and was shortlisted for the Giller Prize.

Greg teaches literature and creative writing in the English Department of the University of Alberta.

Sinclair James received her MFA from Bennington College in 1990, where she worked with poets Alvin Feinman and Stephen Sandy. A native of New Orleans, her short story "Baptism" was awarded the prize for Best Short Story in the Creative Writing Program at Southeastern Louisiana University, where as an undergraduate she worked with the short story writer and student of James Dickey, Tim Gautreaux.

John Lavery lives in Gatineau, Quebec, with his wife and three young children. Stories of his can be found in several Canadian journals, as well as in this year's *Coming Attractions* anthology (Oberon Press). A collection of short stories, *Very Good Butter*, will be published in the spring of 2000 by ECW Press.

K.D. Miller received a BA from the University of Guelph and a Master of Fine Arts from UBC. Her writing has appeared in *The Capilano Review*, *The New Quarterly*, *Writ*, *Flare*, and has been broadcast by the CBC. *A Litany in Time of Plague*, her first collection of stories, appeared in 1994. Her second collection, *Give Me Your Answer*, will be published this year by The Porcupine's Quill.

Barbara Mulstein is a full-time artist and something of a closet writer who only occasionally surfaces long enough to send out the rare submission. She studied Creative Writing at the University of Toronto, was short-listed for the CBC Literary Competition in the personal essay category (1996), and has both poetry and prose published. She is currently working on her first novel.

Kate Small lives on the west coast of North America where she writes, walks dogs, and plays the accordion.

Sue Walsh is completing a degree in Writing and English Literature at the University of Victoria. Last year she received a full Senior Scholarship Award from the BC Arts Council, as well as the UVIC Millen Undergraduate Award for Creative Writing. A non-fiction essay titled "White Girl Screaming" is forthcoming in *Going Some Place*, an anthology edited by Lynne Van Luven (Coteau Books).

Sue is originally from Durban, South Africa, and has lived in Victoria for almost ten years.

MACLEAN HUNTER
ENDOWMENT
Inaugural Award for Literary Non-fiction
announces its
$1500 Annual Prize
for the best piece of literary non-fiction

Maximum 25 pages per piece, typed and double-spaced. All work must be previously unpublished. Entry fee: $20 plus $5 for each additional manuscript; this includes a one-year subscription to PRISM *international*. All Non-Canadian residents, please pay in US dollars.

Contest Deadline: September 30th, 1999

Mail entries to: **PRISM *international* Non-fiction Contest**
Buch E462 -1866 Main Mall, UBC
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1 CANADA

For more information, send a SASE to the above address, or e-mail us at **prism@interchange.ubc.ca** or visit our website at **www.arts.ubc.ca/prism**

Creative Writing B.F.A. at U.B.C.

The University of British Columbia offers a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing. Students choose three genres to work in from a wide range of courses, including: Poetry, Novel/Novella, Short Fiction, Stage Play, Screen & TV Play, Radio Play, Writing for Children, Non-Fiction and Translation. All instruction is in small workshop format or tutorial.

Faculty

Sue-Ann Alderson
Keith Maillard
George McWhirter
Jerry Newman
Linda Svendsen
Peggy Thompson
Bryan Wade

For further information, please write:

Creative Writing Program
University of British Columbia
Buchanan E462 - 1866 Main Mall
Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z1

Or check out our web-site at:

www.arts.ubc.ca/crwr

PRISM international

announces its 14th Annual

short fiction contest

$2000 Grand Prize

5 runner-up prizes of $200 each
plus publication payment!

Maximum 25 pages per story, typed and double-spaced. Please send unpublished original work only; translations are eligible with permission of original author. Entries will *not* be accepted by e-mail. The entrant's full name, address and the title of the story must appear on a separate cover page. The title of the story should appear on each page of the story, but the author's name should not. Manuscripts will *not* be returned.

Entry fee: $22 plus $5 for each additional story, no story limit. All non-Canadian residents please pay in US dollars. Make cheque or money order payable to PRISM international. Each entry receives a one-year subscription to PRISM. Winners will be announced in June, 2000, and published in PRISM's Summer Fiction Contest Issue.

Preliminary judging by the PRISM international editorial board; final judge to be announced.

Entries must be postmarked no later than **December 31, 1999**.

Send entries to:

PRISM international Fiction Contest
Buch E462 - 1866 Main Mall, UBC
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1 CANADA

For full contest guidelines, send a SASE to the address above,
or e-mail us at **prism@interchange.ubc.ca**
or visit our website at: **www.arts.ubc.ca/prism**

Canadian Literature

A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

RATES FOR 1999

CANADIAN ORDERS
1 year
4 issues

INDIVIDUALS
$40 + $2.80 GST
= $42.80

INSTITUTIONS
$55 + $3.85 GST
= $58.85

OUTSIDE CANADA
1 year
4 issues

INDIVIDUALS
$40 + $15 POSTAGE
= $55

INSTITUTIONS
$55 + $15 POSTAGE
= $70

Canadian Literature, published quarterly at the University of British Columbia, explores and celebrates the best Canadian writers and writing.

Each issue contains articles on writers and books—with some issues devoted entirely to special topics—together with new poems and an extensive section reviewing recent and current books.

We hope that your interest in traditional and contemporary Canadian literature, in both French and English, will convince you to subscribe to the most respected source—*Canadian Literature.*

Canadian Literature
The University of British Columbia
#167 - 1855 West Mall
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2

TEL:
604 822-2780

FAX:
604 822-5504

E-MAIL:
Can.Lit@ubc.ca

WEB SITE:
www.cdn-lit.ubc.ca

Printed on acid-free recycled paper

Coming Spring 2000

25th Anniversary Millenium Issue

Contemporary Verse 2

P.O. Box 3062
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 4E5

Subscriptions: 1 year $23.98 / 2 years $42.98

Women's Writing at Century's End

CV2 is pleased to announce a special Anniversary Issue of creative fiction and non-fiction by many of Canada's best-known and most exciting women writers. The issue will explore where women's writing has come from, where it is now, and where it is headed, in order to present a dynamic and heterogeneous view of what "feminist literary activity" might encompass as we approach the new millenium.

Watch for it in your mailbox or bookstore!

POETRY • PROSE • SHORT ESSAY
SHORT FICTION • REVIEWS • ART

Life is Short.

(And Art is Long).
Enter Short Grain.

Short Grain Writing Contest

$3500 in prizes
in these categories:
- Prose Poem
- Postcard Story
- Dramatic Monologue
- Creative Non-Fiction

- $22 for 2 entries in 1 category.
- $5 for each additional entry in ANY category.
- Enter one or more categories.
- Every entrant gets a FREE one-year subscription to Grain.
- Deadline is January 31.

For complete rules,
contact us:

Short Grain
P.O. Box 3092
Saskatoon, SK
Canada S7K 3S9

Tel: (306) 244-2828
Fax: (306) 244-0255
email:
grain.mag@sk.sympatico.ca
website: www.skwriter.com

grain MAGAZINE

Grain: A choice Canadian literary magazine since 1972.

The 1999

FIDDLEHEAD CONTEST

CONTINUES THE OPEN THEME
AND
WILL AGAIN AWARD

the

Ralph Gustafson $1,000 Prize for Best Poem

AND

$1,000 for Best Story

plus publication fees

FICTION: ONE STORY OF UP TO 25 PAGES PER ENTRY
POETRY: UP TO 5 POEMS PER ENTRY
ENTRY FEE: $20 INCLUDES A YEAR'S SUBSCRIPTION TO THE FIDDLEHEAD
(additional $6 for US & overseas)
NO MULTIPLE SUBMISSIONS AND NO PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED —
OR ACCEPTED FOR PUBLICATION — SUBMISSIONS. MANUSCRIPTS WILL NOT BE RETURNED.
DEADLINE: DECEMBER 15, 1999

SEND SUBMISSIONS TO:
THE FIDDLEHEAD CONTEST
CAMPUS HOUSE
UNB PO BOX 4400
FREDERICTON NB E3B 5A3 CANADA

$4.50

I cultivated the vocabulary,
the humours of men, so I could
navigate among them, hail them,
listen to the clatter of their winches,
the creaking of their hulls.

— John Lavery, Page 43

FICTION CONTEST WINNERS

Sinclair James

John Lavery

K.D. Miller

Barbara Mulstein

Kate Small

Sue Walsh

PRISM INTERNATIONAL
FICTION DRAMA
POETRY TRANSLATION
CREATIVE NON-FICTION

ISSN 0032.8790

Cover Photo: *Untitled* by Mike Craig