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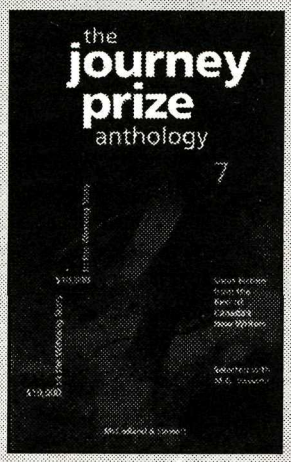

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Righteous Speedboat

Mark Anthony Jarman

For no animal admires another animal.
Blaise Pascal

Even now the vibrating screen maims the very molecules of my eyes but I have to gaze. How many bent berserkers, how many peckerwood imposters will they call to the silver microphone before they call to me, here with my nigh-on ruined vision? No finish at the net and hands of stone but I can read a play, backcheck like a madman and I move malevolently inside a snarling wind. Pins go down. That ought to be worth *something*, a few paydays, a winning smile from the bankteller. Tampa could take me down there with their palmetto bugs. Need be I'll go to the moon, I'll skate on Mars.

Maybe a scrounging team will grab me in a late round. Scrounging is okay, late round is okay. I could help a club in the Colonial League, work my way up. Just give me a contract. Or else I'm toast. I'm over-age, I can't go back to my junior team. I burnt a few bridges there, pissed off the scunt-eyed coach. I caught an elbow in the nose and saw visions of gasping lightning while the guy with said elbow slid away like a pulse to score the winning goal, to bury it top-shelf. All season who had the best plus-minus on the club? *Moi.* I repeat: I had the best plus-minus on the team. Yet in front of everyone the coach really reamed me out. Up and down, went to town. He had no need to do that, to humiliate me.

Elbowed nose still throbbing, I moved in close to the coach, paused to get him wondering, feinted, then I gave his nose a shot: I clocked the coach. Nothing really. They want you to hit everyone else: *Him*, they say in Spokane, and you know what they mean. Bing bang bong. Do it to *them*, though, touch *them* and it's the end of the fucking world. They tell the reporters you're "difficult," you're a cancer on the team. Control freak wimps. Blue-legged fops. Pukely ticket-punchers. I say this much is obvious: the "difficult" players are the real action, living it, lean as whippets; they throb, eat at the air like engines.

I call my agent long-distance and he allows, *This is he.*

Doesn't look good, he says. Our noisy years are moments, he says.

I call my mother and she sighs, You had so much potential.

I'd call my friend from Salmon Arm but Ryan's lost his head. The bloody trail across the gravel road I still dream of, and the green radiator water burning my hair. Ryan's head rolling.

Once upon a time this was a happening bar but now it's a loser bar. The bar has no view at all, a pocked pallid concrete bunker, which is good. Night for day, no trees and no sky. You pay extra for trees and sky, the darkening harbour. You need no view. You need to hear your name echoing in that distant subsidized convention centre; those two sweet words in that room of tasteful blurred suits. Your name.

I like loser bars. They're quiet and I can think.

I think there is always some injustice. We depend on tales of injustice. At the small curved bar an intense young man is telling a dark-eyed woman his specific story of injustice. He's well-dressed: black custom-cut pants and a beautiful shirt that is white and tapered. Gel gleams evenly in his hair. I decide his name is Laszlo. Someone looks after Laszlo's cuticles. Laszlo smokes. He collects things: plenitude, kudos, ivory elephants. The young woman is listening yet she is clearly fidgety, restless. Her dark eyes move in a sad poised face. I watch her dark eyes shiver. Her lipstick is almost black. She shows her teeth in a sad brief smile and it is everything. You learn everything. I can't stand the idea that it's all random.

Here's a guy, Laszlo says, leaning right at her, real good guy, he says.

Here's a guy, I don't know, so-called best friend.

Laszlo lowers his voice but I can still hear him. He's too close to her. This is a guy that. Feed him breakfast. Pick him up, take him to work. Give him a job and uh, *float* him. And uh, my mom has his cheque, some deductions of course, he looks at it, something's wrong, he says.

The young woman asks Laszlo a question.

Yeah, my mom, she had it. And he stole! He stole from us! Laszlo cuts the air with a flat hand. I went by the next day. This is not the agreed.... What is this—this, this holding company? None of your business. Well, I said. I was ready to kill—

The dark-eyed woman breaks into his story.

Sorry, she says, I *really* have to run. Give me a call, she says. Gotta go!

Oh, he says. A-O-KAY! he says brightly. Laszlo tries to get funnier after the serious story. He needs a fast transition. He picks up her key ring, a tiny flashlight hooked on it, and he sings into the tiny flashlight as if it's a microphone: I DID IT MY WAY! he belts out.

My Funny Valentine, he croons softly, eyebrows up like Elvis Costello.

They both try to laugh but still she takes her keys back, plunging them deep within her Peruvian satchel.

The young woman leaves briskly, outside to oaks up like oars in a spooky sky, and Laszlo glances around, ill at ease now, alone, no longer

singing. Now he has to adjust himself, recast the last moments, her exit. His status has changed here. He peers around at the subterranean concrete tomb as if for the first time, at the monotonous hockey draft unscrolling on the monster TV screen. It's a crap shoot. Some of us are wanted in the first or second round. Some players wait all day and no one calls. I'm not flying down east for nothing, for crocodile tears in the arena seats and maybe your parents phoning your hotel room, telling you there's next year, or you could play in Italy or Blackpool. Everyone will lie to you at some point. They decide they know best. Some are allowed dignity; others scramble. I will scramble if necessary. I'm not 6'5" but I'll run my cranium into the Zamboni if that's what they desire. They can croon my name, tap me on the shoulder, and I'll get it done. Only connect. Call my name. I'm shallow. I want to hear my muddled name run through a silver microphone, to shake hands with a million people I don't know.

Laszlo shows the red-haired bartender something from his wallet. A sunlit photo, waterfront property, a speedboat docked. The speedboat has a blue canopy and a blue racing stripe.

Looksee, he says. Is that a nice place or is that a nice place? Just up island. Hey, tell you what. You want to go there, let me know. I'm driving up there practically every week. All the goddamn time.

He carries a photo of property in his wallet. Now: would I be any different? I'd probably carry a photo too.

Laszlo scribbles a note left-handed, passes it over. The bartender does not read the note. I order a Greyhound, bite from the small onion I always carry in my coat. I'd like some chowder or chili, some good cornbread or sweet potato. Carbohydrate loading just in case I get picked.

Laszlo points with his sterling silver pen at the bartender's red hair.

You must be Irish, eh?

No, says the red-haired bartender, looking irritated.

Our place up island: we've got ten acres, two hundred grand. Bay goes in like this—we own from this peak to here. Goes back, big trees. Ten acres. Laszlo keeps smoking. He opens his wallet again. He likes to open his wallet. The ferry system, this is how.... The schedule. Thursday. No, hold that. Tuesday. Right. You know why Tuesday?

He lights another smoke. Dull Clapton plays: post-heroin Clapton, post-lobotomy Clapton. I'm truly sorry his little kid fell out of the high-rise but I don't like the tape. I like Art Bergman's new single: *create a monster, something something, we got a contract, contract, who's using who?* Art Bergman, crown prince of detox. The hockey draft is still on the screen. My draft. I'm so close to a contract, to treasure. Mr. Eric Clapton sells a billion boring records and no one wants me. The bartender doesn't ask why Tuesday.

* * *

On TV men in suits argue and wave clean hands en route to the silver microphone; they must speak their pick, announce who will skate, who will consider a million seven, who will buy a sleek growling speedboat. Something is wrong though; men in suits argue like they're chewing a mouthful of bees. They act as if they don't know their pick. I'm available! I shoot out mental telepathy messages from this edge of the country. Me! I have a head on my shoulders.

The erudite GM bends over; he seeks the ear of the frowning coach. The GM straightens, walks to talk with the worried head scout, then puts glasses on the end of his nose, peers over some papers. A weird delay of some kind, a plot complication at the meat market. Just past the media tables I can see the cackling old owner who was jailed for fraud and mob connections, for taking the Fifth, for taking the assets, for chortling. Well, no one figured he was a choirboy.

They'll take a d-man, says one customer.

No, they need a centre. Definitely a centre, says another.

The GM at the mike finally mouths the name of the anointed, the chosen. A goalie! Takes a goalie! They have goalies in the system. They have goalies coming out the yin yang. Trade bait, but who? Trade the young guy? The backup goalie? Trade the older goalie, the former cokehead?

They screwed up, someone in the bar says. They screwed up. He says this four times in a row.

They've been tricked. They traded up to get the franchise bruiser they wanted; they made a deal, and all parties agreed to square dance, to give and take. They agreed what bodies would be available when they got to the microphone but at the last second another team, a team without scruples, traded draft choices and future considerations, snatching the franchise bruiser out from under their red noses. Stole from them. Their *property*. We've been snookered, states the GM, we've been submarined. The GM's Byzantine maneuvers and agreements are useless. I traded up for nothing, he thinks, all that trouble for another goalie. The troubled scout tears the bruiser's name off their jersey, his sweater waiting at their table. How sure they were. They don't have my name on a jersey. They have different tables for each team, like it's the United Nations, like it's the fate of the free world. Then there are prickly-pear and sea lions, sooty terns and albatrosses and California sea lions dripping in the sun on the colour TV. Another highly illogical car commercial that seems to be selling something other than cars. What exactly is it they are hawking? Nature? Oceanfront? Does it work? Does it actually sell cars?

Insects crash at the screen, hearkening tragically into their multi-hued harbour. They want to eat the TV light, the only game in town. I keep studying the draft but Laszlo studies two women who seat themselves at

the bar. The first woman keeps her sunglasses on. She is taller than me. I see her and think *stature, presence.* Her friend is shorter, with lighter hair and the small peaceful face of a follower.

The woman in the dark glasses inhales hugely, exhales: Well, we broke up. Went pretty well considering.

Woman #2: No sobbing?

Woman #1: A little. (She pauses.) Him. Not me.

Woman #2: Let's go prowling!

Woman #1: No thanks.

Woman #2: Oh yeah. You're in THAT phase. Wait two weeks and you'll be crawling the walls.

Woman #1: No. I don't think so.

I realize she has someone lusty waiting, someone already drafted, but she hasn't told her friend. She broke it off with one guy to move to another. She possesses a five year plan. Woman #2 complains, My roommates are doing it all the time and I have to sit and listen. I mean I can't help but hear it. I can't afford my own place. And he has to end up with *her.* I had such a crush on him. It was supposed to be *me.* I had hopes. Now I'm going nuts. Why do I have such bad luck with guys I like?

They sip their drink specials.

Woman #1 says, This older guy took me to an Icelandic film festival. The movies were like, what the fuck!?

AHA! An older guy is chosen.

For me the charm of hockey was always its lack of charm. It wasn't hip. My agent says he'll call me back. He's busy with his "real" clients. I walk to the washroom and see a nickel gleaming at the bottom of the porcelain urinal. I do not pick it up. I look out at my nation. I have no nation. Okay—I have a wormwood nation.

Laszlo is talking to the two women: We'll take my Dad's speedboat across. If you don't have tackle we can get you some. Waterfront. On the water. Everyone said we paid too much. Local yokels laughing. Day later, $20,000 more. Who's laughing now? Very rare find. Very rare. Nice beach. Arbutus and oak. Beautiful property. We'll get some people. We'll go up there. Road trip! Road trip!

Well now, isn't waterfront always on the water? Woman #2 wonders.

What's the catch? I wonder. Why does Laszlo have to cajole people to go to this Shangri-La? Doesn't it come stocked with beautiful people? The way they stock a fish farm? A fat farm?

I realize Laszlo is talking to a different bartender. Bartender #2.

Bob Hope, Laszlo exclaims. Bob Hope's been there. We'd just fumigated so he wasn't too happy. Log cabin, some bugs. Ants, I guess. Ce-

dar. Wouldn't think so. Puzzling. That loser shirt, Laszlo says, laughing at the bartender.

Hey sport. Hey pal. This is my brother's shirt. My brother who died in an accident. A *fatal* accident.

Oh. Sorry.

Laszlo lights another smoke, looks around. On TV a GM slides right by a team's table, a team he used to coach. He jumped ship. He doesn't look and they don't look at him. He found the loophole he needed to break his contract, to dance with another party, a party other than the one that "brung" him.

Bob Hope's a card. Bob Hope says, Any chance of anything here? Something other than pinochle and Ovaltine? Nyuck. Know what I mean? Country girls, nice country girls. He wanted some action. Horny old bugger. We caught a cod. Engine broke down, going slow, get a blueback, keeper, three pounder, eat salmon that night. But I'd rather catch one big one. One big Chinook, a tyee, a king. Bob Hope bitching at me all day in that irritating voice. I'm looking for this ledge, I'm looking for this ledge with a depth finder. Jigged, buzz-bombed, mooched, nothing. Tried a new lure, a silver one I found in Dad's tacklebox.

(Now it's Bartender #3 half-listening, a guy in a muscle shirt. I think the bartenders must take shifts with Laszlo, then go hide back in the cooler.)

ZING! GOT IT! Laszlo mimics a fishing rod and a sudden strike on the line. ZING! He doesn't finish the fishing story. He smokes non-stop. I have another Greyhound. Maybe they don't draft players who punch their coaches. Maybe there's a secret agreement, rules they don't tell you about. I'm bitter (wormwood, wormwood). I'm starting to feel like saussurite, like schist, like stone.

A stoned voice bellows in the direction of the jukebox: PLAY SOMETHING...BY SOMEBODY...WHO KILLED THEMSELVES!

This desire to be fucked up, and think it something special, something to be attained. That's rich. Ask my friend Ryan if he's happy now.

All my friends are lawyers, Laszlo says. And the women are incredible! They work so hard they don't have time to meet anyone else. You want to meet great women hang out with lawyers.

Yeah. Like I really want to hang out with lawyers, Bartender #3 growls.

On TV the GM in the suit is helping the young hockey player pull on his new team sweater. It's too intimate. There is some awkward tugging at clothes, then embarrassed smiles and camera flashes for the sports cards.

Who's this clown they pick? Who's this sack of hammers?

Some Swede faggot. A *foreigner*.

You on a team? Laszlo asks the muscled bartender.

Used to be. Same old used to be.

Now I recognize Bartender #3: a fantastically shifty forward with Tri-Cities. He had moves like a humpback salmon, and Pittsburgh was after him until he was submarined, blew out both knees big time. Good old Tom what's-his-name. They said he'd never walk again. Huge writhing scars each side of his knees. Twins. A suicide pass. Skate into the middle and CRANG! you flip over with a quicksilver crunching, then they carry you off, a sudden screeching pauper. Wheelbarrows of cash will alter anyone, but he's been changed by the cash he never got, by what could have been that draft year. He could have been the one under the blinding television lights, the one getting offered a million seven. Instead. Well, instead he watches with me. Now Tom what's-his-name is a major drunk with rehab muscles. I'm not as shifty but at least my knees are okay. My knees are not too shabby. I cast a shadow, I get my back up, show up for every game. Buffalo could take me. The Jets. There's that windy corner. The Sharks. This sounds like West Side Story.

I'm going to drive up there to the property tomorrow. Come on along. Pick up my cousin and bullshit. Deli grub, some Heineken. Greenies. You like Heineken? No? The airport and take the speedboat across.

Laszlo has told three different bartenders about the speedboat.

Laszlo asks, How does that bear joke go again? Let's see. Bartender tells the bear he can't serve him because he's on drugs. This part. I can never remember. Drugs. What drugs. You help me, yeah. Oh, the *barbituate*. The bar-bitch-you-ate! Ya ya. Ha ha. That's a good one.

The two women do not share Laszlo's love of the bear joke.

We're lucky, you know, Laszlo says to the women, that place up island. Played our cards right. Cheap locals can go jump in a lake. If they knew anything they'd be somewhere else, right? Road goes around pretty little bay. Speedboat. No waiting. Catch a big one. No tackle we'll take care of you. Little general store not far. Good beef jerky. If we don't have it you don't need it. That's what they say on their sign. They don't have it you don't need it. That's their hick philosophy, their London School of Economics approach to local yokel marketing. Road goes around a nice little bay. See the smooth golden stones at the bottom. A beautiful place. We own it. It's ours.

Lizard King Jim Morrison says hello. Jim Morrison says he loves me. Jim Morrison says he wants to know my name. The jukebox decides what to play. And the big screen shows the famous footage: Big surly Eric Lindros refuses the sweater. He stares off, dark mad eyes and curly hair. A thick neck, a bull. He'll never sign with this team. Maybe they called his name but that doesn't mean they own him, that doesn't mean

he's their *property*. He refuses their blue uniform, their lovely stone city, their scheming owner. In this hexed process, this amateur hour crapshoot, here's what I wish to know, to *divine*: who has the real power and who is the victim? That's what I have to learn, even though I already know the truth.

Wait until Lindros is on the ice, the young man says to Bartender #4. He'll pay then. Someone'll stick him good. Get his bad knee.

I say nothing. He shouldn't talk like that. I've seen too many torn up knees. Hurt!? Are you fucking kidding? Un-fucking-believeable. Anterior cruciate; that's the worst. It digs into my stomach just thinking of ruined knees.

Just how many bartenders are back there? Do they have a bartender *pool*? There are more bartenders than customers.

Everyone thinks Lindros is a greedy arrogant asshole but meanwhile the team's owner is mulling over juicy offers of $75 million U.S. for the franchise. The Quebec owner will sell in the night; the owner will hustle the team out of Canada with a tearful press conference. The owner will cry all the way to the bank. Who's the greedy asshole then? What did our pal Peter Pocklington get for selling Gretzky to Los Angeles, for selling a person, a *human being*? $20 million? (For he is an honourable man.) And how much money does Peter the meatpacker owe the Alberta government right now? He's in so deep they can't touch his house of cards, his dead pigs and stuffed sausages and offal, his slit-throat palace over the river valley. So the players are greedy? The players are arrogant? Give me a break. Get real.

No one gives me a break. No one gets real. Instead they draft a dead guy. In fact they draft Ryan, my friend from Salmon Arm. His last night on earth we were riding in what journalists would later refer to as the death car. I was passed out in the backseat. Ryan was in the passenger seat. Then I woke up in the ditch, in the rhubarb where the world was utterly different. Green water was pouring out of the upside-down radiator, burning me. The power pole was in three pieces, its line sparking. Ryan's head rolled across the gravel road, his brain still sending messages, questions, trying to find out what was wrong. I took off my wet shirt and hid my friend's head. I was afraid to pick it up so I just covered it with my shirt. What would you do? The car looked like modern sculpture, the driver still curled inside it like a foetus. Not a scratch on me, though my teeth were chattering and my hair was steaming. My friend's head: pebbles and dust stuck on it. And this brain of mine. Then some kind of gleaming milk truck came by and the driver said Jesus. And the big club must not know he's dead. If Ryan was alive he'd laugh. Here they are throwing away a pick on him before they'll draft me.

I have watched the drunken screen for hours, eating the past, wrapping my head in it, and my eyes complain at the images, at the labour; my eyes are shifting right out of focus. Can't they make a big screen that doesn't kill you?

I am one of God's creatures but no one is taking me. Not the Lightning in Tampa, not the Panthers. Not the Jets. Not the San Jose Sharks. They're taking hundreds of snipers, killers, muckers, headcases, piranhas, pretenders. They call out polyglot Latvian names at the silver microphone. They don't care about my plus-minus, they don't care about my Grade 8 blues records or sensitive feelings or that I move like silt and stick like glue. What about the San Diego Gulls or Las Vegas and that Russian guy named Radek Bonk? This is a great name for a player. Bonk! Pass me the puck! Hit him Bonk. Bonk him! Marty McSorley was going to sign with Las Vegas, play in the desert. I'd play in the desert. I can't go back to the fucking last place Cougars. I know I'm *this* close to making it but the Cougars have dragged me down, they've buried me, made me invisible. In a seething minute you are made to pay for your geography, for being in the snake-bit boonies; the center doesn't hold for *you*.

I'll have to try my luck as a free agent. Some good players aren't picked but they make it later as a walk on. They force the issue, bull their way in the door. Courtnall, Joey Mullen, Dino Cicarelli, Adam Oates, and that guy on the Habs. It happens. Brett Hull wasn't taken until the 117th pick, and Fleury was 166th his year. Nemchinov didn't go to New York until the 244th pick overall in 1990. Now he has a Stanley Cup ring. Every Cup team has its free agents, its "difficult" players. They made it, crawled out of the ooze. You hear their names: a mantra repeated. There's a free-agent camp somewhere in the States; the scouts look you over, look inside your head, see what you've got. Courtnall has it made in the shade now, big money, owns restaurants and a spiffy log cabin on a cliff over the crashing ocean. Douglas fir and ferns and fishing boats in the harbour where the whales come in to rub. A view. This is Geoff, not Russ. Russ was drafted first round and he married a movie starlet; Russ Courtnall has no idea what it's like to be invisible, to wait all day and be slowly made crazy, to want to punch out a guy named Laszlo. I'm so close, so close to treasure. Is it a litmus test, Russ? No. It's not a litmus test. Just look inside your rolling head, the head and source of all your son's distemper.

I wish the woman with dark eyes hadn't left. Why does one person seem different and necessary? I chose to interpret the angle of her neck, slurred messages the speed of blood inside her unknown neck and uncertain smile, her teeth and her lips with the darkest darkest lipstick. I watched the draft while I watched her eyes move, her brain shift into an uncertain smile, and I knew she was leaving just then to become a bus

window or a blur in the rain in the raw city of colours, just as I knew I would not be drafted, as I knew they would take a dead man before they would take a player who clocked a coach.

On the Cougars Geoff punched anyone who touched his little brother Russ. I bet now both brothers bomb around in righteous speedboats, ocean their blue and white freeway while a pretty woman from Hollywood naps down in the V-berth. She is waiting for you and you are waiting for her. You are waiting to catch a big one. You stand wide-legged at the wheel and gaze at the sky over arbutus trees and your hair slides back in the salt breeze. You think your head is attached to your shoulders. Expensive sunglasses protect your eyes, zinc your fair skin, for you cast a shadow, you are the paragon of animals, you have connected the dots. Frantic lawyers and children clamour for your signature, your autograph; children and lawyers shout out your name in the sonic echoing arenas, in Inglewood, in Florida, in United Centre, in General Motors Place.

There is money moving out there, green as absinthe, green as antifreeze, and everyone has a chance at it. Take this from this, if this be otherwise.

That's the *system*. You think they are going to change it just for you?

Terrance Cox

Backbeat #3:High Fidelity (85)

for Matthew Poulakakis

All still works, sometimes.

Lots, now, twenty years away,
I listen to pop records,
cut back one epoch,
into lunch-hours lost, awestruck
by single hits, riffing
racks for new releases,
tracing bullets on the chart.

As by analog, twice-over,
revolve in memorial recess
before vinyl gathered gilt,
when penny over stylus solved
dilemmas of dust & scratches,
flawed mono on the Silvertone.

I track self-same lust,
those days of acne, furtive
fondle & sha-la always love her;
holding hands supposed, yeah,
to be congress sung about.

Spun off bargain plastic,
I drink in bag rye seasons,
outside high school gym,
suspended fool with cohorts,
too cowered to risk floor,
twist with fall term's flame,
lest DJ spring slow drag.

I parse in past imperfect
cheap powers; conjure
out of shadows, these
real groovy illusions;
how heavy is slight music,
playthings of strange faith.

I reckon time by rpm
well-passed presence,
long-play or large
hole in the centre.

Roger Greenwald

two poems

Telephone Dreams

Everyone's brow furrows deep in a phone booth
saying I'm rejected saying I reject you
or speaking in the neutral tone that
tries not to wound and is
death, protection from wounds.
Furrow of remembering numbers
furrow of waiting for connection
furrow of busy furrow of ringing
furrow of Sorry, I'm busy.
Frown of hope,
frown of listening frown of talking
frown of turning your back on the passersby.
Your tense half-smile of anticipation
is the furrow of remembering inverted.
Frown of not being there, frown of not
being there yet.
Every call from every phone booth in the city
is to Dial-a-Prayer,
keep in touch with household gods, gods
of refuge, the next stop, the last stop,
gods of What's doing and I forgot to tell you,
praying they'll pray back because
we are powerful, we reach them.
Powerful with dimes.
Not too sure.
Continually, dreams in which we never get through.
Worldwide the voices go up, the sums of them
watched in darkened rooms at Bell.
Worldwide the furrows add up
to a ditch that's growing a bumper crop of thistles.
Come out come out every one with your prickly flowers!
Come out with your wristwatch and your pile of change.

Arms and the Woman

Arms of the woman singing in the briny air
as we're finally setting out, strength those arms had
in your visions of mountain rescues, swimming escapes,
now shoving off the wooden boat, straining
at the prow, her feet gouging pebbly sand
as she pushes you stern-first into the green breakers
and you pull at each oar separately to ride the troughs,
waiting for her to jump in. She keeps pushing,
wading out against the wash, arms raised
against the whole ocean. Soon she's submerged, soon
your horizon is all water, you turn and turn in the sun.
Along the bottom, like a huge shrimp, she's walking tiptoe
toward the broken high wire of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge.

The Night Mother

Elyse Gasco

For God's sake if you know of anything,
do not turn from us; all of us kneel to you,
all of us here, your suppliants.
Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*

She is the woman of your dreams. Your S. S. Night-Mère.

It's just like a detective movie.

The window of the door is thick rippled glass, slightly green. You cannot see in but from the inside she must see your shadow. Across the glass in black letters it should say Social Service, but all the letters have fallen off except the two big secure S's. So the glass says: S S.

Just like a detective movie. It doesn't begin until you open the door. It won't begin until you open the door. There is a small sticker on the corner of the door just near the handle. It should say something like: Have a Nice Day or Please Remove Rubbers or even Protected by Security. Instead, in small white letters, it reads: You are responsible for all the bad things that have happened to you. The question is, how do you know it is her and not someone else? The answer is that you don't. Except that at some point all the women in your life seeped together—as though there was a leak in you and you couldn't keep them each contained where they should be, in their separate molds, their little plastic ice trays—and the thing that was formed from this mess was her. She is like something found in your freezer. Frozen, sticky, impossible to identify, even by smell.

* * *

You wear old jeans and a t-shirt that says blah blah blah the first time you go see her and this must be the mistake. You begin in French, not knowing what language is spoken here. *Je cherche*...I am searching.... She says something, finishing for you. You think she says *mère* but later you realize she might have said *merde*—shit. She offers you a smoke and then pulls the pack away and says: I thought so.

On her desk is a sign that reads: No crying. No drama. Then, finally, she offers you your file, but that too she pulls away and writes down in her loopy hand—cannot take a joke. On the walls are photocopied pic-

tures, unwanted posters, where the faces of adults look just like children and the faces of children look just like adults.

You stare at each other for a moment. You realize you are just a shaggy, hoofed animal, snorting in her garden, waiting to be named.

When you scratch your head, she mimics you. You are thinking: God, is she ever ugly. But it isn't true. She is beautiful. She closes the lights and stands behind your chair. You watch a slide show, but first she makes shadows on the screen. She tells you to guess the shapes but none of them are recognizable.

She asks: Life is a mystery to you, isn't it? She pulls her bony fingers through your hair and says: Still, your ears are dirty. It is the first time you remember her touching you. Your scalp tingles from where her nails have scratched. In your life you have been known as a joker. But with her, you cannot finish the most elementary story. Lately all your riddles begin "Have you heard the one about..." but then you cannot finish. You see her looking at you and you are forced to mumble: Oh, never mind. I can't remember. I'm sure you've heard it before.

The first picture flashes and she narrates behind your head. Somalia, Djibouti, Sudan, Mozambique. And then there is one of you, sitting there exactly as you are in your blah blah blah shirt, reaching for that cigarette. You're doing relatively fine, she says. As far as I can see.

* * *

The next time you go in heels to show her your long narrow legs. You go for lunch and order eggs and vodka and try to get each other drunk. I always hated my real mother, she confesses, when you ask her for a hint, a syllable, a vowel or maybe just something that it sounds like. It sounds like sheepskin, body oil, forceps, ice caps, shoes that dance, fleece gloves, underpants. You want to tell her that none of those things are sounds at all. She has the senses wrong. These are things you touch, places to leave your finger prints. But there are rules here. You take off your face and become nobody. You humour her and try to look together. Your stockings and your shoes are a perfect match. She cannot fail to notice this. Otherwise you might not get your mother.

You think you are close. She is slurring and pretending to be drunk. She says: It is such a sad story. Did it start with a "C"? Oh, yes, I think it did. Unless it was that other one, the boy who fell out the apartment window and made a sound like a bomber jet all the way down. Was I the maid that let him fall? No, that wasn't me. Bruno? Bruno? Do you love me? Should we get married now?

But suddenly she is feeling sick and she wants you to take her home.

There are pictures of you all over her walls. You feel famous in a sick way. You are sorry that you ever imagined having your own fan club. In

dreams, nothing is private or sacred. Somewhere, you are sure that the woman you are looking for cannot sleep well. Every night you must turn up at her door, your head still indented from the forceps. Many of the pictures you recognize. A birthday party where you are wearing such a short striped dress that the cuff of your underwear shows. A trip to Ixtapa where you are sucking on a lime coated in liquor. A university graduation. A new apartment. She says: See, you have never wanted for anything.

It is clear that she keeps track of the ungrateful. She is prepared for you. On one wall, painted a frightening dark blue, are pictures you have never seen before.

You are sitting on your bed naked and blindfolded. You are wearing your father's clothes and he is wearing yours. You are hiding in your parent's closet and your eye is blackened, swollen closed. You turn to her: But none of this happened. She says: Then what are you whining about? She takes photographs of false memories. It is her art form. It is how she expresses herself. She tells you that all your life you have known that as an only child everything you do will seduce your parents.

In her bedroom she asks you to unzip her dress, but you need water first. She holds out a glass to you. Will she pull it away? Who knows? She jingles the ice in the glass, the sound of jewels and teeth, but before you can punch her in the mouth, she makes you play her game.

She holds out the glass to you. Says: Mother, mother, may I take a step?

So you ask. You are dying of thirst.

She says: Yes, you may take a step.

So you must ask: How many?

And she answers: One little baby.

Naturally. It always turns out just as you imagined and you are, of course, no closer to the water.

* * *

Someone you know is having a hot summer party, where everyone leans threateningly over the iron balconies, spilling sangria into the garden below. When she shows up uninvited, you are standing near an open window, your hair bunched up on top of your head and held there with one hand. With the other you fan your arm pit. She kisses the host and you watch her tongue slip into his mouth. She introduces herself to everybody as your social worker. Her hair is swept up off her face and just a few ringlets fall loose across one eye. Her earrings are little silver clipboards. She asks for an hors d'oeuvre and you bring her one, a little round cracker with some mashed eggplant. She dances with all the men you've slept with. Pressing her body up against theirs, she whispers your

birth weight into their ears. You hear her ask them if you've always been such a whiner. And you see them laugh. You see them nod their heads. Apparently you are a whine without a cork. Flat, dry, and unfulfilled. She gets drunk just to tell them your secrets. She loves to socialize. She loves to be tied up in red tape.

In the morning she steams her body in your tub and you bring her weak, greenish tea. You must look put out, miffed, a little crabby, because she reminds you: If she is looking for you, she has to come through me.

You are thinking: Yes, sheriff. Yes, my saloon-door-swinging-social-working cowboy. Yes, ma'am. There is something about her that is very high noon. She walks with her legs bowed. She walks with sore thighs.

Just who is it that you work for? you ask her, when she gets up to get going. She leaves a brown skin ring around your tub. The water is murky. When was the last time she bathed? She smiles like a spy and drips dry on your rug.

My only job, she says, hooking up a tattered garter, is to see what you can stand knowing.

* * *

What you have always wanted to do is to learn to draw a perfect knot, in light pencil shadings, with each braided vein of the model rope exquisitely copied. You would like to put this perfect picture of a knot in a wood frame, with white matting, and hang it in your house. You would point it out to guests and say: I did that. You try. But you have no talent for this kind of art. Everything comes out like a cartoon. You have many scraps of paper with quick sketches of knots begun and unfinished. There is something just right about a gnarled lump of string, a small veiny fist, an intricate contained puzzle, and every time you look at it your mind silently starts the process of unravelling it. Easy, because things give way in the mind, anything can come undone, nothing material can stop it. The brain, yes, the brain itself is just a big knot.

* * *

Of course you meet again. How can you stay away from each other? This time, it's a bar with double X on the door. The female gene, she explains. As if you are not well-educated in biology. She is a scientist and a symbolist, your S. S. chaperone.

She leads you up the dark red stairs, stained and scuffed with black, and you see that this time she is wearing pants. Inside, she pays a woman to table dance, whose eyes stay closed the whole time as though she were mimicking a blind person. That could be her, she says, watching you breathe. You show her your teeth and pretend it's a smile. I could

stand that, you answer, matching the dancer's body against your own.

The next time she calls you just let the phone ring. Liar, she says, I can hear you breathing. And she leaves this message: Murder, madness, suicide, an alcoholic, an institutionalized psychotic. A woman as bland as rice or love, laughs out loud at The Brady Bunch, would never miss an episode of The Price is Right or Family Ties, once participated in a blind taste test for cola, believes the shampoo commercial where one side of your head tingles and the other doesn't....

Could you stand that? she asks, before her thirty seconds are up. Could you stand that? Could you....

* * *

Over and over again she asks you: What makes you think you have a right to reality? In the bathroom, she watches as you bleach your hair, shave your legs, curl your lashes, cover all your imperfections, pluck your eyebrows, check for whiskers. You are a hypocrite. Look at all the lies you tell yourself.

She is the gate and the gatekeeper. Her spine is a tight black hinge. Her fingers close around you like iron locks.

When you read the horoscopes in the paper instead of the headlines, she is pleased. In the great spectrum of happenings—where are you? The moon says something about the shape of things to come.

Your clothes do not fit you anymore. You are losing your shape. All these secrets, all these lies, make you formless. Her words can make and dismantle your life. And when she sees this, your flimsy existence like gauze, she doubles the paper work. The carbons. The copies. She hands you a stack of pages and says: A few forms for you to fill out. And then she laughs. God, I am so funny, she says. My talent is wasted here.

To pass the time, you play hangman. Your file is taped across her like a chastity belt. You guess letters and vowels but you always end up a stick figure hung by her badly drawn rope.

* * *

This is not quite sleep. And it is not quite daylight. Or waking. All grown up and still an unborn. Like all the old black and white movies you watch to keep yourself awake at night, there is a black sedan, with tinted side windows the color of dying lungs. Someone drives the getaway car fast around a bend. It merges into traffic or goes over a cliff and is lost forever. It's not that the wreckage cannot be put back together, it's that it is never really found. Someone walks the streets with an old speedometer in her hand, asking everyone: Was this how fast I was going?

In a way, you expect her to be a man. She would be much easier to hate. But she reminds you that she is only a metaphor for what you can

and cannot know. She calls you narrow. Nearly unsuccessful. Almost disastrous. Like something barely escaped. Of course it isn't true that you can't hate a woman. You know she's seen that look in your eye that makes you squint, that you try to pass off as tears or floaters.

She says: I am FBI, CIA, KGB, CSIS, RCMP. Closed files. Covert tactics. Secret affairs. I am things done in the closet. Things done with eyes closed. A paper shredder. A white-washer. I am arms and other body parts sold for hostages. T.V. Anything cleared by the military. Tests. Underground. Above ground. Positive and negative. I know all the unsafe places to walk at night. Where the disappeared go. Where the bodies are hidden. You don't really want to know the truth, do you? Don't you know that the truth is always bad news?

* * *

She hands you a book of secrets. She wants to share with you the burden she has had to carry. She has her own proverbs: Let sleeping dogs lie to you. Let families breed contempt. She is doubled over with her own heavy truth, that there are some things we can never know. She tells you to look it up. She gives you her own dictionary just to be nice, to be social and of service, to show that there are no hard feelings, that feelings are so soft they fall apart and fray like livers. That she does not withhold everything.

So in her book: To "know" comes just after "knout"—a whip formerly used for flogging. You read: know, know-how, knowing, knowledge, knowledge—right on the precipice, the very edge of knowing. Knuckle. Knucklehead.

And then she punches you hard and invites you to a party. She cannot stand it when you look so sad.

* * *

It's potluck.

Here, you have to earn your mothers and so you bring offerings. One woman brings baby pictures, but she laughs like a social director and throws them away. She calls everything sentimental hooey. Someone brings poems and stories. One brings a diploma. Another, a name in the newspaper. Someone brings a medical degree. Another, a name on the ballot.

She finds you sitting alone and scolds you for not playing. You remember that you once brought a dead fish to show and tell. She says: You'll never find anyone just sitting around here moping. She hands you your make-up bag and tells you to go freshen up. All this, as though it was just another social function where you might mingle for your mother. And maybe you could date awhile, really get to know each other.

But you are numb and lifeless now. The party is out of hand. People are stealing each other's curriculum vitae and no one is all that impressed. She sets up her video camera and films the desperate. She tells you to tuck your hair behind one ear, to smooth an eyebrow, to iron a pant crease. She tells you to be natural and to relax. Hi, one woman says to her camera. I'm five foot seven, twenty-eight and three-quarters years old and I'm looking for someone maternal and stable. My hobbies are....

She knows that she is losing you, that in your memory she will just be another paper-pusher who had you stoned and mesmerized for a short time. But you are coming down. It will be a very clean break. You never exchanged any gifts.

She makes one last effort: Hey, you there, sitting frozen, running out of time, etched and marbleized like some statue of limitations. Just look at you. Why would she ever want to know you? Do you really believe that you are ready to meet her? Ready is the position a rifle is held at before aiming. Did you know that?

* * *

Oh, but already you hear hoof beats—light pulling at your eyes. And you are clinging to the neck of this night mare, grabbing at the hair of your night mother, this dark unknowing horse, this sore blackened brood.

Your story is your mystery, and it has been such a long night. In your reality noir, your dark black matter of fact, the detective is the killer, the victim isn't dead, the client isn't who she says she is, and life is filled with very ordinary people who you haven't met yet. Everybody lies and smokes too much.

She calls from behind you: All your truths will come from strangers.

With a little light you can see shadows. Still, you cannot tell this dream you have. No one understands its logic. Just let something be real to you, that's really all you're asking.

Say: God, I am so tired now. Where are my people?

Shannon Stewart

The Diviner

On nights of meteor showers
my mother rolled her damp hair in pincurls,
smoothed her face with Revlon Moondrops,
a yellow mask promising
the most beautiful skin.
She'd lie on the picnic table,
toes pointing toward the ocean
where the eye of the moon
widened over the island hills.
I could see her from the kitchen window
as she read the winnowing sky,
the dropped flecks of light, hieroglyphs
a body leaves upon falling to earth.
The silent mountain behind her
where the dark wind took the birds into sleep.
I stood at the sink with a glass in my hand,
contemplating the water, my thirst,
this ancient face dried and golden,
the soft skin I knew to be beneath.

Sarah Venart

Animal Stories

She remembers you at her birth—swears by the blood of it
by the bloated pink tubed skin she fell through that
separated her from her mother

that first escape—the rush of it—
the escape and taste of air that tongued her first mouth like cold metal
the slick feel of her fists wet against her own rat belly
pink skin and colourless eyes
clenched like those fists, her lids fighting
closed against the bright reflection of your glasses as you cut
her cord and placed her on her mother's empty belly

You built important wooden birds for her, did you know that? a mobile
of birds flew over her crib and over her pillows
they flew out the window and in again, as far as she was concerned
your hands made them sing as they opened the oiled cloth smelling
of linseed and you hung them above her, those fresh new birds

all singing and flying above her crib, she recalls that too
and the very shape of your hands, the oil smell of them
the blunt square quality—hands like rough jaws,
jammed up thumbs that she circled in her fist and held tight

She has small pieces of the farm on her walls now—a barn shingle
sketches of lambs who came motherless to the stove
and lay still and wrapped in a barn jacket

she misses the animals—you know that much
the linseed-timothy-grass smell of you,
your baseball hat tugged at uncomfortably

when she enters the airport—now—as she enters the airport and runs
right at you, you hold her and say,"Your mother missed you terribly,"
and you mean that you missed her

you miss her four-year-old six-year-old eighteen-year-old face
that brings back the cribbed boat she slept in
still brings back the curved ribs, the curved back of her mother
bending over to fetch her up in the morning

When she was six you carved her a moon
and a soapstone seal that you placed on her windowsill
you counted her fruit pits in the morning

taught her the rhyme of who she would marry by counting
those clean polished pits of apricots, prunes, and dates that she spat
into a saucer and brought to you
singing tinker tailor soldier sailor rich man poor man beggar man thief

And she could wake you in the middle of the night with her cries
her feet slapping the hardwood down the hall to your bed
where she cried and told you the dream she had again and again
where she becomes some sort of queen

and she is dressed up in a pair of wings made of pink granite
a hat that has a little campy pattern of yellows—the exact colour
of canary beaks and feathers
and she is flying, low to the ground, almost touching the trees
flying so low she is somehow able to pat the animals as she goes—
a brown striped cat, a rusty old Jersey cow
in mixed sleepy language she tells you about the sun that she flew
against in the pinkest red shadows

And then she is on a swing
that is higher than any swing she has been on
way up in the sky
and the swing is winding round and round a tree, so high
she cannot see the ground, she is suddenly falling faster than anything
faster than a dive, she says

curling then and breathing
her hot sleep breath into your armpit
she falls back to sleep
as though in telling you,
all fear climbs out of her and walks away

The Chronicle of Mary

Tad Troilo

MARY *and* HERMAN *are a couple considering their first child. Time is the present. Settings are completely suggestive as they travel to a Florida monastery. One bench serves to define the various locations.*

PRIVATE COMPARTMENT OF A TRAIN
(*Mary sits writing in a notebook.*)

HERMAN: Good. (*Pause*) Good. (*Pause*) You are a good father. (*Pause*) Good.

MARY: You will be a great father. Stop worrying.

HERMAN: You are going to be a great father. (*Pause*) Great. What do you have to do to be a great father? Frankly, I'd be happy just to be a good father. I mean, I'll try to be great, but...great. Wow. Seems so exclusive.

MARY: Is this the Midnight Express?

HERMAN: I don't know many great fathers. How do you get to be one?

MARY: What is this train called?

HERMAN: Maybe there are classes.

MARY: I think this is the Midnight Express.

HERMAN: I hope there aren't classes. I'm dumb in classes.

MARY: I'm gonna call this the Midnight Express.

HERMAN: It's the 11:55 Saratoga Sprint.

MARY: Now it's the Midnight Express. Adds some dash to the chronicle.

HERMAN: But you're making that up.

MARY: (*writing*) Midnight Express.

HERMAN: You're lying.

MARY: I'm chronicling the event.

HERMAN: Would a good father go for this lying?

MARY: It's not a lie. It's a chronicle.

HERMAN: It's a lying chronicle then.

MARY: It's my chronicle.

HERMAN: The old Herman wouldn't think twice about a little lie. I mean, I've lied, I've been lied to, I've seen lies all over, I mean what's one more lie among many? It's nothing. A guy with so many lies in his column, in his court, so to speak, what's another? But now I'm not just Herman, I'm Herman aspiring for—but not counting on—the title of Great Father, Herman certainly hoping to be Good Father. I have to start the scoring over. Not for me, my game's not worth watching. But for the father in me.

MARY: (*writing*) 11:55 Saratoga Sprint. It doesn't sound that bad.

HERMAN: Thank you.

MARY: You're going to be a wonderful father.

HERMAN: Do you think your mother ever said that to your father?

MARY: Take a nap.

HERMAN: I mean, you're gonna kill him.

MARY: Shhh.

HERMAN: I don't want my child killing me.

MARY: I know.

HERMAN: I want to be a good father.

MARY: You will.

HERMAN: If not great, good at least. I don't feel well.

MARY: Do you think he will have any last words?

HERMAN: What?

MARY: When I shoot him, will he say anything?

HERMAN: I don't know.

MARY: I don't think he will.

HERMAN: How can you chronicle that?

MARY: He never said much.

HERMAN: You can't write that part yet.

MARY: I'm not. I'm just thinking about it. (*Pause*) I'll be wearing a wedding dress.

HERMAN: You brought your wedding dress?

MARY: I'll get one when we arrive.

HERMAN: We can't afford that.

MARY: It will add a sense of occasion.

HERMAN: I don't feel well.

MARY: Watch the cows.

HERMAN: Why ?

MARY: It will make you feel better. (*She returns to the chronicle.*)

A TRAIN STATION

MARY: One last train, aptly named the Destiny Express....

HERMAN: It's not called the Destiny Express.

MARY: ...aptly named the Miami shuttle, brings us to my father, the man who bore me, the man whom I shall kill. My thoughts race.

HERMAN: Oh God.

MARY: Introspection is a very important part of a chronicle. (*Herman tries to snuggle with Mary.*)

MARY: Stop it. (*Herman tries again.*) Stop. (*He doesn't.*) Herman, I cannot chronicle with you doing that.

HERMAN: I just want to snuggle.

MARY: I am busy.

HERMAN: Well, let's snuggle.

MARY: Stop it.

HERMAN: What's wrong with snuggling?

MARY: I am introspecting.

HERMAN: Cows do it.

MARY: Cows introspect?

HERMAN: Cows snuggle. I watched them from the train.

MARY: I need to introspect right now, Herman.

HERMAN: Cows also chew cud.

MARY: I am not a cow.

HERMAN: I know that.

MARY: I am introspecting.

HERMAN: So you could introspect *and* snuggle.

MARY: Introspecting is not as simple as chewing cud.

HERMAN: I'm sure it's not. (*Pause*) It's just that snuggling makes the cows feel better.

MARY: I feel fine.

HERMAN: You're not burdened?

MARY: No.

HERMAN: See, when the cows are burdened, they snuggle and, well, it's not a cure-all, but it helps.

MARY: And what would a cow be burdened by?

HERMAN: It's more indecision. When the cows are plagued by indecision they snuggle.

MARY: Indecision?

HERMAN: Aren't you feeling any indecision?

MARY: About what?

HERMAN: About this adventure?

MARY: There is nothing to be indecisive about.

HERMAN: When life's complexities bear down on the cows, they snuggle.

MARY: This is not complex, Herman. You want to be a father?

HERMAN: Yes.

MARY: I want to be a mother. But I'm not ready. After this, I'll be ready. See? Simple. Not complex.

HERMAN: Just a little snuggle? (*They snuggle.*)

MARY: Are you better with a shotgun or a pistol?

HERMAN: Excuse me?

MARY: I think a pistol adds to the spirit of things. Don't you?

HERMAN: I don't want a gun.

MARY: We'll both get pistols in Miami.

HERMAN: Are you chronicling me a gun?

MARY: Yes.

HERMAN: I don't shoot anybody, do I?

MARY: I'm penciling it in so it can be erased. Takes a bit away from the prophetic nature of the thing but it has to be done.

HERMAN: What kind of a father shoots people?

MARY: It will only be for emergency.

HERMAN: Who would let their child play with our child if our child's father shoots people?

MARY: If you don't shoot anybody, I'll erase that part of the chronicle.

HERMAN: This is getting complex.

MARY: It is not complex.

HERMAN: I just want to be a good father.

MARY: You will be.

HERMAN: I want to be a cow.

MARY: You'll be a great father.

A WEDDING DRESS SHOP

MARY: *(She wears a wedding dress.)* How does this one look?

HERMAN: Expensive.

MARY: Do I look pretty?

HERMAN: Pretty expensive.

MARY: It adds a certain charm to the event.

HERMAN: Very important.

MARY: (*writing*) Charm.

HERMAN: Very important to be charming when you are killing your father.

MARY: I think so.

HERMAN: And it's expensive to be charming.

MARY: This dress is not that expensive.

HERMAN: You already have a wedding dress. Only wore it once.

MARY: I didn't bring it.

HERMAN: Can't you rent one?

MARY: You can't rent a dress.

HERMAN: You can rent costumes.

MARY: I will not wear a costume to something as important as this.

HERMAN: I just don't see why we aren't saving the money.

MARY: For what?

HERMAN: For the child. (*Pause*) And I don't see how our child can be born from murder. (*Pause*) I want it so badly. I want to be a father. And you too.

MARY: I want it too.

HERMAN: I don't want *you* to be a father. I want you to be a mother. My mother. Our child's mother. A family. That's what I want.

MARY: That's what we will have.

HERMAN: And yes, I'll do anything for it. I'll take a train, I'll take the bus, I'll puke all over the bus, I'll spend the money.

MARY: You're very brave.

HERMAN: I want it so badly I don't even think. Just boom! We're off. And seven states later, here we are. And you're dressing up for a murder.

MARY: I wished I had a mirror like this.

HERMAN: It will add a reflective quality to the whole thing.

MARY: On our wedding day, I wished I had one. So I could see all sides of me. Because when I looked at the front, I felt something wrong in back. And when I turned and looked at my bottom, covered by fabric, safe, not sticking out, I was sure the dress was falling off my breast. So I had to turn real fast, front to back, front to back. And I remember thinking, I wish I had one of those mirrors, so I could just look and know I was okay. Then the phone rang. It was you.

HERMAN: I forgot the Reverend's name.

MARY: I told you it was Reverend Spieglenhopper.

HERMAN: What a stupid name.

MARY: I made it up.

HERMAN: You did?

MARY: It was Reverend Smith.

HERMAN: No wonder he tried to deck me at the reception.

MARY: And you told me you loved me.

HERMAN: I do.

MARY: We said that later. And the phone rang again. It was my father. He asked me if my dress was pretty. I said yes. He asked me if it was white. I said yes. He laughed. He hung up.

HERMAN: You look beautiful.

MARY: I want to have a family.

HERMAN: Is this the only way?

MARY: Yes.

HERMAN: For you, I'll try.

MARY: For our family to be, try.

IN A GUN SHOP

MARY: (*to unseen store owner*) Those are very nice guns.

HERMAN: I'm sorry.

MARY: Don't be sorry. Just pay for the guns.

HERMAN: I'm sorry.

MARY: Herman.

HERMAN: I think I was wrong about some things I decided in my youth.

MARY: Are you okay?

HERMAN: I was wrong to think my happiness was the key to my happiness.

MARY: Herman, please, we don't have a lot of time.

HERMAN: I will never be so selfish again. I'm sorry.

MARY: (*to owner*) No, we'll take them. They're so cute.

HERMAN: Hardly great father material.

MARY: No need to wrap them.

HERMAN: I won't quit my job until I find another one, but I will quit. And I like my job and I don't want to quit but I will because I don't want to be selfish so I'll do it. I'll do it! I'll do it!

MARY: Herman.

HERMAN: I'm sorry. We are out of money.

MARY: But we need the guns.

HERMAN: I'm gonna get a better job.

MARY: (*to owner*) We'll be right back.

MARY: Take it off.

HERMAN: Mary....

MARY: It's a fair price.

HERMAN: I'm sure it is.

MARY: So take off the ring, Herman.

HERMAN: Have you ever taken it off before?

MARY: Of course I have.

HERMAN: You are cruel.

MARY: Herman, take your ring off.

HERMAN: What a way to tell your husband something like that.

MARY: Like what?

HERMAN: Like your infidelities.

MARY: What infidelities?

HERMAN: You took your ring off.

MARY: It's right here.

HERMAN: Why would you do that?

MARY: I take off my ring when I clean cucumbers so it doesn't fall down the sink.

HERMAN: I have never taken my ring off.

MARY: You've never cleaned cucumbers. Herman, please, we have to pawn them.

HERMAN: I don't want to.

MARY: This is more important than your wants.

HERMAN: What is?

MARY: The chronicle.

HERMAN: It is?

MARY: We need money to go on. To do what we've come to do. To be ready for a family. We need to finish the chronicle. Take off your ring.

HERMAN: For a diary?

MARY: It is a chronicle.

HERMAN: For a chronicle?

MARY: For a family.

HERMAN: Pawn our love?

MARY: Pawn a ring.

HERMAN: Sell that which binds us to one another?

MARY: It is just a ring.

HERMAN: I can't believe you said that. It is our wedding ring.

MARY: Pawn it!

HERMAN: Pawn?

MARY: Pawn is just a word....

HERMAN: It's an ugly word.

MARY: And that is just a ring!

HERMAN: I'm leaving. (*Goes to exit.*)

MARY: Herman, there is no chronicle without you.

(*Herman crosses the stage, out of the shop. Mary says some words to the unseen storekeeper, then follows Herman.*)

MARY: Did you hear what I said?

HERMAN: You said it's just a ring.

MARY: Before that.

HERMAN: No.

MARY: There is no chronicle without you.

(*Herman exits.*)

HERMAN IS FEEDING DUCKS
(*Mary enters.*)

MARY: (*angry*) There is no chronicle without you.

HERMAN: Shhh.

MARY: Herman!

HERMAN: I'm feeding the ducks.

MARY: I don't care about the ducks.

HERMAN: They have a remarkable way of dealing with the stresses the world provides for us.

MARY: There is no chronicle without you.

HERMAN: They quack.

MARY: Listen to me.

HERMAN: Just before their heads explode, they quack. Isn't that brilliant?

MARY: You didn't hear a word I said.

HERMAN: I heard plenty.

MARY: But you weren't listening.

HERMAN: Quack.

MARY: You are making me so angry.

HERMAN: Quack.

MARY: Just stop quacking and listen to me!

HERMAN: I'm feeding the ducks.

(Mary scares the ducks away.)

HERMAN: Now what am I going to do with all this bread?

MARY: There is no chronicle without you.

HERMAN: You want me to give our wedding ring for that chronicle.

MARY: Yes.

HERMAN: So without me, there can be no chronicle and all you care about is my ring and your chronicle and if you could catch me sleeping, you'd slip it off my finger and go on without me.

MARY: No.

HERMAN: Quack.

MARY: No.

HERMAN: Quack.

MARY: Without you there is no chronicle. There is no family and for me there never will be. So if you want to sit here and feed the ducks, then I want to join you.

HERMAN: How do I know you mean all that? I said I would try. And I have. But this, giving up our ring, our symbol of unity, Mary, I don't know if this makes sense. You're so obsessed with this thing that I don't even know if our marriage still interests you....

(Mary kisses Herman. Long. Longer.)

HERMAN: I love you.

MARY: I love you too.

(Herman takes his ring off.)

OUTSIDE A MONASTERY.
(*Mary in a wedding dress.*)

HERMAN: This is a monastery.

MARY: Pretty, isn't it?

HERMAN: Mary, this is a monastery.

MARY: I know.

HERMAN: Do you know who lives in monasteries?

MARY: Put this on. (*She gives him an outfit.*)

HERMAN: Priests live in monasteries. (*He holds up the outfit.*) What's this?

MARY: It's a priest's suit.

HERMAN: Why?

MARY: This is a monastery.

HERMAN: I know that.

MARY: Priests live here.

HERMAN: I know priests live here.

MARY: This way you'll fit in.

HERMAN: Do you know that commandment about killing being bad?

MARY: Thou shalt not kill?

HERMAN: That one.

MARY: Get dressed.

HERMAN: Do you know who wrote that?

MARY: Moses.

HERMAN: No. Moses just brought it down from the mount.

MARY: And change your shoes.

HERMAN: So who wrote it?

MARY: Who?

HERMAN: Who else was on the mount with him?

MARY: God.

HERMAN: Yes! God. God wrote it. And what is God?

MARY: He's God.

HERMAN: He's a priest.

MARY: He's not a priest.

HERMAN: God is a priest.

MARY: My father is a priest.

HERMAN: You never told me your father was a priest.

MARY: We're at a monastery.

HERMAN: He could've been the janitor.

MARY: He's not. He's a priest. And he's on his deathbed. We have to hurry.

HERMAN: My point is God, like your father, is a priest. And God wrote the commandment that you are going to break.

MARY: God is not a priest.

HERMAN: Okay. Maybe not. But priests, like your father, read the commandment that God wrote and they are all like buddies.

MARY: What's your point?

HERMAN: God always wanted to be a priest. Won't take this lightly.

MARY: You're a priest.

HERMAN: I'm not a priest.

MARY: Sure you are. Look. You'll put in a good word for me. Make God understand. You look good in black. I think you're a winter. (*She writes in her chronicle*) I never thought I'd make it. There's magic in the air.

HERMAN: Who are all these people?

MARY: They're with the press.

HERMAN: The press?

MARY: I guess his death is news. If only they knew how it will happen.

HERMAN: How are we gonna get to him with all these people here?

MARY: I'm family. Once inside, we bolt the door.

HERMAN: Shouldn't we hurry?

MARY: Hold on.

HERMAN: What are you doing? They're swarming inside.

MARY: I'm writing the ending.

HERMAN: The end hasn't happened yet.

MARY: But it will.

HERMAN: Of course it will. But how can you write the end now?

MARY: I told you, it's prophetic.

AT A DYING MAN'S BEDSIDE

HERMAN: You didn't tell me he was a Cardinal.

MARY: Yes, I did.

HERMAN: You said he was a priest.

MARY: Same thing.

HERMAN: It's not the same thing.

MARY: It's him either way.

HERMAN: A Cardinal is a real good priest. A priest that God really likes.

MARY: He doesn't look like one.

HERMAN: You're going to kill a Cardinal.

MARY: He looks vile.

HERMAN: A Cardinal.

MARY: He's not a good priest. Or a good Cardinal. Or a good father.

HERMAN: There are a hundred newspeople trying to get in here.

MARY: He is vile and evil.

HERMAN: Some people think he'll rise from the dead.

MARY: He looks like the devil in a hospital nightie.

HERMAN: So this is really gonna happen.

MARY: Herman.

HERMAN: Shoot him.

MARY: What is the matter with you?

HERMAN: Nothing. Give it to him!

MARY: I certainly will not.

HERMAN: Hurry up and let him have it.

MARY: This is a moment to be savoured.

HERMAN: Mary, I am trying so hard to understand, my head is gonna pop off my shoulders. I'm not puking, I'm not complaining, I'm rooting for you to commit patricide. So please, while I'm trying so hard I'm in an odd state of detachment, and before the press comes barging in, blow his brains all over the wall.

MARY: (*Sits.*) I can't.

HERMAN: Sure you can.

MARY: This was supposed to be divine retribution on earth. It was supposed to be a cleansing moment, my revenge, my rebirth.

HERMAN: Mary, I think this is all crazy. I will bolt the door, pawn my ring, wear a collar, but that is it. The rest is up to you. So please, do it before the army of press breaks down the door.

MARY: You need...I need to know I am not sin. All this was so you would understand that.

HERMAN: All this was so you could kill him. So kill him.

MARY: Herman, you need to know that I am not sin.

HERMAN: Fine.

MARY: And all this is a waste if you really don't see that when he called me sin, it wasn't true. Because, though he made me, he called me sin, every day he lived with us. And when he left my mother and I for crucifixes, the word sin stayed behind. And I am not sin. I need to know that me and my baby are not sin.

HERMAN: That I understand.

MARY: You do?

HERMAN: (*He looks at Mary's belly.*) Did you say your baby?

MARY: (*She holds her belly.*) Yes.

(*Herman moves a cabinet to block the door, goes to Mary.*)

HERMAN: (*To her belly*) You are not sin. (*To Mary*) And you are not sin.

MARY: I know that. (*With gun to the Cardinal's head*) Now so shall he.

HERMAN: Oh God.

MARY: I can't wait to have your baby Herman.

HERMAN: (*His eyes closed.*) I love you.

(Mary pulls the trigger. Nothing happens. Herman opens his eyes.)

HERMAN: No bullets?

(The heart monitor makes the ringing sound that means the heart has stopped.)

MARY: I didn't need them. The chronicle said I would not start our family from bloodshed.

HERMAN: I said that.

MARY: So did the chronicle.

HERMAN: *(Hears people coming.)* They're coming! *(Mary hides gun.)* Oh my God he's dead!

(They both cry loudly, hugging each other. As the lights change, their tears become laughter and the only crying is that of a baby heard as they look down into a crib.)

The play presented here is an abridged version of the original one-act. It may not be reproduced in any manner whatsoever and no production presented without the express written permission of the author.

Sharon McCartney

two poems

Lower Muscatine

Under a map of my country,
we fucked like collaborators,
quietly, each with a reason
to be elsewhere. I remember
stroking your hair, the laughable
pillow that was actually
the seat from a car,
and, now, how you expected
me to leave. I was happy;
I loved, already, your back
shaped like a capital M,
the two warm crests
of your shoulders. I didn't care
if we ever spoke again.
In the morning, you kissed me
through the open window.
I listened to Joe Ely over and over.
I could have left earlier,
in the dark, while you slept.
Tell that to our children.

Adolescence

I wear bikinis and smoke
as much dope as I can
and whisper fuck you
to my sister who is dying.
In the tumbleweeds behind
the house, I fill blue glass
bottles with vodka.
I go through so much
codeine, my doctor
phones me. One day,
while I'm lying on my purple
bed, staring at the purple
wall, I realize my father
is talking; he's telling me
how lucky I am to be young,
how I will live to see
people on Mars, maybe
even my children.
I don't try to speak.
I don't want my children
anywhere near Mars.

Hillel Schwartz

The Lunatic Trucks

The lunatic trucks careen around lath-
and-cardboard corners like Mary-had-
a-little-lamb ice cream wagons gone berserk,
straightmen at their running boards white as all get-
out and a-shiver with the sternness of regency. Mean-
while the mad twist into manholes like bolts through
nuts; fall into troughs of ghostpaint thick as corn
starch; wheel off on donkeycars chased by blue faces
and the fat bungled erotica of nightsticks.

The mouse-eared camera follows, dollying up and
back, diddling in and out, and the mad go on
being stuntmen, glaring like idiots into glass
eyes, subscribing to vertigo, helium, tics.
Everywhere are backwards jackets and belladonna,
smelling salts, kings of hearts, Bonapartes
playing triple solitaire.

The trucks come for your grandpa, your Teddy
Roosevelt half-cousin, your polka-dotty great-aunt,
that rebellious fast-talking dime-dancing niece,
the nice boy next door who never quite came back
from the trenches, the Zone, the jungle.
The trucks take them to farms where the cows lean
on two-by-fours, chickens are latex, geese honk
like bicycle horns, and Harpo interviews a furpiece.

Repainted, the trucks become paddywagons, milk wagons,
Brinks wagons, and come for felons, bottles, bricks of gold.
The straightmen, re-costumed, become cops, peddlers, pallbearers.
Nothing remains what it seems. Everything is on consignment
or recall.

The lunatic trucks careen around coroners,
straightmen at the running boards white as paper
forms and stern with repetition, always always
in a hurry. Madness cannot last, must be taken
at high tide and just one way. No one returns
home in a lunatic truck. People come back
to empty apartments or fancy split-levels
in black sedans, white roadsters, checkerboard taxis.
The lunatic trucks miss them all by clever inches
on their determined path to another pick-up.
Again! shout the directors. Do it again!

The lunatic trucks careen around corners
like pest wagons; nothing gets in their way.
No head-on collisions, no traffic jams, no quakes,
no streetbeggars, no skies falling, no pennies from heaven.
They come right to the door, efficient as klaxon,
and the straightmen deliver up the body like a
moth wound back to its neat cocoon.

The lunatic trucks careen around corners
back to the funny farm, but no one sees these antics.
You only see the cocoon spun into its nest among alders,
starched elders, and Groucho dissecting lyric opera.

I cannot get the trucks out of my head.
They must run on Carver's peanuts or silly putty,
a thousand and one reels to the heaping tablespoon.
Their brakes are so sure and sudden they must be lined
with the likes of Descartes or maybe Billy Sunday.
They keep to their road more certainly than Ed Sullivan,
more directly than astronauts. There is no stopping them
and their attendants and the drivers and their navigators
until they want to stop. I want them to stop.

The lunatic trucks careen around corners

Salted Meat and Cucumber

translated from the Swedish by Steven Hartman

Stig Dagerman

When I was nine years old and supposedly small for my age, the way to school passed by a creek with yellow, muddy water. In the winter you could stand there on the bank and throw stones until the golden ice cracked. But in summer, spring and fall the creek became a racecourse for matchsticks, corks and matchboxes—the matchsticks always won because the corks and matchboxes would get stuck between the rocks. Once my friend Inge and I found two fat, ugly lampreys squirming around on the bottom. We stuffed them in a sandwich bag and took them home. But nobody wanted them. So we had to throw them back in the river. I hope they lived. In those days our knees were always scraped, the scabs forever fresh and soft. And just when they had begun to heal a brewery truck that you just had to tow behind would almost always come down the road, or a new log jam that you just had to run across would form in the river.

Yes, the road to school was filled with adventures—not so much on the way there, but on the way home. The rich old farmer had an apple orchard with bitter, green fruit. And there was an old abandoned house that eventually became a chapel. Birds flew around in the dark under its broken roof, shingles had fallen in and covered the floor, and everything—the steps, the doors, the warped window frames—everything was rotten in a way that equally frightened, tickled and enchanted.

And then of course there were the old women of the district, always dressed in black, whom you could usually see walking through the trees toward some old roadside shack. To us, people were never as old as they were in those days—a couple hundred years was just barely middle-aged.

There were other things, too, forbidden things which we could never really know for sure, simply because they were forbidden. Yet the unawareness was but a myth, for if ever there was a time when life was filled with sticky symbolism, it was then. Almost everything we did had

double meanings. If you threw a stone at a girl out of pure mischief, the act would certainly be interpreted as something else altogether. One time on the hillside by the river we found an old deck of left-behind cards half-destroyed by the rain. Only the Queen of Spades was still in fairly good shape, and I remember very well the many different ways this could be interpreted by those of us who were more experienced.

When the washtubs simmered on the bank of the river, we would steal matches from the woodpile and light them up in the dark behind some barn wall. This gave us a gruesome pleasure which somehow made life even more complex than it already was. I remember my friend Inge once took a single match to an entire box of stolen matches. When it burst into a hissing flame he flung it out through the air and into the creek. And I remember thinking what a terrible sin it was to waste something you had just stolen. No, we were never as moral as we were in those days.

To us, the most important bits of knowledge often came in whispers. In the hallway at school, terror had a way of sinking its claws into you, because that's where you were often pointed out by some secret whisper that would be followed from mouth to mouth. And the strangest thing about it was that you never got to know what your own secret was all about. It could be whispered of someone that his house was infested with lice, or of someone else that she had peed her pants in class and had to stay in during recess to clean it up. But of my own supposed offences I was never once allowed to hear.

By inscrutable means, everything that required quiet talk found its way to our ears. One boy in the fourth grade was known to have tormented animals. It was common knowledge that he had once lured a tomcat into a cage full of hens, with disastrous results, and that afterwards the teacher had gone to his house to lecture him about it. Even though he was only in the fourth grade, he was already wearing a grown-up's long trousers. He was tall, with shoulders that hunched forward. During recess he would walk around kicking stones, and always by himself, because the judge that was somewhere inside all of us had long ago condemned him to a life of exile.

At recess we would lie in the green grass and bite pine cones to the core, or we would take turns trying to kick a broken tennis ball through a small hole in the school fence—one time I even managed to get it through, even though I was from Stockholm. The girls on the other hand would stand in small groups by the schoolhouse wall. The line between us was hard and fixed, like nothing else.

Speaking of the judge within us, it happened during one recess that the boy who abused animals—his name was Sivert—got yelled at by the teacher for scuffing up his shoes on some rocks in the school yard. They were actually the county's shoes, because his family was too poor to buy

him a pair on their own. When the teacher turned his back, Sivert twisted his face into a wild grimace. Then another boy ran to the teacher's side. We called this other boy The Thief because it was well known that he had once stolen the janitor's glasses during gym.

"Mr. Andersson," The Thief cried out, "Sivert just stuck out his tongue at you!"

Suddenly the teacher whirled around and with one hand he grabbed Sivert by both cheeks, palming his face and pulling him up to the tips of his toes. He leaned forward so that his and Sivert's eyes were just a few inches apart. And that's how they stayed for a long minute, silently staring at each other. At last he lowered Sivert back to the ground. He released his grip, turned abruptly and headed up towards the school. But then to everyone's shock Sivert stuck out his tongue again, his expression much uglier this time. Yet before The Thief had a chance to yell something out, one of us grabbed him by the mouth and forced it shut. There was something which told us the whole thing had gone far enough.

We had our own system of justice, a code for measuring the seriousness of a crime, and the punishments were carefully chosen. Stealing was nothing compared with torturing animals. Once when The Thief was standing at the blackboard the teacher reached down into his pocket and found that it was full of chalk. The Thief had to stay behind when we went out for recess, so we waited for him at the bottom of the steps, gripped with fear, restless with admiration. When he finally came out we had a feeling that something about him was different. A smell? His way of walking? Of spitting? Hostile as always when encountering something unfamiliar, we remained coldly silent. But The Thief jumped towards us, excitedly.

"I got to keep the chalk!" he said. "He only pulled my hair, the bastard! He said to me, 'It starts with a piece of thread and ends with your neighbour's bread.' But I got to keep the chalk!"

That was the first of probably four hundred times we would come to hear the "theft verse" in school. But you could tell The Thief was scared because he looked like he was ready to fight. He turned and started walking out in front of our enormous group towards the back of the large red schoolhouse, and the space between him and the rest of us was filled with our contempt. In back of the building a ladder hung down from the roof, and it swayed back and forth in the wind.

"I bet you I can climb up there and draw a cross on the roof," he said, spitting the words out at us. Some of us spat back, "The hell you can!" But by the time the challenge had left our mouths he was already several steps up.

So we sat down in the grass and followed his steep ascent. Like little angry dogs his hands clamped their teeth onto the ladder's rungs with

more and more fury the higher he went. We understood of course that he was very scared, and the closer he got to the top the more he began to slow down in hope that the school bell would ring. The wind was blowing much harder now, ripping into the ladder. We let him climb three-quarters of the way up before we finally shouted that the teacher was coming. That was his sentence for stealing.

But then everything else went on as usual. He got to sit on our bench in the hallway during lunch, eating sandwiches like the rest of us. The girls sat on a different bench, towards which we all threw our crumpled sandwich wrappers. Only Sivert had nowhere to sit. Most of the time he just stood by the window, drawing pictures of queer little people on the white sill with his pencil. Sometimes he would go outside and throw stones at the birch trees, and then we would get up and go to the window to see what he had drawn, filled with a strange sort of resentment. We always hoped the teacher would come along and get a look at what Sivert had drawn.

During lunch my friend Inge and I always sat together. His father owned a vegetable stand, and maybe that's why he always had cucumber on his sandwiches. He detested cucumbers, but he was too timid to say anything at home. Sometimes I got salted meat in my sandwiches. At home they thought I liked salted meat because that's what I had always been given when I lived in Stockholm. But what they didn't know was that back then I was in the habit of dropping my salted meat into one of the empty desks at school. Naturally, Inge and I could have exchanged sandwiches, but he didn't like salted meat either, and for that matter I didn't like cucumber. So one day it occurred to us that we could take the thin slices of salted meat and cucumber and drop them discreetly behind our lunch bench, which stood against the wall and extended all the way to the floor. That entire fall and throughout the winter we dropped salted meat and cucumber behind the bench, and on our way home from school we fantasized about how a flood of salted meat and cucumber would flow out over the floor and drown the whole school if we ever moved that bench. But we never dared to move it. Instead, we continually searched for new places behind the bench to drop our fillings so that the load would be distributed as evenly as possible.

It so happened that one week it was my turn to stay behind after school to air out the classroom, to clean the chalkboard and clap the erasers. Just as I was finishing up I was gripped by a terrible desire to see what it looked like behind our bench. I was nearly overcome by disgust when I thought about the sight that awaited me, and several times I walked out into the hallway, whistling and turning around. To delay the decisive moment a little longer, I began to throw chalk, first trying to hit the teacher's desk and then the fat Gustav Adolf* who hung on the wall right

**A portrait, probably of Gustavus II Adolphus, King of Sweden (1611-1632)*

behind it. Then I went around the room, lifting up the girls' desk tops and looking through their things. I was very curious, but also a little proud of myself, because I didn't have the need to steal anything.

At last I knew it was time to get going, and even then I couldn't resist the temptation. I practically threw the bench out from the wall and I stopped to listen for the dull groan of the landslide. But there wasn't a single sound in that whole dark building. I got down on my knees and felt along the wall from one end of the bench to the other, at any moment expecting my hand to slide through something dark and horrible. But all I could feel was the naked wood. Not one single piece of our sandwiches was back there.

Next morning at home I quietly filled another small bag full of salted meat. There were at least a dozen pieces, and during lunch I dropped them one at a time down behind the bench at different spots along the wall. Later on, after all the students had left, I was alone in the school. I was sitting in the classroom at the teacher's desk, pretending it was the last day of class. I had already turned off the ceiling lights and was now just sitting there, smelling the graduation flowers which Inge and I usually picked in the woods in the spring.

Then suddenly I heard quick footsteps in the hallway. At first I went stiff from fear because I thought I was doing something forbidden by sitting there in the teacher's chair. But the steps ended outside the door, there in the hallway. Relieved, I got up and acted like I was erasing the blackboard, just in case someone walked in. That's when I heard the lunch bench being moved, first scraping against the floor and then creaking as it was pushed back against the wall. I heard a few more steps, and then they stopped again—in front of the window, it seemed. I could still hear the snow boots squealing against the floor.

I turned on the lights and ran to the door. A slice of light fell out into the hallway's darkness, and directly in that small path of light I could see Sivert standing there. He was bent forward, greedily eating the salted meat and cucumber from his hands, with wild movements of his head like when dogs tear at a piece of meat. And suddenly everything which had gathered up inside me during the winter—secret deals, suppressed thoughts, powerless knowledge, envy of experience, half-conscious guilt—all of it pressed violently against my core until I could not stop myself from crying out:

"You Goddamned thief! You Goddamned thief! You Goddamned thief!"

I chased Sivert through the darkness of the hallway and out onto the steps, where he slipped and tumbled down into the snow. I was on top of him at once, driving my knees into his shoulders. Some of the boys who were still outside throwing snowballs against the school's basement windows came trudging towards us.

"He's been stealing," I shouted wildly. "He's been stealing from me and Inge!"

Together we turned his long, weak body onto its back. One boy sat firmly on his legs. He pulled the laces out of Sivert's boots and then tossed them in the snow. Another stretched Sivert's arms back and sprinkled the powdery new-fallen snow onto his skin. Yet another dug in hard with his hands all over Sivert's bare chest. As for myself, I unbuttoned his shirt and shoved snow down his back as far as I could get it. In no time his eyes were cemented shut by the snow and even his mouth was filled with it. Then, as if reacting to some secret signal, we all jumped up and left him alone. Excited, I ran back into the school, freezing but also hot. Scattered on the floor of the hallway were little pieces of salted meat and cucumber. As I jerked open one of the windows I could feel them in my hand, cold and frog-like. With indescribable disgust, I flung them out in the snow.

Then I went into the classroom, still hot, but still cold, too. There was some sort of earlier unknown tension still working inside me, and it made me feel as though I was slowly being torn apart. I frowned around the room, banging on all the desk tops with my fist, wishing that I knew what to do next. But nothing more occurred to me than to sit at the biggest girl's desk and write a dirty word on its underside with a piece of chalk.

However, the judge within me must have been more than nine years old, because at last it told me what a coward I had been. Was it really stealing to take something we had rejected? Still defiant, but slowly coming undone, I turned off the lights and left. Outside, I saw Sivert's shoelaces lying in a snow drift. I put them in my pocket. I hurried on my way home so that I would not have to be alone with my judge for too long.

A few minutes later I saw Sivert on the road ahead of me. He was kicking a piece of ice from one side of the road to the other. I hurried towards him.

"Hi," I said, tapping him on the shoulder.

He crossed over to the left side of the road, looking down into the ditch as he walked along it. I wanted to make things all right again, so I crossed over too and walked right beside him.

"Would you like a sandwich, Sivert?" I asked him.

Then he crossed over to the right side again, acting as if I wasn't even there.

"Would you like a sandwich?" I asked him again, even louder. But he wouldn't answer me.

He was the only one who could save me from the shame of what I had done—a shame which, at the time, I believed would last forever. In despair that he would not help me, when he was the only one who could, I hung onto him heavily, pouring everything that was in me out over him,

hoping somehow that he would finally push me away and scream "Go to hell!"—so that in the end I might at least have the chance to say to myself, Well, I wanted to set things right. But he told me to go to hell.

But Sivert did nothing. He simply let me hang on him, spitting out all the abuses I could think of. So then I threw him down in the snow at the edge of the road, hoping that I might be able to say, Well, I wanted to square things with him. But then he hit me! But Sivert willingly let himself be thrown down into the snow drift. I jumped on him, pounding and hitting him wherever I could, panting above his closed eyes.

"You lousy thief! You Goddamned animal killer! You lousy Goddamned thief animal killer!"

And yet, all of this seemed to be happening to somebody else. I was so nearly out of my mind with tense despair that I just left Sivert lying there, and I ran and ran. In front of the church I suddenly began to cry. And I must have cried the whole way home, because I couldn't see anything. I could tell the farmers were driving their manure sleds out into the fields from the smell, and from the clanging of the bells which flew like blue birds out over the expansive plains of twilight. And because it was that time of year, I also knew that the woods were releasing their small clouds of white winter mist. Yet the very next day the miller's children told me how they had been standing next to father's big maple tree, and how they had asked me to go home with them to play "people drowning" in the giant wheat bin. They said I just walked right on by, as if I didn't even see them. And the simple truth is, I did not.

Adam Ginter

Sawmill Town

The town burns boulders of wood
at the bottom of the mountain,
setting the cloud singing its brass.
Shovelled pole to pole from lamps
above rooftops where the path is thick
charged hands
work to fill beehive burners,
burnt paper under the street,
pounded until the clock is punched
and old mother sandblower cleans,
stars like hot iron plates.
Bare-armed, bare-fisted outside the mill
as it's chucked to coal,
backs face where the line leads
to those roads hewn under their own light,
as spadeful after spadeful of chips
are put in the wet ground, reaching
across the silence of the spark and steam.

Tom Wayman

The Politics Of The House: Some Furnishings

1. Carpets

Carpets are the news media
of the house: giving a reassuring veneer
to the facts of the flooring.
Even when carpets are startling or
fascinating in design
or hideously coloured
or worn
they conceal a fundamental question
about this dwelling: is what supports us
as we walk around or
sit or doze
beautiful hardwood planks
or cheap particleboard?
Carpets insist they provide background
yet they are actually one layer removed,
one strata of insulation,
from the real basis
of existence here.
Their task is comfort,
not clarity, a lulling fog
that keeps even the soles of our shoes
—which ordinarily have no illusions—
ignorant or confused.

2. Bookshelves

resemble time itself:
indifferent to what people treasure
and display.
They serve faithfully as a frame
but are unable to conceal a superior attitude,
knowing that what is valued today
will be ignored or discarded later
—men and women being
fickle, inconstant, distracted
in any bookcase's opinion.
The merciless regularity
of this structure of shelves
—a quality also shared with time—
when compared to the mix of shapes,
textures, and colours of books
and how sloppily they often are piled
testifies
to the inhumaneness, the mechanical nature

of constructs we let into our house
because we believe they help us
but who are not our friends:
like a religious counsellor
on home visit
conveying, despite his talk about charity
and forgiveness, a moral disdain
for our messy lives.

3. Lamps

The Santa Claus of each dwelling—
providing, during the seasonal festival of every night,
a gift
of all that is inside: objects, hours, chores.
Seen from without, lights are watchdogs
barking at thieves
as well as guests.
Within, lights are guardian angels
—comforting, guiding
—or spiritual philosophers
who provide awareness
to anybody who enters their influence.
As with Buddha or Jesus, though,
their very radiance
separates us from the stars.

Japonisme

Sally Ito

Her favourite café was called *Chine Bleu.* She no longer remembered where in the Paris rabble it was but that it was blue, she was sure—a twilight blue, the colour of the evening sky before the stars—a royal and imperious blue, the silk gown of a boy prince.

It was run by a Chinese man, long-haired, who had seen the world muscled and fisted in bullets and bloodshed. His face was muzzle-rough, a bulldog's bristle, and his body thin and sinewy as hemp. *I am a refugee,* he said, *from Vietnam.* He spoke perfect French. She supposed he was learned; she could never tell with refugees. He came to her table, bending over to take her order, his shirt billowing open at the neck where she could see the small smooth muscles of the neck twitch and twitter with each growl from his throat. She called him Wang.

In the early mornings, Wang would open up the café, and would sit in the front window to read the newspaper with a cup of tea, his *enfant* in his lap. He used to smoke, he told her, but it was bad for the *enfant* so he quit. When it got busy, he would hand the *enfant* to the grandmother who sat in the back behind the cash register on an old red stool. It was she who took in the money, the wrinkled fingers smoothing out the bills, caressing the change. If there was a wife, she was nowhere to be seen.

She and her lover lived in an apartment across the street from the café. Their bed was near the window and in the mornings, they would stare out at the café, a snow-white drift over their sleepy heads. Through the hole they had made in the snow, she could see all the people walking along Paris' grey boulevards. Her lover had a long, broad arm that he swept around her head, the shape making a frame through which she could see the world, a painting crying out, *look, look at me!*

Her job was translating Japanese court poetry. She worked at the Musée Guimet, in the back where shelf-loads of manuscripts and scrolls were stored. From out of the densely dancing black strokes of the calligrapher's brush she extracted poems of autumn leaf, spring cherry, the moon's silver reflections, laying them out into the sun-dusky light of the tiny back room for the curious Western eye to peruse.

Her lover was French—French like a spring vine that curls up to a woman's window and blooms on the sill of a day-dreaming heart. Standing one day at her desk in a long black coat, with a belt knotted at the back of the waist, he was a shining prince of the court. Lovelorn dilettante here he was, and—oh! in her heart's foolishness—she dropped her pen. He picked it up, set it on her scribblings with his name card. *Guillaume de Lavison–Antiquaire d'objets orientaux.*

In those first and luscious days they sat in the window seat of the café sipping warm jasmine tea, their legs entwined underneath the table. The scent of white flowers floated up into the air, the delicious whiff of that faraway spring would bring their eyes dancing from cup to hand, from hand to face. The walls sighed, a shudder of their blue breath slipping over the chairs and tables, melting into the cupped white tea bowls, mingling with the gold trim. Their eyes closed to hear the soft and silent colours when *KA - THANG!* ear-splitting crash of stone against glass, youths with swastikas running down the street, Wang after them, broom angrily in hand. Sometimes she and her lover would stay, watch the drama of the police—notepads and sunglasses, black boots on splintered glass. Other times they would slip out, leaving money in the teapot—*hurry, hurry, let's go home*—nestle together in that warm snow.

Hours and hours she spent in the dusty chambers of the *musée*, poring over the gentle moonlit nights filled with soft scent of summer flowers, the whisper and shudder of a courtesan's gown as he hurried for the evening rendezvous with his lover, coy and demure behind her screen—how his words trailed like silk across her face, sheltered her—his warm, broad palm cupping, like a bowl to be appraised, her chin, her mouth and the small breaths that escaped between his fingers.

When they fought, she went to the café by herself where she would be beckoned into the kitchen by the grandmother. The kitchen was that private place, not for customers, oh no, but for the black-haired ones like her, like the old woman, like Wang. There the old woman would serve her pork soup and snow-white buns filled with meat. They hardly exchanged words. The old woman would hold the *enfant* and watch her sip the steaming soup. The old woman smiled her golden-toothed smile, clucking and cooing. Then stretching her gnarled, hawk-like hand with its one long fingernail, she would touch *her*—her young smooth hand that held the pen, that was now holding the porcelain ladle with the dragon swimming in its shallow depths.

From that steamy kitchen the old woman released her, let her out onto the cobblestone alley strewn with garbage and old huddling men. In the dim light, she would scurry like a frightened cat into the apartment, throw herself into the snow and press her face against the warm

bitter smell of Guillaume's pillow. Later he would come in, smoke-filled locks of hair rustling against her face, smelling the ginger of her closed eyes and waking her to finish, finish the silly argument.

His hands were so big the world fit in them, and yet, like sand, she filtered through, returned to the sea. She and Guillaume parted the day Wang closed down the café. The *enfant* was getting big now, too much for the old woman to handle by herself, and Wang was getting tired of the rock throwing. *You see, they hate us,* Wang said, waving his arm at the grey buildings, at the snow in their windows. *Us.* Tears sprang from her eyes as if she had suddenly stepped out of a palanquin to become a stone, hurling her way through his blue window to shatter into sand, the people they no longer were.

Paal-Helge Haugen

three poems translated from the Norwegian by Roger Greenwald

(Memo for the buried)

Not to be carried off
when the mole-men get familiar
and call you brother, invite you
down long shit-brown hallways
and offer all kinds of free passes.

Not to trade away your compass
and plumb-line, or drink groundwater
and swim downward.

Not to join up
with the black divers—there are
tentacles in your field of view, they're waving:
Come here, good night, always.
Here few rules apply, none
are in the book.
Later someone whispers
that it's possible to find
one milligram of light on the left,
just over your shoulder.
The intelligence reports are unreliable.
Maybe I should put out a spy.

(Off, on)

Everything you can't turn off:

A face that rivets itself into the night
The body bolted fast to the frost, the ice
Fossilized love, the burned-out lots
that can't be rebuilt
The sound of wind through broken glass
Timers ticking toward zero
in radiation-proof bunkers
A full-scale model of death, 1:1

Everything you'd love to turn off
you and your flagging heart

(Clearing up)

after so many years
this evening opens up:
a shaft downward and
leading back, the light flooding in
where we didn't believe
it could go

trees move slowly, the evening
rippled by a wind of time
that carries off the weathered remnants
of hatred, confusion
slag, fragments of words with jagged
edges, blindfolds, the sound of
doors that keep slamming

what remains is the outlines—
of precise caresses and wide-open
mornings, lit up from below
and with our backs to the darkness, a strong
resolve to understand
what must be understood
the wind moves off, it's clearing up

I touch you
with a slight hand

Jay Schneiders

What Passes for Gesture Between Us

for Naomi Nigro

As I turn left at some light, heading home,
it strikes me suddenly
the place of it
that you travel at this moment toward Akita,
that your eyes see
what eyes see from trains that could not be here.

I feel your absence in the city almost as if I had
all the pieces of my body in my body except one.
As if the relations between things had shifted:

> the Botanic Gardens in relation to your yard;
> the distance around the park,
> its relation to the distance from your front door.

At first, I wished I was Chinese:
quieter, subtler,
more shadow than colour,
easier for you in smaller ways.

Language on its own emerged late:
fingertip to scapula, curve and turn.
Declensions of flesh.
Endings.

It's like writing in characters, you said softly.
I was circling your spine with fingerings from Brahms:
Schnabel's old cadenza,
some other things.

Now, tenses shift.
I hear the whisper of your white wool socks across
the hardwood floor, their whispering

> *The rug is gone, Jay,*
> *the echo already here.*

I recall how easily your feet with mine
took a crescent turn.
How you would walk away from me
to cross a room.
That you preferred my tongue
fluttering the *Cantos.*

Now I smile. I am silent
like the Japanese who has not met you yet,
who dares not dream you in his dream,
who walks
who hears crickets
who waits for autumn with its cool attention
to detail in all branches,
who listens for the direction of your footfall in silence,
who knows

> something is blossoming here.

A La Playa

Kelley Aitken

You picture this from a bird's-eye view. A pair of heads, two sets of shoulders, his more deeply tanned than yours. The artist in you, storing the image for further use, notes—true to the conventions of Egyptian tomb painting—he/dark, she/light. Four arms like noodles out over the fat shiny tire, bobbing on an immensity of sparkling, swelling green. Beneath the surface, shadowy wiggles, four legs like tentacles drooping from the big black octopus head.

Toes touching his and then sand, drifting toward beach, toward rocks, one foot glancing off—oooo-what-is-it—something weird and woolly. Snaps you back into the tube and out of your airborne vision, dumps your consciousness into the immediate. He grunts, you produce a little shriek.

In a few minutes the two of you haul it up the beach, an old net in the shape of a body. You'll pull out the coral snagged in the folds, the shells and jagged cups of barnacle, chewed-up cork, hooks, and here or there a knotted mass of line, all of it complicated and compacted into this thing that weighs as much or more than a drowned sailor and the excitement and mystery of it fades when it proves to be nothing more than a drowned net.

After the dip you rinse off in brackish water from the showerhead attached to your host's house. The water gouts and sputters and then leers out of a plastic clown face screwed to mouldy cement. Some days you soap up but the ungainly squat and your hand shovelling at the crotch of your suit, the fact that everybody smells the same, of sweat and tanning lotion and bug cream and beer, and sometimes just the weird red grin leering at you from the shower nozzle, makes you hold back from being too scrupulous in your ablutions. Instead you let the water decide, running down over your head and shoulders. You snap the sleek black tank suit away from your cleavage, once, twice. You can't really be bothered getting cleaner than this.

The man loves you but you won't fuck. He won't try and you won't invite. You'll share a bed and snuggle a bit, until with a sigh you say, "Too hot," and push him away. But you're at the beach, so you think about sex a lot, it's accumulating in layers like the creams and lotions on your skin,

like the slightly greasy feel of sea air, another epidermis, laid on and glued down by wind.

You find the toucan head on the first day, walking alone towards Tonchigue, the fishing village a mile south of where you stay. It's strange, a red and yellow and green hook of a thing, hanging just out of reach on a dried stalk, reed-like, part of a parched bush backed up against a cliff. You throw pebbles and shells at it before you know what it is, trying to shake it loose from its perch. Finally you go in search of a stick and flip what you now recognize as a beak over your head. You wonder where the bird died, not here, higher probably; and this, the part the vultures didn't want, was dropped and where it snagged and stuck the only things to find it were the ants that have picked it almost clean. The lower beak hangs slack, bleached, still attached but tenuously, by black cords of sinew or skin. The skull is perfect, smooth on top and at the sides. Only underneath are there scraps of leathery flesh. One round dried marble of an eyeball clicks against the beak. It stinks. You carry it back to the house, wondering what invisible form of lice might now be travelling from dead bird to live woman, setting up shop on sunburnt skin, crawling through the forest of fine blond hairs on a forearm. You perch the skull on the sharpened cane fence of your host's house. It presides over the visit, a bird-god. Sightless, silent, beaky.

Later that night you are at the beach-side bar run by the balding Italian with the lisp whose body is firm and muscular, whose balls bulge in a skimpy thong underneath his designer T-shirt. He rescues his pet spider monkey from a clutch of taunting squealing children on the balcony. The monkey is squealing too. The Italian brings it on its string leash to where you are half-seated, half-splayed out, an awkward position dictated by the mad mechanics of the wooden deck chair into which you melted after too much lobster and too many beers. He introduces the monkey to your lap as if the two might be made for each other, at least the monkey thinks so, and the man, as an afterthought, looks at your face and queries, *"Te molesta?"*

You have never had a monkey in your lap before and you are wondering what kind of lice or fleas or ticks or chiggers are housed in its short sleek fur or alternatively what kind of disease you will contract if it bites you, what about that AIDS theory, the thoughts spin and shuck and drop in your mind like tumblers on Lottario day and you decide, never mind, death by tropical infection or infestation, and you say, *"No, no me moleste,"* because the feel of the monkey in your lap and its delicate fingers on your arm and its dear bleached scalp are worth the thousand terrors that have somersaulted through your consciousness in the last ten seconds. It's like a baby. You want a baby. But on a balmy night beside the ocean, just north of the equator, on a night when no baby has yet appeared,

miraculous, in your womb, you discover that a spider monkey, temporarily, will do.

At the beach you hardly ever bathe. You dip in and out of salt water and salt air and accumulate layers. Of fish juice and the cold drips running down beer bottles onto your skirt, bug repellent, sun lotion, the squeeze of lemon over *cebiche,* the shrimp guts and squid ink that paint your palms and fingernails and arms and legs. You are becoming a biosphere and the ocean breeze circles you like a testimony, like a story of your new and ancient self.

You always feel like this on the beach, naked and yet not, solid and yet permeable. Usually horny as hell. Wet sand underfoot—you can't get enough walking—you want to walk the coastal length of this continent but you turn back before Tonchigue, you turn back at the pier, iced like a cake with frigates and vultures and pelicans, the memory of its attachment to land hanging still in the emptiness between it and the shore. Dozens of birds. The white throat sacks of the frigates, the yawn and stretch of an occasional pelican shaking its pouch for a snack, the preternatural brood of vultures hulking higher up on the abandoned shed at the end of the pier.

You hardly ever bathe at the beach because there's a metal trunk in the shower stall of the one bathroom and the toilet is lined in grime and salt rime and always smells like someone just took a dump. For the first few days you are not aware of the other bathroom, *en suite* to the master bedroom. You have already postulated that your host has adopted the habit of "doing a growler"—this is the language your friends use—in the ocean. You know most men in this country pee on bushes and hedges and fences and walls and tires or on nothing but the baked brown dirt out behind houses. By the time you discover that this other bathroom exists, with its relatively clean and private tub, you have resigned yourself to the salt and fish stink of your skin. The knowledge of this extra bathroom is a luxury item in the file of your brain. You categorize it under non-necessities.

One day it rains and you stand under it, letting it slick down your body. The man who loves you wants to help you wash. He hasn't seen your breasts in seven years or your bare ass in twelve. You were lovers once, that long ago, and for nostalgia or something less definable you shared a bed the last time you visited this strange and wonderful country, but he was still married and so you kept your panties on and now time has solidified the feelings between you but the motions are more difficult. He pours buckets of rain water over your head. You use shampoo. Your body feels babe-like and rubbery. You say to yourself that you're washing off years. The palm fronds drip all afternoon. The man who loves you makes lazy proposals of marriage that involve varying increments of

weight loss for him and waiting for you. All day long, he plans a fish chowder. You help him by looking in a stained and tattered cookbook whose back cover and several pages are missing. From "D" onwards the index is gone. You settle for *bouillabaisse.* Flies thicken the soupy air inside the house. Fish heads bubble on the stove. One eyeball floats to the surface, opaque as a cataract. You think of Innu children but can't bring yourself to snack on the proffered delicacy.

You force the man who loves you to "talk turkey" about his plans. You are relentless, insistent as a dentist's drill. He keeps reaching for *The Joy of Cooking* as a way of changing the subject, an ineffectual detour from the single track you're on, fish soup be damned. You alternate tough questions with your own assessment of his life so far. You cite examples of older expatriate drunks. "Don't end up like them," you say. His eyes are hurt behind the polaroid lenses of his glasses when he responds, "You think I haven't thought of it?"

The next day you're swinging lazy in the hammock in the red light of late afternoon. He stands over you and, with his thigh, stops you midsway. Leaning over the hammock, he says, "You're in danger of becoming a bitch," and pauses. Then, taking courage from your silence, he goes on, "Because you're so opinionated."

You resist the urge to fight back. He has a point. You could argue his choice of words but not his right to say this from out of the vulnerable part of him you exposed yesterday like a surgeon. You know you are like a drug to him and that he doesn't yet know how much he can take, neither the allowable dosage nor the frequency. He is at sea in you. He is a little boat tossed about on your waves and you are the great devouring saltwater womb. You don't mean to be but that's not the issue. Whatever you do keeps tossing him high in spray-filled air and flinging him down on a drum-hard beach. Bitch.

His body has aged outward, flesh hanging heavy on his medium build. His hair has developed that indeterminate colour exhibited by men in their fifties. He is regrowing the moustache he had for over twenty years that the Ecuadorean girlfriend convinced him to shave off. He is deeply tanned and weathered and uses his body well, which makes the girth of him bearable to you who are so vain about appearances. You tease him about his gut. His toes and ankles are those of a fisherman, gnarled and choked with varicose veins. A great scar like a sickle embraces him under his ribs, a chunk of liver gone, delivered finally onto an operating table after years of recurrent malaria made worse by drink.

He's done his share of drugs too. Cocaine for the most part. He's separated from the wife who has not stopped huddling over the smoking screen, who is enticed back *ad nauseam* to the sweet sickly stink of base and all that it fitfully promises. He thinks of you as the love of his life but

you know you've only earned the title by default. The part of you that isn't a bitch worries that you've pared him down too much, too close to the bone. But instead you say, "I was worried that I was just a symbol to you." This, after his prediction of your impending status as the kind of woman men avoid. He is stunned. Hurt.

"Symbol of what?"

You don't say it but you think it—the Light Princess. Sunshine, laughter. All that she isn't, now. Snow White or Cinderella compared to his wife, a burnt-out Dragon Queen. You remember just in time that everyone is human. Even you. He has treated you with gentle humour and affection all week. You wonder what it is about softness in a man that brings out the talons in you and at the same time this icy shield. You love him too, in a way that you can never admit, because the pity part of it may be for something in yourself. That after all these years, this is the marriage you are offered, the pairing, perhaps, that you deserve.

You acquiesce enough each night to kiss him good night before you turn to sleep on your side at the edge of the bed facing the door. Knowing that in your dreams, you'll veer towards the symbolic, wanting to be sure of an escape route. You poke him when he snores. He does with regularity. In the morning you ask if you snored too. "Gently," he says, "I could hardly hear it." He goes on, "It's sweet." And more, "Kinda sexy." You have to admit you love the way he loves you. No demands. You don't know if you could have sex with him anymore. A rhetorical question. It strikes you that it would be easy to marry him. That maybe sex leaves so many marriages because it's the volatile component, the need and heat. You can imagine yourself growing old with him, trading off more and more of the gender roles. He loves to cook and doesn't mind cleaning. You tell him he'll have to teach you how to take apart the engine of his Harley. You like this man. He is as calm as a rock, as rooted as a tree and only windblown where you're concerned. You love the way he treats you, moving around your perimeter with gentle wariness, with solid affection. When he takes you to the bus in Esmeraldas, the one that will take you away from him, he reaches for your hand as you cross the street.

Holding hands with him is the most comfortable place you've been in eight years. You do not tell him this. You board the bus after wriggling out of his sweaty grasp. You are going to miss him like mad.

You wash the beach off you as soon as you arrive back in the city. You stand for half an hour under hot water. You knead your scalp and suds your armpits, you scrub at the unrealized potential of him between your legs. You wash it all away, the need, the possibility, the kindness of him, the sweaty fish stink of sea. You rinse clear of the past and the future. Sand swirls in the tub and down the drain. You step out.

Margaret Gunning

What Happens in September

...all the acorns of my brain rioting
out of a little hole in the top of
a tree

I can hear them rumbling
(like Frost's apples) from long away—

Squirrels whiz in a double helix
around the black tree/each
tail-frisk

bright as a fizzing synapse

The smell of English walnuts
and an old old box made of dusky wood
just opened after fifty years in
the attic

Chestnuts on the ground like the
eyes of fractious horses

that gallop through

a seethe of

surf

I am six, scruffy-kneed, collecting
chestnuts to string or sell on the street

or Sixty, dimmed but simmering still,
hair gone to milkweed,

skin with the smell of dried apricots
and used aprons/still on the

wheel of Four, the wheeling and

reeling,

rocketing year.

Rita Signorelli-Pappas

White

When the Prince disappointed her
she found her way back
through the shadowy forest
to the cottage of the dwarves.

Only one remained after all those years.
He was lonely and tired,
his eyes heavy with the silence
of sleeping pines.

But his old devotion flared
when he saw her and
he prepared a sweet, rich soup
of plums, cinnamon, and wine.

And as they ate together
in the blue, windy twilight
she felt the sadness slide from her
like an avalanche of snow.

So she stayed the winter
watching death slowly slip
its mask over his face
like a forgotten message.

She felt the resonance
of oracles that wait
to swirl through the heart
with the passion of wild cranes

crying and diving
into low, dark clouds.
And she buried him
under the thick slumber

of cold, snowy pines
there in the glittering forest
where she had once known something like
contentment.

Contributors

Kelley Aitken is a writer, artist and illustrator. She lives in Toronto, travelling regularly to Ecuador. Her work appears in a number of Canadian journals.

Terrance Cox has recently had poems appear in *The Fiddlehead* and *The New Quarterly*. He has two manuscripts under consideration, a third in progress and a collaborative "spoken word set to music" recording entitled *Local Scores*, to be released in early 1996. He lives in St. Catharines, Ontario.

Stig Dagerman was born in Älvkarleby, Sweden in 1923. A prolific writer of novels, stories, essays and stage plays, his career was cut short by his death in 1954 at the age of 31. He is considered one of Sweden's most significant 20th century authors, and his work has been translated into seventeen languages and published in more than twenty countries.

Judy Daley is an artist working in mixed media and photography. In *Postcard*, elements of the near past—represented by the postcard dated 1905—and that of a distant one—embodied in the fish fossil—are combined to examine the traces left behind by two very different ancestors.

Elyse Gasco has just completed a collection of short stories with help from a Canada Council award. Her work has appeared in *The Little Magazine*, *Canadian Fiction Magazine* and *The Malahat Review*. She lives in Montreal.

Adam Ginter lives in Telkwa, BC and is currently attending the University of Victoria. Influences (lasting) at the time of writing the poem were Patrick Lane and Seamus Heaney. His family's oppression by heavy industry provided the incentive to write the poem.

Roger Greenwald won the CBC Radio/Saturday Night Literary Award for poetry in 1994. His first book, *Connecting Flight*, is distributed in Canada by Cannon, in the U.S. by The Distributors, and elsewhere by Baker & Taylor.

Margaret Gunning's work has appeared in PRISM *international*, *blue buffalo* and *New Morningside Papers*. She received an honourable mention for poetry and second prize for non-fiction in the Edmonton Journal Literary Awards. For the past four years, she has been a book reviewer for the *Saturday Review* section of the Vancouver Sun.

Steven Hartman has an MFA in Creative Writing from the American University and was a Fulbright Scholar in 1991-92. His newly completed translations of stories by Stig Dagerman have appeared in numerous literary journals. His translation of a volume of stories by Dagerman, as a work in progress, received an honourable mention for the 1993 Translation Centre Awards. He teaches literature and creative writing at Stockholm University in Sweden.

Paal-Helge Haugen, a leading Norwegian poet, has been translated into several languages. In English: *Stone Fences*, translated by William Mishler and Roger Greenwald (University of Missouri Press, 1986) and *Wintering with the Light*, translated by Roger Greenwald (Sun & Moon Press, forthcoming).

Sally Ito was born and raised in Alberta and received her BFA in Creative Writing from UBC and her MA in English at the University of Alberta. Her work has appeared in *Matrix*, *Grain* and *WestCoast Review*. She has recently published her first book of poetry, *Frogs in the Rain Barrel* (Nightwood Editions, 1995).

Mark Anthony Jarman likes Art Bergman's latest album, *What Fresh Hell Is This*. He has fiction forthcoming in *Hawaii Review*, *Northwest Review* and *Quarterly West*.

Sharon McCartney has recently had work appear in PRISM *international*, *Event* and *Grain*. She has an MFA from Iowa and a law degree from the University of Victoria.

Jay Schneiders lives in Denver, Colorado, where he is a psychologist and consultant to the American literary organization, Writer's Conferences and Festivals. His poetry has appeared in *Ariel*, *Queen's Quarterly*, *The Antigonish Review*, *The Fiddlehead* and the *Georgia Review*. He is at work on a collection of essays on the psychology of writing and the writing life.

Hillel Schwartz is a Senior Fellow at the Millennium Institute and an independent scholar; poetry is currently published in the *American Literary Review*, the *Beloit Poetry Journal* and the *Centennial Review*, and essays in *Brick* and *Aspenia*.

Rita Signorelli-Pappas lives in Princeton, New Jersey. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *College English*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Poet Lore* and *The Women's Review of Books*. She has completed two collections of poetry and is currently at work on a third.

Shannon Stewart is a Vancouver writer whose work has appeared in a number of Canadian journals. Her poetry has been included in *Breathing Fire*, an anthology of Canada's new poets.

Tad Troilo is an award-winning playwright whose plays include *Joseph and Joe*, recently staged at the Changing Scene Theatre in Denver, Colorado, and *Bricks*, a one-act produced along with *The Chronicle of Mary* at the Climax Theatre in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. *The Chronicle of Mary* was most recently staged at The University of Alabama. He lives in New Jersey.

Sarah Venart's poetry and prose have appeared in *The Antigonish Review*, *Blood and Aphorisms* and *Existere*. She has recently been accepted into the Graduate Program in English and Creative Writing at Concordia University. She currently lives in Vancouver.

Tom Wayman teaches at the Kootenay School of the Arts in Nelson, BC, although for Winter Term 1996 he will be the Presidential Writer-in-Residence at the University of Toronto. His most recent collection of poems is *The Astonishing Weight of the Dead* (Polestar Press, 1994).

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