PRISM international

54:2 / WINTER 2016

PRISM digital archive

PRISM international is proud to announce the launch of our digital archives!

With the generous support of the British Columbia Arts Council, we have digitized over 200 back issues, bringing 56 years of literary history online. Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, and Seamus Heaney are just a few names from PRISM's long legacy. Digitization of our archives is an important step in preserving and promoting influential literature, and we are excited to share our publication history with readers worldwide. The searchable archives are free for anyone to access, and can be reached through **https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/prism**.

If you are a former *PRISM* contributor, and you would like to have your work removed from the digital archive, please contact us at prose@prismmagazine.ca to opt out.

PRISM
digital archive

BRITISH COLUMBIA
ARTS COUNCIL
An agency of the Province of British Columbia

BRITISH
COLUMBIA

PRISM international

PROSE EDITOR	Christopher Evans
POETRY EDITOR	Dominique Bernier-Cormier
EXECUTIVE EDITORS	Jennifer Lori Claire Matthews
FACULTY ADVISOR	Timothy Taylor
FINANCIAL ADVISOR	Sierra Skye Gemma
DESIGNER	andrea bennett
COPY EDITOR	Rosemary Anderson

EDITORIAL BOARD

Max D'Ambrosio	Megan Barnet
Wendy Bone	Nicole Boyce
Alison Braid	Connie Braun
Melissa Bull	Sonal Champsee
Rhonda Collis	Robert Colman
Elaine Corden	Danielle Daniel
Bryce Doersam	Lesley Finn
Jill Goldberg	Esther Griffin
Tyler Hein	Sarah Higgins
Melissa Janae	Keri Korteling
Kirsten Madsen	Judith L. Major
Karen Palmer	Sarah Richards
Anjalika Samarasekara	Robert Shaw
Matt Snell	Rochelle Squires
Catherine Stewart	Tania Therien
Meg Todd	Carly Vandergriendt
Cara Violini	Matthew Walsh
Jane Wood	Catherine Young

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

Alison Braid	Maegan Cortens
Kelsey Savage	

PRISM international, a magazine of contemporary writing, is published four times a year by the Creative Writing Program at the University of British Columbia, Buchanan E-462, 1866 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z1. Specific back issues can be ordered from the Executive Editor, Circulation: circulation@prismmagazine.ca.

Website: prismmagazine.ca

Copyright © 2016 *PRISM international*. Content copyrights remain with authors. Cover image © Søren Solkær, "Don John."

Subscription Rates: One-year individual Canadian $35, American $40, International $45; two-year individual Canadian $55, American $63, International $69; library and institutional one-year $46; two-year $72. Single issue by mail is $13. US and international subscribers, please pay in US dollars. Please note that US postal money orders are not accepted. Make cheques payable to *PRISM international*. All prices include GST and shipping and handling. *PRISM* occasionally exchanges subscriber lists with other literary magazines; please contact us if you wish to be excluded from such exchanges.

Submission Guidelines: *PRISM international* purchases First North American Serial Rights at $40 per page for poetry and $30 per page for prose. Contributors receive two copies of the issue in which their work appears. Submissions are accepted online or by mail. Electronic submissions are preferred. All submissions must adhere to our submission guidelines, which can be found at prismmagazine.ca/submit, or can be requested by mail at the address above.

Advertising: For details on how to place an advertisement in *PRISM*, please visit our website at prismmagazine.ca/advertise.

Our gratitude to Dean Gage Averill and the Dean of Arts Office at the University of British Columbia. We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the UBC Creative Writing Program, the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

January 2016. ISSN 0032.8790

a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

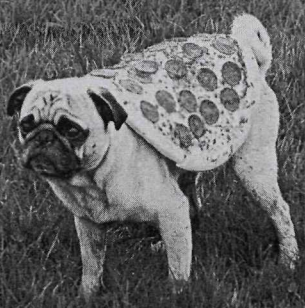
CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM

BRITISH COLUMBIA ARTS COUNCIL
We acknowledge the support of the Province of British Columbia through the British Columbia Arts Council

Canada Council for the Arts | Conseil des Arts du Canada

PRISM CONTESTS

FICTION & POETRY



DEADLINES

FICTION: JAN. 15, 2016
POETRY: JAN. 15, 2016

JUDGES

FICTION: Lee Maracle
POETRY: Kayla Czaga

DETAILS

ENTRY FEE: $35 CDN

1st prize: $1,500 + publication
1st runner-up $600
+ publication considered
2nd runner-up $400
+ publication considered

Entrants receive a one-year subscription to *PRISM*. Visit our website for contest entry guidelines:

PRISMMAGAZINE.CA

CONTENTS

FICTION

Sharon Bala	9	Reading Week
rob mclennan	25	The city is uneven
Craig Takeuchi	41	Guest Room
Alex Pugsley	45	Karin Finally
Annie Reid	66	Glorious Kingdom
Ben Merriman	73	Stories in Abstract
Lucy Bashford	79	Doorbell
Barry Dempster	85	Untitled

NON-FICTION

Elizabeth Horneber	30	In Considering Henry Kissinger

POETRY

Kim Fu	6	La Traviata
	8	Dissection
Amanda Paananen	22	It's the Chicken Parable
	23	I Am Bluebeard's Wife
	24	The Colour of Ash
Mallory Imler Powell	28	Again, I Insist I Don't Want Ashes
John F. Buckley	29	Open Your Other Heart to Me
Joseph Kidney	38	Poppy
	39	Solvitur Ambulando
Elizabeth Morton	43	Phone
Robert Nazarene	44	Wishbone
Pamela Langevin	62	The Oracle
	64	Fallow
	65	Head Full of Pink Glass
Donovan McAbee	71	Anecdotal Evidence for the Existence of God
	72	Anecdotal Evidence against the Existence of God
Jami Macarty	76	Epilogue
	77	Extremity
Matt Rader	82	When For a Time I Loved Two Women
	84	Captain Ahab and the Great Shroud of the Sea

Contributors 89

Kim Fu

LA TRAVIATA

Backlit panorama of blue sky and tree tops
on the ceiling above the MRI machine.
"La Traviata" comes through faintly,
headphones wrapped in woven tissue paper—
the same sanitized fabric as the gown and pillowcase.
The tenor sings *Libiamo! Libiamo!*
Let us drink! Let us drink!
A shadow voice to the skull-rattling kachunk-thunk,
the *Do not stare into the laser* sticky label
two inches from the eye. Sung from a booming belly
yet uncertain, elevator muzak played soft
and low as a hallucination.

I think of you, who died.
That comes first, with its own operatic rhythm,
easy to rhyme: you died. You did other things—
you lay patiently inside machines,
resisted staring into the laser, shivered thin.
You drew their innards, builder and designer,
as they later drew yours, exposed your faulty wiring,
your speckled organs and blackened brain.
You did other things, but then you died.

Grief rises from the unstirred deep,
not as it used to, not like a man-shaped monster
dripping with bog weeds. As a vision:
I am the technician behind the glass.
You are alone as you will always be alone.

I turn up the music. I have that power,
to make it swell in the chorus:
In questo paradise ne scorpa
il nuovo di.
Let the new day find us
in this paradise.

I can make the sky spread over the tiles,
fluff the picture-frozen clouds
until they travel on the wind.
I can make the thin fluorescent filaments
into a near and beloved star.
I can make the treetops rustle, send flocks
of bird silhouettes across the burning blue.

I am a limited god. I can turn hospital linens
to field grass and wildflowers,
I can bring your body to rest
in any heaven I desire.
I cannot bring you back.

DISSECTION

Cut into a lobster, a crow, a mouse,
an ape, your mother.
See the economy of space inside the body:
a shared rented room in the city.
Fat crowds against the walls,
shoots heroin into its blubbery sac.
Coils of intestine unwind on the futon,
motel maids squeezing shit
through caterpillar rooms of clogged drains,
ruined sheets thin as tissue paper.
Organs sleep tangled in hammocks
like tree-fulls of mutant bulbous fruit.
They wake up late for sweatshop jobs
with hair in their mouths.

This is all we are. The grade school maps
have neat highways, systems separate,
one machine function and then the next.
How shocking to see skin split
like dandelions through concrete,
to see how everything is jammed
together with no air between,
no hollows and tubes,
just meat and compression like a sink
against a bed against a door.

Sharon Bala

READING WEEK

A room. Seventeen by seventeen. Opposite sides like inverse images. Something like that. Outside: a knock. Soft. Uncertain. Inside: guitars, bass, drums. Late-90s alterna-rock. Angry. Angst-ridden.

Girl at a desk. Hair, ponytailed. Or turbaned in damp towel. Doesn't matter. Plaid flannels. T-shirt, possibly frayed. Abbotsford High. Bare feet. No. Slippers. Once plush, now worn. Pencil. Tap, tap, tap against textbook. Bits of twisted rubber, eraser crumbs everywhere. Goosenecked lamp.

Another knock. Louder. Nine steps to the door. Distracted. Product Rule $(fg)' = f'g + fg'$. Pencil clamped in mouth. Teeth bared. Door swings inward.

Now, everything in slow motion.

At first Jo doesn't recognize him. His flecked, green eyes, the turning down at the mouth, the scar under his left ear. Who is this guy standing expectantly in the doorway of her room? She takes her pencil out of her mouth, ready to ask. But then the stranger sinks his fingers into his hair and it is Jeremy.

All these years he's remained frozen in her imagination: sixteen, a child on the cliff's edge of adulthood. Two years ago, she had vaulted past him.

Grocery store cake. Carrot, her least favourite. Seventeen candles. Pink wax dripping. Cream cheese frosting. Inside of eyelids: orange and black. Make a wish. Exhale. Hard. Now, here it is: her wish come true. Seventh time. Charm. Etc.

"Hi." They speak in unison, two sides of the same voice—male and female.

All the things she wants to say occur to her at once: What are you doing here/Where have you been/Are you okay/Do you have any idea.

"How's it going?" This. This was what she has chosen to say.

"Can I come in?"

How long has she been standing here, mouth like a guppy? "Uh yeah. Sorry. Of course. Sure." She steps aside and then her brother is in her room.

More things Jo wants to say: Oh my God/Do Mom and Dad know/ Stay.

"Cool room. Nice tree."

"That belongs to Alice." Jo steps around the stump and waves her hand around the far side of the room. "This is my half." She presses a button. Radio silence.

"I like them too." He points to her CD player with his chin.

The conversation is too normal. Jo wants to dial back three beats. "How did you find me?" Finally, a real question.

"I saw you. On Princess Street."

"You live here?"

"No. I'm going to Montreal. A guy in a pick-up dropped me off."

"And then you saw me."

"I wasn't sure. Not right away."

Jo tries to work it out. She had gone to the A&P for Kraft Dinner and Jeremy had followed her home. "But I've been here since seven."

He doesn't respond and she doesn't really notice. Because she is staring at him, trying to see her brother. His hand hangs limp by his side and he looks like a stranger again. She can't comprehend what he has said. It is too much to do all at once. "Wait. How did you get in here? You need a card..."

"I walked in after someone."

"We're not supposed to...nevermind. What's in Montreal?"

Jeremy lifts his shoulders to his ears. "Dunno. What's in Kingston?"

"I'm in Kingston."

He smiles and the stranger looks like Jeremy again. A taller, leaner version of. And hungry. It occurs to Jo that she should hug him. She holds her arms out and when he sees what she is doing, he does it too. The mechanics are awkward and quick, and somehow they have their arms around each other and she is patting his back. She comes up to his shoulder now and he smells like sweat and stale coffee. The inside of a stranger's pick-up. Not bad, all things considered. But this is not how she remembers. And it is not how she imagined.

They have left the door open and Alice walks in as they come apart.

"Hi!" Alice has blond hair. Dreadlocks.

"This is Jeremy," Jo says.

"Hey," Jeremy says. He does not try to shake her hand.

"Hey," Alice says back.

Jo has never had a guy in the room before. She sees how it must look. "Jeremy's family. Is it okay if he stays the night?"

Alice bends one knee and fiddles with the thin strap of a heel behind her back. "A cousin?"

Jo does not look at Jeremy. "Something like that."

They make up a bed on the floor with spare blankets and sleeping

bags. Alice hauls the communal vacuum from down the hall to suck up the wood chips.

"I missed you, Joannie," Jeremy says, when they are alone.

"It's Jo. I'm Jo now."

Jo is an only child. Jo does not wear glasses. Jo has a fake ID that says she was born in 1977. Jo is not a girl you needed to feel sorry for.

Joan is ten. Jeremy is sixteen. There is a note. Two sentences. *I've gone. Don't try to find me.* The Centre called her parents and her parents called the police. There was a search. The local news media came out. Every night on the TV, her parents crying. *We love you, son. Come home. If anyone has any information...*

Patience is a well with a shallow bottom. From up above, it looks deceptive. Go ahead—fall in. You won't drown. People lost interest; they became unkind. Jeremy wasn't kidnapped. He'd gone willingly. What kind of parents were they, anyway? To harbour a drug addict (this was a nice community). To shove him into rehab. To not get him in fast enough. What kind of parents.

Jo wakes up and it is Sunday. Her bed is by the window. A gust of wind rattles the pane. It sounds cold. Victoria Hall is a time warp circa 1968. The carpet is a pukey pink colour like Pepto-Bismol. You must use blue tack on the walls; the posters are always falling down. Sometimes on top of you so that you wake up staring into Liam Howlett's tortured face emerging out of liquid metal.

She hears doors down the hall. Groggy *good mornings*. Slowly the present comes into focus. Jeremy is here. She sits up. A thrill. Christmas morning. In the middle of the room an open space. Bedding in a neat pile. A shard of notebook paper on top. She doesn't want to look. Jo knows what it will say. *I've gone. Don't try to find me.* She closes her eyes. Counts to five. Slowly, slowly. Leans toward the note. On the other side of the room, Alice is a lump under a flowered blanket. Jo stares at the wall, turns her eyes only at the last possible second. What the note says: *Gone to church. Back soon.*

Before Jeremy left, Joan's parents had done things: walked for breast cancer, voted for (more book mobiles) and against (grade five sex-ed) things at PTA meetings, insisted on family dinners. After, they found excuses to skivvy off work. Sometimes on her way to the portables for calculus, she would see them loitering across the street, watching the stoners play with lighters on the edge of the soccer field. (Looking for what? Ghost of teenage son past?) Her brother had left but Joan was the

one who disappeared.

"Are you like religious or something?"

They are walking to the library. Alice has gone away for Reading Week. Home to Sudbury. Or Tremblant for skiing. It's not important. She has left her student card behind for Jeremy to use. Already, they've been to the dining hall in the building with the weird Gaelic name (What was it called? Ban Righ?) where Jo watched Jeremy put away more food than she thought it possible for a human to eat.

"I'm trying it out," Jeremy says. "Sometimes I go to the synagogue, too. Depends on what's around."

Jo tallies this up. Give up drugs. Take up God. Grant me the serenity.

Jeremy wears yesterday's shirt—sleeves folded up to the crooks of his elbows (no track marks, she'd surreptitiously checked)—and the same pair of blue jeans. More worn-out than worn-in, the thread at the knees near transparent, threatening to split. As kids, they had called these potatoes—the round holes that appeared on the knees of pants or the heels of socks. Mom would say: "Little spuds on my small fries" and Joan and Jeremy would laugh, and inevitably one or the other would demand french fries. It occurs to Jo now, and for the first time, that Jeremy had gone along with the game long after he must have outgrown it.

"So where's the shelter here?" Jo has never seen a homeless shelter. The hands held out from the sidewalk are uniformly young—highschoolers playing at poverty for beer and videogame money.

"The shelter?"

"Well, yeah. If you hadn't seen me, where would you have—"

"Do you want me to leave?" He asks without anger, his voice flat and inscrutable.

"No. God. No. Just curious. Just...making conversation."

At first, Jo had been worried that Jeremy looked too disheveled, too ratty, that he'd be recognized as an impostor and kicked out of the dining hall. But they had walked in together and Jeremy had slid Alice's student card through the electronic reader and smiled at the woman in the hairnet who watched to make sure bagels didn't get smuggled out. Like this was his morning routine. And Jo saw that her brother had confidence, that he knew how to blend in. Mom and Dad never stood a chance.

"This is kinda like my church," Jo says, when they arrive at the library. Stauffer is what a cathedral would look like if it was built in the 90s. From the outside it is fascist, spiky and forbidding. But, through the huge, heavy doors, it soars, full of light. Clean, straight lines. Lots of wood.

Inside, Jeremy drops his cover. He stares up at the vaulting ceiling,

the floors of books and reading rooms stacked on top of each other. He is open-mouthed. Jo has to take his hand and force Alice's card through the reader. It is the first time they have touched since the night before. His skin is rough. His wrist bone bobs like an Adam's apple. It is a wrist that belongs to someone else. Granny Edna at the end. She wants to give him a hug. And maybe tuck him into bed, kiss his forehead and read him a story. *What life have you lived?*

"This place is massive." Jeremy's head is back, crown straining behind neck. "How many square feet?"

"What do I look like, a guide book? I dunno. Big. Let's go upstairs."

She takes him to the undergraduate reading room. They decamp on the best seats in the house: two leather armchairs in front of the fireplace.

Jo gets cracking. The Krebs cycle. Okay.

Jeremy has brought his backpack (it is the same one he ran away with—a blue beat-up Jansport that looks as though it's shared his life) and his copy of Tolstoy. He'd taken it out the night before.

Tolstoy wrote children's stories?

Yeah. Wanna hear one?

She and Alice had fallen asleep to the sound of her brother's voice, and Jo had dreamed she was six.

Your cousin's cool. Here, take my stud card.

Now, Jeremy is a fidgety reader. After a while, he stands.

"Fireplace reading room," Jo reminds him. "Second floor."

He returns with books. Mill. Augustine. Hume. *Origin of Species. Communist Manifesto. Great Renaissance Painters.* Clamped down under his chin. After that, Jeremy sits still. For hours. Book after book. Covers snapping open, thunking shut. Onion skin turning.

Later, when the window has been black for hours and they finally pack up for the day, Jo says: "Leave the books. Someone will re-file them." Jeremy stacks them neatly in a tower and she watches. Out the corner of her eye. He sees her looking. She turns away.

Ghost of teenager past:

1. Honour Roll
2. Last voice to crack/first face to break out
3. Slayer of imaginary closet monsters
4. Addict, thief, liar

First, their parents had worried about Jeremy having no friends, then they worried about him having the wrong kind of friends. And then he was gone.

Why did he insist on being the odd man out? Always. After a while, he didn't even fit in with the stoners. Pot was a gateway only Jeremy blew through.

A week without classes. What it looks like: Campus quiet. Empty and anxious. Libraries. Common rooms. Dining halls. Writing. Cramming. Muttering. Maslow's Hierarchy (physiological/safety/love/esteem/self-actualization). J. Alfred Prufrock (objective dramatic monologue, correlative of melancholy, bathos). Cloud classification (cumulus, stratus, cirrus, nimbus). Atomic number of nitrogen (7). Everyone orbiting around their own nucleus.

Guys wear the same pair of wrinkled jeans day after day. Girls pull back their hair with their hands, not even bothering with brushes, tie it up and then tuck the ends under, into something that is a cross between a ponytail and a bun. Jo wakes up every morning and puts on an oversized navy blue hoodie. Jeremy wears one of two different-coloured versions of the same shirt. They often walk in a not-uncomfortable silence. Technically this is grammatically incorrect but it is also true. He is working out different ideas in his head. The things he has read being weighed and assessed. She knows this look.

Joan's university selection criteria:

1. far away
2. far away
3. far away
4. far away

Limestone buildings. Ivy. A guy on a rooftop picking out chords on his guitar. Dress code: cargo pants, GAP sweaters. Scarves: the more colours, the better. Perfect. She would live in a recruitment poster. She would be girl in V-neck cable-knit on stone step, textbook in lap.

After Jo moved away to school, her parents—suddenly, conveniently—remembered they had a daughter. Inquiries: classes, Alice, weekend plans, prospective boyfriends (Is there anyone special? Be careful. You know condoms are not always…Mom! Enough!). And exams! Always exams! As if they were a daily occurrence, as if ninety-nine point nine per cent of university wasn't about floating aimlessly with no real conception of how you were faring until after the final. Until after it was too late. Calls, emails; please, God, may no one tell them about ICQ (oh-oh). For the first time, Jo had felt the burden of being an only child.

There is no photo of Joan shaking Principal Harris' hand in a blue gown and stupid hat. Some woman on an online chat room claimed to have seen Jeremy in Seattle.

"Hey, where were you in June? Were you in Seattle?"

"Seattle? No. June, I was in Toronto."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah. May is pretty foggy but June I know for sure. Toronto."

It is Tuesday and they are walking to the other cafeteria. The one in Leonard Hall. Just for a change. Jeremy wears a thin jean jacket. Jo has given him a scarf and a pair of mitts. She doesn't have anything warmer that would fit. She wears something insubstantial too, an autumn-ish jacket. She wishes he would leave so she could wear her wool coat, but this is a passing thought, one that comes and goes so quickly, it leaves no time for guilt. Jo does not know when Jeremy plans to leave. Or what he is doing here. What she does know: when Alice returns on Sunday, Jeremy will have to go. And: he has been sober since he arrived.

On the first night, she had shoved her vodka to the back of her underwear drawer. Every time she is alone in the room, she takes a ruler to the bottle. Then unscrews the cap and sniffs.

The residence in Leonard Hall is men-only.

"Have you ever been upstairs?" Jeremy asks as they swipe their cards.

"Once. It smelled like Dad's spaghetti."

"What?"

"Dad's… the time he put cumin in the pasta?"

Jeremy's face blanks out. An unplugged TV. Someone else's brother. "Nevermind. It smells like a locker room upstairs."

The air in the dining hall is also ripe. Boiled cabbage. Fried liver. Sweet and sour pork. Jo looks around. All week, they have run into people she knows—floormates, lab partners, occasionally a teaching assistant. Jeremy introduces himself as her cousin. He does it with a straight face and Jo can't tell if he is pissed off or hurt or what. Part of her feels bad but another part of her doesn't want to care.

"The burgers here are good," Jo says. Actually, the food at both dining halls sucks. They should have taken a bus to west campus where the food is actually half-decent. Tomorrow. Will he still be here? She's afraid to ask. Afraid to spook him. She can't bear to think of him in a shelter. Jeremy is a ginger, freckles. He does not look like someone who would survive on the streets. And yet, he has.

"What happens next?" Jeremy asks.

They sit across from each other and pick up their forks. Every time they do this, Jo thinks of all the meals she ate facing an empty chair. Her parents at either end of the table. Or more often, absent.

"Next?"

"After this… after graduation."

He was her older brother. He was fifteen and she was nine and he knew twelve went into one-forty-four twelve times.

"Something in science, I think." The potatoes are tasteless. She looks for the salt shaker. "But not… I don't want to be a doctor."

"What's your major?"

"Bio for now but we'll see. I might switch to biochemistry."

"Biochemistry." He repeats the word and she tries to remember if biochemistry was part of her vocabulary at age sixteen.

She complains about her lab partner instead. "She doesn't trust me. We split up the work and then she does my half before I can even get started."

"Sounds like a pretty good set-up." Jokey.

"She doesn't even give me a chance! She wants to be a nurse."

Jo could just see her butting in during surgery, snatching the scalpel from the surgeon's gloved hand.

"Nurses are bitches."

Jo smiles. It takes her a moment to see he is not joking.

They walk along the lakefront. Jo shows Jeremy the outdoor sculpture—two rectangles rising out of the ground, tilted and leaning toward each other—and explains how they were built on a fault line.

"They're supposed to touch at the turn of the century."

Jeremy looks up. From some angles, from farther away, the two columns can look like they already connect. Lovers in mid-embrace. But from here, from close range, what is most evident is the gap. A peaked roof with a hole in the middle. An imperfect shelter.

"I think they miscalculated," he says.

He takes the incline at a run. Jo wants to yell for him to be careful. For a moment he's at the summit—right shoe on the edge of one rectangle, left shoe on the other. Poised. Suspended at the top, between two mountains. Behind, trees. Naked branches. His head becomes a moon eclipsing the sun. Backlit, his body is a shadow. Jo's hand forms a visor. She squints. Then he runs down the other side. Fast.

When he is most like Jeremy: first thing in the mornings, last thing at night. Reading aloud from Tolstoy. The steady cadence of his voice, a sleigh drawn by horses through a snowy Russian landscape.

When she watches him with others—librarians, people on her floor, and later, at the bus station ticket counter—then, he is a stranger.

Sometimes Jeremy takes off. Needs air. To be alone. Never very long. An hour. And a half, tops. On Thursday Jo puts on her wool coat. Pulls up the hood. Keeps her distance. He walks with his head down. Man on a mission. Years since she's watched him walk. All week she has only seen it side-on. Now she sees the place where the rubber soles of his shoes peel away. The stick-thinness of his legs. The hunch of his shoulders.

Earlier that day, she had come into the room with an empty laundry

basket to find him standing by her desk, holding a photo of Mom and Dad.

"How are they?"

"Broken." The word had left her mouth. It could not be taken back.

Jeremy slumped into himself. He put down the picture frame.

"I screwed up, Joannie."

"It's not too late. Why don't you—"

"No. I can't."

"You came here."

"I didn't plan that. It just happened."

Jo is a magnet. Jeremy was drawn. Against his will.

"They're better off without me," he had said.

Did he think that was noble? It was selfish. No one was better off.

University Avenue past the library. Three students come out. At the corner, a handful more. An impromptu crowd and for a step or two she loses track of which one is Jeremy. Another cold day. Jeremy's hands fist up. She knows without seeing. Halfway down Johnson Street: church bells. Jeremy walks a little faster. Jo stops. Up ahead is St. Mary's. People on the steps. Walking in. Grounding out butt ends. They look like Jeremy. And they don't. After that, there is no need to check for track marks.

Heroin is different. Is what Jeremy says. It's like nothing else. "When the smack was in me, I had no problems."

The problems of middle-class two-parent suburbia. Jo tries to think what these could be.

All the bad things, being high is the opposite. Anxiety, inadequacy, they're clustered up here. At the cold North Pole. And way over there, Antarctica, is being high. Nothing could be wrong in the world when Jeremy was high. *He* could do no wrong.

"It was like everything before was darkness and being high was the light."

And now? Was life black?

More like grey. "I'm learning to live with grey."

Jo still doesn't know what any of this has to do with Mom and Dad and why he won't call them. She has patiently waited. Since the first night. Now, it is Friday and time is running out.

Simultaneous: "What's with this tree stump?"/"Call them. They won't be mad or whatever."

Jeremy shakes his head, stares at the poster that hangs like a headboard over her bed.

On their walks through campus, Jo has only shown Jeremy the nicest parts. She wishes he had come in September, when everything looked scholastic and preppy instead of dismal and plaid. She has been hawking

an idea, a subtle suggestion. She does not think he is buying.

Jo gives up. "Alice whittles."

"Whittles?" The beginnings of a grin.

"With a pen knife. Swiss Army." Jo flicks a shaving of bark with her toe. "The shape has yet to reveal itself."

Laughter. Relief.

Sometimes they speak of the past. Before the drugs. Always before. The time he taught her to ride a bike. Holding the handlebar and seat. Then just the seat, by the very edge. Until she lost track of the moment he was holding on and the next when she rode free. A split second that moved from present into past unacknowledged.

When Jeremy ran away, out of her present and into her past. When? The exact time un-noted. How long before anyone realized? Her parents in meetings. Markers on flip charts. Until someone knocked on the door. *Excuse me. Urgent phone call.* Joan at the chalkboard. Conjugating irregular verbs. Until the vice principal walked in. *Bring your books with you.* A classroom of eyes on her back. Then and after. Always after. And now here is Jeremy. Catapulted out of her past and into her present. Three dimensional. A guy who both is and isn't her brother.

Her whole life. Every moment ever after. An exercise in re-creation. Taking up the pieces, working out how they fit. Liquor bottles topped up with water. The sharp chemical smell like concentrated detergent that made her head spin. The piggy bank. Smashed. Slamming doors. Red eyes. Long-sleeved shirts in summer. Report cards. Calls from the principal. Things she witnessed but only later understood.

Jeremy's old room is there still. A museum no one visits. She wants to tell him but holds back, waiting. A reckoning. On one side, her hurt. On the other, his. Make the two sides equal.

There is a schedule. Little boxes shaded in different colours. Taped, it hangs down from the shelf that juts out over Jo's desk. She does not worry about midterms. She works hard. Of course, there is hard work. But there is also a formula. Scantron. Due dates. These are things over which she has control.

Evenings are for revision. Jo and Jeremy sit in her room and he reads quietly or drills her. A tape is in the machine. Volume on low. Portishead on one side. Tricky on the other. The music is languid and lazy. Like floating underwater. Like drowning. Like dying.

In Jo's textbook there are diagrams of viruses. Each one is a funeral wreath made of different kinds of flowers. She closes the book, stares at the ceiling above her bed and tries to recall the genomic structure of HIV. A

retrovirus. Genus lentivirus. Measured in nanometres. The size of a speck.

"Why not medicine?" Jeremy asks.

"Too much school," Jo says. Two strands of RNA at the centre. Protein shell like a pearl necklace. "Too much expensive school."

"Dr. Joannie Halsham. I like the sound of that."

Average latency: ten years. A squatter taking up residence, settling in for the long haul. HIV is small and cunning. It knows how to hide.

"There are easier ways to be a doctor."

Jo has thought about graduate school. But not in any serious way. She is eighteen and time is still a luxury.

Jeremy sits on Alice's bed. Cross-legged, bodhisattva-like. Jo's psychology text is in his lap. He has quizzed her on Piaget (*Four stages of childhood development. Go!*) but now she's moved on to biology.

Sometimes, Jo can fool herself into thinking. Sometimes, she can look at Jeremy and think: If my brother had never been an addict, this is how he would be.

"You'd be a great doctor." Jeremy scratches his chin and turns a page. "You have the people smarts. Bedside manner."

"Yeah, you're the expert, right?" The words that tumble out are those of a younger sister teasing an older brother. Normal people. But after she has spoken and it cannot be taken back and Jeremy has not lobbed back a joke of his own, she remembers. That she does not know. Anything about him.

Jeremy leaves on Sunday. Overnight it snows but only very lightly, and in the morning the temperature spikes and everything is dripping and melty. At the bus station, Jeremy skirts the puddles without looking. Jo is glad about the twenties. An envelope shoved to the bottom of his bag. No time for a note, and anyway, what would she write?

The bus hasn't arrived yet and they stand awkwardly by the folding plastic chairs. One week ago he had gone to church and left her a note. This. This is the moment when present becomes past.

Alice is due back in the afternoon. Jeremy used her card for the last time at breakfast, and afterward, they'd snuck out bagels and fruit and a couple pieces of cutlery for the road. Jo told him about how when it snowed students would steal trays and use them to go sliding down the hill beside the dining hall. At the exit, Jeremy and the woman in the hairnet had exchanged good mornings. Old friends now.

"I'll be here in the summer," Jo says now at the bus station. "I got a job. There's an ice cream parlour downtown..."

Already there's a fantasy—she's scooping Rocky Road, hand cramped up and her brother saunters in, cool as you like. Jo feels furious. Angry at

herself for indulging in this daydream and angry at him because he will not come.

"It's nice here," Jeremy says. "I'm glad you're a part of it." He nods his head and glances around, as if they are standing on the green in front of Theological Hall instead of the sticky floor at the bus station. He reminds Jo of their father, of something he would say and the exact way he would say it. Her anger turns a little to the left and then it is regret.

She wants to pummel and shake him. *Take a class. Why not? Don't leave.*

He does not say: Sorry for interrupting your cramming, or, Thanks for putting me up. There are unsaid things between them but also no platitudes.

I'm glad we had this week, is what he says. "Now when I think of you, it'll be in context."

The bus is announced at the same moment it pulls up. Around them, people stand and heave up bags. It is not quite nine and the other passengers go through these motions with exaggerated exhaustion, as if they are Herculean efforts.

"You know where to find me. For the next three and a half years anyway." Jo will not see him again. Already, she knows this. "Just. Send a postcard or something."

They go outside. Jeremy has his ticket in his hand. It is white and perforated. This time the hug is just right. The way she remembers. The way she imagines. Jo holds her brother close and inhales the scent of her own soap, her Pears shampoo. He is thin and insubstantial. In Montreal, he will disappear. A speck in the crowd.

"Wait," she calls as he turns to leave. She peels off her sweatshirt and holds it out to him. She hasn't got a jacket and now the February air bites her bare arms. "It's cold in Montreal."

Jeremy holds it close for a second, hands crossed, knuckles turned in. Then he shrugs off his jean jacket and pulls it on over his head. The university's name is splashed across the front. The tail of the Q trails out like a ribbon. The sweatshirt has always been big on Jo, but on Jeremy, it is a perfect fit.

She does not ask why he is going to Montreal. Why not somewhere warmer. Instead she touches the lines around his eyes. "You need to wear sunscreen."

"It's February."

"At least SPF 15."

"Bye, sis."

He's trying to keep things light, to be silly. But Jo's feelings have seized her and now she wants to seize him too. *Don't go. Not yet.*

Everyone is on the bus. The luggage compartment underneath has closed and the driver is waiting.

Jeremy hands over his ticket for inspection. He is about to put a foot on the stair.

Jo grabs his arm. "You need to take the medication." She speaks quietly. Looks him steady in the eyes. Her heart beats hard. She did not know she would say this and now the words have taken them both by surprise. "Don't miss a dose. Not a single one. It's really important."

"I won't," Jeremy says. "I promise. I swear, Joannie. I promise."

She can't recall what she said next. If there was anything. If it was just a nod or a smile or a look or maybe another hug. She can only remember her heart like a fist jamming up her throat. He waved from the window and then the bus rolled away and then that was it.

Years later, when the memory of this week has grown so vague she must reconstruct the details, an old photograph will remind Jo that Jeremy was at camp the summer her training wheels came off. It was her dad who taught her how to ride a bike.

Amanda Paananen

IT'S THE CHICKEN PARABLE

The Renaissance undoes all this: gravitas,
dignity. Mother puts her finger to the wind
and returns into the sea. There was blue grass,
bread and circuses,

supermodel bones. I consumed them
because I (am a thinking thing) pay the king's taxes,
while all the pretty faces scrape their tongues
along the ocean floor.

Begin here. In a vacuum-bottle, where the neck
narrows. Sealed between math and morals,
a message to the modern self: there's no one
left to crucify.

We could mention God, but words will calcify.
I've stepped on the shards with an intentional
blink. It's time to tear apart and shape a cell
the size of the Sun.

I AM BLUEBEARD'S WIFE

He left me for a mail-order bride with compliant skin.
There's no more myth than Marie Antoinette's breasts.

Other spiral organs funnel sound waves,
amplify Fibonacci. I'm innervated.
The cellar door is locked.

From the West, a deliberate echo, several
sisters gone. I keep a strict diet
and scratch my name on the wall.

Even how my hands are carved, I hold on.

THE COLOUR OF ASH

The French have seven words
for going down on a woman
but the dead won't talk,
not since Darwin.

My earliest memory: an eclipse,
sudden and unexpected.
I can't believe this is how I die,

with too much to be done.
I count the rings around the mirror,
curl my hair.
A nod to the man behind the curtain,

the rattle of his buckle so cliché.
I miss the days of drunk and hopeful.

They say the eyes go first.

I once knew a budding naturalist
who loved a medium
who choked on plasma.
Now he translates Sanskrit
full-time in Manhattan.

rob mclennan

THE CITY IS UNEVEN

Always in Alberta there is a fresh wind blowing.
—Nellie McClung, *The Stream Runs Fast*

1.

Soon this space will be too small.

This is what I am trying to tell you: I am attempting to make it out of the middle.

The middle of what?

2.

This conversation occurs in a repurposed church, as part of a literary festival. Her third such festival in the space of weeks. Perhaps this particular thread only occurs in her head.

They were here to discuss Alberta's first book in more than a decade. They declared: a triumph, a departure, a return.

Anglican-grey stone walls and tempered wood. Given the setting, she is conscious to refrain from cursing, and makes a joke of it during her reading. She recalls Christmas services from childhood, and the blessings of the water. Her mother's belief in what the blessings provide.

Alberta wonders: if this is a return, where had she been? The same desk in the same small room, scratching away. The penance of Sisyphus.

She squirms in her seat, attempting to not sound ridiculous. As part of the on-stage interview, she is asked about the intervening time since the publication of her previous novel. What were you doing?

The audience falls on a hush.

Alberta, startled. Writing, she says. I was writing.

They act as though she returns from the dead.

3.

Her home office, with south-facing window directly across from their neighbour's stained glass. Months of David Bowie's *Heroes* on repeat, lining walls and coating the bookshelves.

One sentence, compounding.

Her house constructed on former farmland. Prehistoric grasses force their way through the patio stone, and puncture the garden. The occasional outcrop of rabbit, or stone.

Their bungalow roughly seventy-five years old, constructed in what was once the outskirts of the capital. Now they may as well live in the centre. One street over, the houses are thirty years old, but most that surround hers are of similar vintage, if not slightly older.

The ghosts of dead livestock. A cornfield across the adjoining lot.

Despite the years, she occasionally forgets: a house purchased as a pair, now singularly owned.

4.

Mx. Her daughter claims the genderless prefix. She concurrently understands, and is baffled. She wishes to remain supportive, but finds the question confusing. How has her daughter changed? Or has the change always been?

One question leads to another, which only seems to antagonize. Alberta, who asks about plumbing, and is met with hostility. Once again, she's informed, you've completely missed the point.

When change is constant, it becomes fixed. Perhaps, she realizes, this is who her daughter was all along.

5.

Emerged. Alberta refuses the word. It presumes she had lapsed into some kind of pit, and perhaps she had. Spring forth, novel.

Fully formed, of course. At least that's what the newspaper profile suggests. A decade of resting on her laurels and sitting on her hands, as her novel sighed out of her.

Too old for this ongoing, restless rage. Everything her novel attempted to purge.

The book was published, and yet, remained in her belly. Until this tour completed, it would not disengage: they shared a bloodstream. She could not find her distance.

Granted, it took longer than it should have. She wrote and wrote and revised, abandoning far more than she'd written, running waist-deep through plots, purpose, and pondering. So much time reworking and so little accomplished.

Graeme, on his deathbed. Recalling her Mrs. Galloway: sometimes it takes a death to prompt the rest into living.

But he'd been dying for so long.

She might not be free until the first sentence of her next book.

6.

The latest review concludes: "This is a book of transitions, composed between point of origin and destination, neither of which are described or explained but through absence. [...] writing out what can only be determined through experience."

7.

Eden posits, re-posits. Mx. Hones a personal precision. A clarification. How does one explain to one such as their mother? The prefix so much less important than stem, but the wrong one throws off all meaning. Eden's mother focused entirely on the wrong things. As per usual.

There is so much that shouldn't need to be said.

This is Eden's articling year: a precision of self in ways beyond the billable hour. A recycled math that evaporates, but for the admission of so many more that will remain unpaid. The archivist, paid to research; the lawyer, not. Is all of this research?

From co-workers: how shall we address you? Emily, shifting to Eden. An interior monologue that requires stifling, while crafting bad jokes, including "Sir Mx-a-lot," or "Hits and Mrs." Such terrible puns. The kind that would cause Eden's mother to rankle; consider beneath them both. How she could contain such a love of language but a lack of appreciation for the pun. As Eden, in darker moments, has described the language of Alberta's novels: "All work, and no play."

Get me to the point on time.

8.

What did Alberta expect of writing? What does she, still? Over the years, her answer has changed. Accomplishment, attention, occasional accolade. Back to the beginning.

Alive only as long as one remains in print.

The ancient Chinese, who recorded no history because they saw the world as cyclical. Here, again. I am. *The Odyssey* and *The Wizard of Oz*: both books about home, and the pull to return. Adventures, be damned.

If all roads lead to Rome, so too, all roads lead away. Telescopic.

9.

"She was loathe to admit," Alberta writes, "but she dreaded the lake."

Mallory Imler Powell

AGAIN, I INSIST I DON'T WANT ASHES

Are you sure you don't want any
of his ashes? There's tons.

You could put them in a pretty box.
You could put them in a pill and take it.
-
The friend who might eat her placenta.
The mother who thinks eating one part of the animal
is different than eating another part of the animal
and doesn't want to be tricked.

You ate all of it for Christmas and didn't even know it:
sugar-free syrup, sugar-free cream.
-
Do you know what cardinals mean?
That there are souls or spirits around,

and there are always cardinals in the garden.
There always have been, I think.
-
I don't want to make it a shrine.
I don't even like the door shut.
-
I took the ashes already
and didn't tell anyone.
-
The law to inform death,
the distribution of wills.
They charge a fortune
to die, they make you do it
differently in different places.
-
I wanted to leave
but the moment was tender
and the wishbone
not yet broken.

John F. Buckley

OPEN YOUR OTHER HEART TO ME

Time to level up. Open the one you bought in Spain,
scented like marinated octopus and smoked paprika.
You called my pricked ears your favorite tapas,
wrapped a plateful in napkins to be nibbled on later.

Open the heart I saw in the hotel laundry, where we
played hide-and-seek in carts of stained Catalan cotton.
Though I caught just a glimpse, I became your pebble forever.

But each day since then, standard issue—wet sawdust,
soft onions. What we've achieved is an anthill of numbers,
twenty gross of days, a municipal security with
a constant drip of interest. What we don't feel are
leafless branches in a Valentine's topiary, a bullheaded Cupid
shorn of his arrows and stripped of his ring.

You crack the casing. I'll cover the exits. Let's open
the vault of siroccos, the portal to Hadron collisions,
the one with the whirling and hums. Let's open
the other hearts, firedarts, vanguards of nuclear summer.
Metropolis needs us. Open your other heart to me.

Elizabeth Horneber

IN CONSIDERING HENRY KISSINGER

AI WEI WEI

To be an artist in the People's Republic of China, one must consider the eyes that will watch, some grateful, some suspicious. Welcome the attention, desire it, but know the risk. Ai Wei Wei was once held for eighty-one days by the government without any official charges filed.

He is an architect, a photographer, a sculptor. He makes films and curates. He employs hundreds to assist him in his work—researching demographics, crafting thousands of porcelain sunflower seeds. It is not the physical act of creation that is dangerous. The government fears the mind and voice. Sometimes all Ai Wei Wei needs to do is release a picture, initiate a gesture or symbol. It catches and spreads across China and to distant places of the world.

First it was the middle finger, photographed at close range with the Eiffel Tower in the background, then the Mona Lisa in the back, then the Cultural Palace in Beijing. Then, this: a photo of him raising his leg and pointing his foot like a gun, his black-socked toes aimed, centered on an unseen target. He's in a pair of boxers and wearing a straw hat, but his eyes are focused, his lips puckered in concentration.

Was this yet another critique of government? A critique of control over media and expression? Though no one seemed sure, people around the world responded with their own poses, their own cocked legs, pointed feet, as though bullets could fly from such toes and the foot could be a kind of protection.

Some wondered if the gesture was meant to echo *The Red Detachment of Women*, a Chinese ballet that was one of the model operas the Communist party promoted during the Cultural Revolution, when other kinds of art were being purged and destroyed. This ballet spoke the communist message. It urged an emboldened unity of mankind—a loyalty not to the self, but to the masses.

Ai Wei Wei's pose resembles a position from that ballet. And in speaking of a man to whom art is always political, a way of being, this is not a stretch of the imagination—that feet curled in one context should be bent and curled again towards a new purpose, one self-conceived, self-contained.

BUTTERFLIES

They taste with their feet. This is their quest. They stomp on leaves and flowers to release juices, and their feet bathe and quiver in the sweetness.

COCA-COLA

In 1972, Richard Nixon "opened" China when he took the diplomatic initiative to visit. A few years later, the United States officially recognized China as a country it was willing to deal and trade with.

The first American product imported into China was Coca-Cola.

In 1994, Ai Wei Wei took a Han-period ceramic vase—perhaps real, perhaps forged—and on it he painted, in what appeared to be cracked and aged script, the red curling letters of the Coca-Cola brand.

DESCRIPTION OF MY FEET

I have toes that curl unbidden. You'd think I've restricted them with too-small shoes all my life. In reality, I am barefoot as often as possible, so that when I do wear shoes, I quickly develop blisters, and so there are permanent scars midway down the top of each foot, beneath my big toes.

I want the texture of the world against my feet. My feet are willing to own me, to wander unprotected, since ways of protecting can also, sometimes, damage.

ELIZABETH

My birth certificate says Elizabeth was born in Rochester, New York, to parents with a German name.

Other documentation exists, traces of my life.

I am pictured mid-jazz-square in a newspaper clipping after being profiled for my role in a musical.

I am in the school newspaper of my alma mater. The paper asks, Where Are They Now? And there's a picture of me in Hong Kong, with aviators and a hand on my hip. Teaching English in China, the school paper said.

They quote me as saying that every day in China is something new. I was thinking of the smells that would hit me outside my front door—tofu, discarded animal bones heating in sun-bathed trash bags, and somewhere, a flower I didn't know the name for in bloom and sweetening the humidity of southern Guangdong. I considered the people I'd pass on the street. Uniformed students singing for money into cheap microphones and portable speakers, apron-clad women with sharp voices bargaining at their food stands, sharp-suited businessmen.

What I meant was that every day you create yourself. Every day your old self is challenged. My skin is canvas. My muscle is clay.

FAMILY TREES

The French phrase *pied de gru* means "the foot of a crane" and is the derivative of the English word *pedigree* because of the way a crane foot branches and descends downward in various directions, like a starfish hanging from a stick, much as a sketch of a family tree. Crane feet tell us no one is alone. We are measured by our connections. We are connected by solid lines of flesh.

GENERAL AGREEMENT *OR* GOLDEN LOTUS

"Lotus Feet" is a term for bound feet, after the old Chinese tradition of breaking and binding women's feet to keep them small. The Golden Lotus was generally agreed to be the ideal length for a woman's foot—about three inches long. With such small feet, it was necessary for a woman to bend her knees slightly while walking and sway to achieve momentum and balance. It was this walk, this movement, this back and forth blowing about that made men's heads turn and their mouths water. This slow, uncertain movement was generally agreed to be erotic. The desire, then, was only partially for tiny feet. The desire was for a specific fragility, a body at the mercy of its foundations.

HALLUX VALGUS CORRECTION

The human foot has thirty-three joints. A hundred muscles and more. With twenty-six bones, it hosts one-quarter of the total bones in a body. When the bones of the foot are out of alignment, the body follows suit.

Yet some are willing to tamper. A podiatrist in California has renamed the hallux valgus correction with osteotomy and screw fixation the "Cinderella procedure." He found a significant number of women asking him for it, so he made the vocabulary easier. These women bring in designer shoes that are fashionable, but painful. He says the main idea of the Cinderella procedure is that women can put on a shoe that didn't fit comfortably before.

INJURIES

Ballet dancers' feet endure constant wear and stress. Corns become ulcers. Nails grow thick and the skin beneath them toughens. So the dancers pop painkillers, never sticking to one brand for too long so it doesn't lose its effectiveness. They take antibiotics and may consider a day of rest, but

never much longer, and their podiatrists are cautious not to advise any more rest at the risk of losing the patient, who will look for a doctor to support their cause.

When in a large company, none of the dancers want to admit to their injuries. None of them want to be seen as weak, as the one who might drag down the group. To achieve status in the hierarchy, they push themselves, especially the young ones who have something to prove.

Some dancers wrap their feet in tape or lamb's wool. They pack stuffing into their shoes. They bathe their feet in glue. They come at their feet armed with scissors and razors to carve them up for another day, and another.

JADED

Ai Wei Wei released a statement revealing the leg-gun pose as a protest against the power a state takes and abuses in the name of counter-terrorism. I don't think of this, though. This is what matters: that each person who mimicked the pose found a new way to change it and change the meaning, make it singular.

Until a new community formed, a new collective of those found among the images. A new, single form. Thousands of feet pointed, perhaps each at something different. But together, becoming something more. And perhaps there is power in numbers, but the implication, then, is that the individual is insufficient.

And the new form comes to be a thing one struggles to fit.

KISSINGER

Before Nixon ever visited the People's Republic of China, officially ending its separation from the United States during the week that he said "changed the world," National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger had been secretly visiting the Chinese, testing the waters. Could he have known just how many lives would change as a result? I would like to meet him, speak with him, explain myself to him, explain how my wandering took me to China, how confused I became, how much I started considering myself, that is, the self. How many ponderous walks I took, how vibrant the world became, out of the shelter of a familiar world. How like myself I became. How unlike myself. I would have shaken hands with the man. I settled with shaking hands with an eighteen-year-old Chinese student who chose "Kissinger" as his English name and was notorious for skipping class to smoke and drink milk at the school canteen.

LOTUS

Legends of the protection god Nezha are found in various forms in India, China, and Taiwan, and none are precisely the same. In Taiwan and China, he is known to be mischievous, one who gets into trouble but is staunchly loyal to his family. In one legend, he dies to save his family, the people who are him in a larger sense, the people who signify himself. He is later made new, resurrected from lotus. He is known by his feet, their wheels of wind and fire that allow him to fly, burning, anywhere he desires.

MAN

Xu Tienan had a weakness for shoes, and so had all kinds—knock-off Nikes, dress shoes, white Birkenstock sandals. I recall one day he slipped my shower shoes on and went sliding around the wet tile floor of my apartment. Maybe it was his shoes and how different they all were, that they seemed to gift him with different personalities, allowing him to move among different kinds of people—one of the first things I told him was that he was a social butterfly. He'd never heard this English phrase, so I explained that he talked to anyone, everyone. After that, I and the rest of his friends called him The Butterfly.

NEZHA

I have no wheels of fire, and yet Tienan gave me the Chinese name Nezha. I never completely understood why (Nezha was male), and yet I wished for his feet. I might have dismissed loyalty to my origins, my family tree, if only to stay in China forever, in the sight of Tienan.

"Nezha," Tienan once said to me, "It would be best if we went somewhere new, not America and not China. A place where we are both foreign. Then we can be together."

OPTIMISM

Ai Wei Wei once wrote that categorizing people by nationality is mere laziness, that a globalized society requires each person be judged as a single entity. This, he says, is truth. Being identified by a nation is an intellectual shortcut.

PORCELAIN

I find pictures from Ai Wei Wei's Sunflower Seeds exhibition at Tate Modern. One hundred million porcelain sunflower seeds. Each hand crafted, each hand-painted. A sea of them, stretched across the floor of

Turbine Hall. They beg to be tread upon, to click and whisper as they make way for the weight of disturbance. Each Made in China. I imagine the seeds that were lost in the creation, lost in transportation, that were lost in cracks or left behind at the end of the exhibition. They probably weren't noticed.

QU

The Chinese word meaning "to go." A leaving. A finding. Movement. Isn't this what feet are for?

Or the opposite. Grounding. Foundations.

RED DETACHMENT OF WOMEN

When Nixon came to visit China, Madame Mao took him to see a ballet. He asked her about its author and composer, and she brushed off his question, saying it was authored by the masses.

In reality, it was based on a film by Xin Jin. The film followed a novel grounded in history. But by the time the story became ballet, it was watered and nourished into pure propaganda.

The plot is simple. A housemaid named Wu Qionghua is abused by her master until she is rescued by the leader of the Red Detachment of Women, a troop of women soldiers. When the leader dies, she assumes leadership, and together the troop overthrows the masters and executes the warlords and liberates Qionghua's village.

Though the ballet seems to highlight power in women, state feminism bears little resemblance to true feminism. In fact, as the stronger communist ideas faded with the opening of borders to the West, the status of women in society became clear. They are most valued when married. They are still frequently expected to accept their husbands' mistresses. Still expected to stick close to home.

But the ballet was beautiful. The arched spines, the pointed toes. How lost every woman of that troop was, lost in the comfort of community, prepared to toast glasses of Coca-Cola to Nixon and the success of diplomacy.

SINO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

I loved Tienan, a Chinese man. Borders opened, crossed. A painful, beautiful dance. An erotic movement. He fucked up my alignment. I tattooed Coca-Cola across his skin. I asked where he'd come from. He said he was the creation of the masses. I made him my canvass, his muscles my clay.

TEETH

In China, though I ate everything from snails to dog, I couldn't bear to eat chicken feet. Because when I did, all I could feel was the rough and wrinkled skin against my tongue. All I could chew was rubber. All my teeth could gnaw on were joints and phalanges that moved and bent under the aggression of my teeth.

The Chinese never seem to have this problem. They eat feet so casually.

UNITY

Here's another thing I'd tell Kissinger. Uniting the East and the West leaves you directionless. But yes, and thank you, and Kissinger, no one would guess you're so fearless from your pictures.

VIBRATIONS

To elephants, hearing is a whole body effort, and elephant feet sense the vibrations from another's call from miles away. And this is important, because the social network is essential for an elephant's survival.

WALKING

South of China, in places that have clung longer to their roots, that are less prepared to change, babies are divine beings that have come down from heaven. In Bali, they are kept from the ground for days and days. Babies' feet cannot, must not touch the ground until the third, sometimes sixth month of their life. I imagine the moment when, finally, the child's feet touch the earth, the moment they cross over, the moment they resign themselves to this world, this baffling life, their imperfect bodies, their roughened, dirty, fragile feet.

XU TIENAN

For what would I destroy my feet? Survival? A man, perhaps. Love, a created thing.

We once went barefoot to the roof of the apartment building where I lived. There, twenty stories above the earth, surrounded by the factories of southern Guangdong, we could look to the East and West and we imagined we were somehow free of it.

But we weren't. He'd argue with his father in Chinese over the phone while I listened, imagining shapes emerging from the sounds of his language. The men argued over Tienan's education, his future career, his duty to his parents and his nation—what was all this talk of drawing things? Of harmonicas and guitars? Of travel? What, then, would he do?

Tienan sensed a humming, perhaps—vibrations under their words.

And I? I tasted the snails and dogs of his country as if I were tasting his skin. I wandered over its torn up sidewalks and pissed-in alleys as though I were treading through the Promised Land. I breathed his name, and butterflies made their home in my stomach, tasting acid with their feet.

Our strange new selves, our unfamiliar shapes that we pressed upon each other were just more shapes. This is merely the way of things. This is survival.

It was easier, then, to return to the old ways. Not force anything. Not break ourselves.

I discovered: feet will wander and wander, collecting everything they encounter along the way, till you're full, wondering what to make of it all. You become unaligned. Your shoes don't fit like they used to.

YAO

The first word I learned in Chinese. *Yao*, to want.

ZHANG

The word in English is bastinado, that is, the practice of beating someone's feet as punishment. In the Chinese army in old days, the number of thrashings was proportional to the seriousness of the crime. It was considered a gentle correction. After a beating, one was to kneel before the judge, bow three times to the earth, and thank him for the care he took in education.

They used a bamboo cane that was several feet long, with a lower part the size of a hand, and the upper part small and meant to be gripped.

And when a person was punished, they were thrown, face to the ground and bared feet pointed to the sky. The judge would distribute a number of canes, and a crowd of men would each take one. They'd each swing. Each would let their cane fall, one after the other against the feet. This, the loving speech of the masses. Bringing the wayward one back into the fold.

Joseph Kidney

POPPY

Too languid to sting, he had the more venom refluent in his blood.
—George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

The day that Opa died the cat learned English
but not the kind of understanding speech
impairs. He heard the snow depress the shingles

while his mouth confused pellets into crush.
Oma spoke; he listened to a voiding
river thaw and shrug its winter clutch

where they found the stale body of the boy
who was never quite right, but now less so.
And why, she asks herself, whenever I say

that Hilda's house is all alone now
do I see the sky as a plane and god as a dud
and the ear as a field and the siren a plough

when they battered Graz? The bombs fell like sleet
on the graveyard; the dead people came out.

SOLVITUR AMBULANDO

This place is rampant with legs.
Everyone in this city has legs
and they know how to use them.
—Caleb Harrison

Everywhere I go happens to be here:
the clearing, the crowd, the sewers
that hawk up whiffs of chrism, notched
in air and reeking throttle. I, forager,
scramble along, slouched, mistaking
apathy for confidence, the net
for work, the squirming bycatch
for the radiant point out of which
the shooting stars open fire.
In withdrawal,
dawdling in spasms of dabble, empty-
handed for the postal boxes
red and blushing, plugged
with disembodied greetings, I salute
the facts in black and white, as a pike
in the stream uncolours the guppies, for even
though hunger is a paint-by-number
there seems no way to switch
my stomach off vibrate.
Let it be an art
awful as eating. Let it be, like a word,
provisional. Let the clouds be given
shoulders to cry on, as they move
with their bundles of water.
I move, shedding
shade, my leashed shadow
yelps at fellow obscurities,
many and random, named *stochastic*
so to make audacities of odyssey
audible; undersigned and under signs:

eight sides to stopping, three to yielding,
either/or, they shine like ore refined,
impurities lost in the yield.
                Smelt them out,
desecrate alternatives, thresh and thresh
and see: on the pock-marked face of the apartment
block, AC units straddle the sills
                as if about
                to jump.

Craig Takeuchi

GUEST ROOM

This is our breakfast: blueberries, roasted almonds, cappuccinos, homemade orange juice, dark chocolate.

Hers: a hard-boiled egg, a glass of water.

She picks away the white eggshell to expose more whiteness underneath it.

"Sometimes I can't tell you two apart," she tells us. We nod. We know. If she chopped off her hair into bobs like ours, we'd be triplets. Her mother, our aunt, says the same thing.

She goes back to sleep, we head off to work, and we don't see her for another day.

Our breakfast: yogurt with granola and leftover blueberries, glasses of water.

Hers: a hard-boiled egg, a glass of water.

"Sometimes," she says, "my stomach is so full of hope, there's no room left for food." We nod. We agree. But we see where her gaze falls: upon our fingers, our spoons, our lips.

Against the thin morning light flooding through the window, with her white diaphanous nightgown draped over her slight frame, she looks goth. Her cheekbones rise so sharply, they look painful and enviable at the same time. This is her as we know her: stripped of makeup, hair, wardrobe, agents, auditions, photo shoots, runways. She's an alternate version of who we could be, had we chosen to pursue the spotlight of fashion, had we sought to trade in small-town life for the urban crush of the city.

We tiptoe as she goes back to finish sleeping her 14-hour marathon. We grab nuts and crackers and cram them into our mouths as we slip out the door. We marvel at how we have become thieves in our own home.

Hers and our breakfast: bread and jam, glasses of water.

In the early morning, there's a change in the town. We see the clouds part. We see people emerge from their homes, zombies hungry for the sun's rays. From our balcony, we watch the weekend hordes mindlessly marching towards Vitamin D. Their collective momentum, their gravitational pull, is too strong to resist, she says, and she ends her hibernation. She tells us it broke the spell cast upon her by the new moon. Of course we know it was more than that, but we feel it's not our place to argue with her at this

point.

We surrender ourselves to the masses: their movement drags us down narrow sidewalks, past café patios full of patrons plumped up in winter jackets and hats and scarves and sunglasses. We stroll down the streets, watching cars on an exodus out of town, to the hills, to the lake, to the forest. But we three head to the riverside. The crunch, crunch, crunch of the gravel beneath our boots makes us think of breakfast.

On a rock slab, we bask in the nutritious sunrays and listen to our stomachs gurgle along with the river.

Our breakfast: bread, glasses of water.

Hers: a glass of water.

Some habits are so hard to shake, she says. She says she has a photo shoot the day after she gets back to the city. We nod as we help her round up her things.

Then the sky cracks.

"I don't mind the rain," she says as we drive to the station, where she'll take a bus to the airport. "It gives me a feeling of release."

We take a booth at the café in the terminal. We have black tea; she has a bottle of water and a large silver suitcase packed with a week's worth of clothes she didn't wear.

She says she wishes she lived here, even though she's hardly seen anything of our town on this so-called vacation of hers. She says she resents the city. Too many people. Too many voices. Too much noise. Too much to block out.

"These last few years, I almost lost myself," she says as we walk with her across the parking lot to the rumbling bus. "I pushed myself so far down that sometimes I felt like no one could hear me."

But we tell her we did.

"We've been waiting for you," we say.

Elizabeth Morton

PHONE

She is sitting on a plastic stool
in a call centre in Bangladesh.
A paper cup holds
what is left of her heart.
She dials the numbers
with a chipped fingernail.
When nobody picks up the phone
she eats another Oreo biscuit
or drags on a menthol.
I am on the other side
of the universe. I grow yams
in a bucket, drive clay clods
into my carpet fibres.
I cultivate thistles and
hack them back on weekends,
watch the television only
for the weather forecast.
There is a cable line snaked
under the seabed. There
are satellites crawling down
the night's throat. There are
a billion copper wires tied
to our fat tongues. Hello.
I can smell the menthol
in her ponytail.

Robert Nazarene

WISHBONE

Emmylou waved from the top of a banana split.
I love her. She slid down and we sat together
Among the asters and lindens. I would buy
A million of her records if I could sell my crops
To a billionaire. We could get married, too.
If I could make this come true I'd turn Christian
Scientist or search the world over for James Earl
Ray and catch him for free. We'd have jet-lagged
Children and go grocery swiping at *Piggly-Wiggly*
And throw our EBT cards into the trash—or
At some poor people. Same thing. My dad
Would just yawn and look bored like he always
Did before he wasn't dead yet. In this world,
With money, anything goes. See? And I'd never
Ever ever have to come from Hell and back again.

Alex Pugsley

KARIN FINALLY

1

We were famous in the city, we were Halifamous, we were the punk band with the dazzling singer, and kids from all over—heavy metal sluggards, suburban preps, bluegrass hippie chicks—came to see the shows. What thrilled me about a Changelings gig was the *realization* of the event, the arrant circumstance, the doing of the thing. In the crash and splendor of our shows, we transcended the grubby circumstances of Grafton Street, creating moments which at once matched and expressed a restless, in-all-directions punk wonderment. There was a song on Karin's mixed tape, Kraftwerk's "We Are the Robots," but in the world of Halifax, *we* were the robots. We were the clash and jam and damned, we were the generation x—those were our stiff little fingers on the vibrators and sex pistols, that was Karin wearing the x-ray spex. For Karin Friday was a magical name in the city now. She was that girl you remembered forever and many were the nights you might linger solitary in a car to listen to the end of a radio song because it reminded you of her. She was the girl dancing on the first English Beat record, the comic book sweetheart of a Roy Lichtenstein print—she seemed a shooting star who streaked across the sky, fixed in no one's orbit, and figures several and diverse were drawn into her gravities. She was eighteen, no longer a stripling kid but a maturing adult female and probably fully aware of herself as gorgeous. Karin was luminous, make no doubt, she owned any room she walked into, if she wanted, and wild was she to hold, though she seemed tame. "And so it begins," said my older sister. "The Karin Friday Invitational." And Babba Zuber: "If you look like Karin, you can pretty much go out with whoever you want." This being Halifax, there were differences of interpretation. Mosey and Posey and the hard-core followers of Scum would have allowed that Karin was a dreamy vocalist but I'm sure they dismissed her as some dilettante tennis girl playing at anarchy. Howard Fudge, a hulking endomorph drug-dealer and my one-time mentor, famously did not care for Karin Friday. "That scooter chick," he said to Gail and me, on the afternoon I bought a dime bag from him. "The girl with the eyes? She's a little heart-breaker. No question. But she's too much." Gail asked what he meant—too much what? "Too much bullshit." "Bullshit comes in many forms, my friend," said Gail, quick to defend a pal and confidante. But Howard Fudge, whose fudge-headedness over time often proved relevant, may

have construed something, for I have not really detailed those instances when Karin *was* too much, when she seemed to force her giggles, when her girliness became presentational and semi-annoying, when phone calls were never returned or never referenced, when her impromptu remarks to the movie theatre screen felt disingenuous. Of course there were some young women, those who moved in different circles, who risked harsher opinions.

"I hate that perfect girl Karin," Amy Disher confided to me one night. "She would never be my friend. Even for a second. You can just tell." For some dissidents, the impulses that motivated Karin Friday's magic and charm were not so far away from caprice or even a kind of sociopathology. Later that afternoon, after the purchase of the dime bag, I made some mention of these discrepancies to Gail, musing on Karin's shape-shifting unpredictability, her flights and quirks, and made the mistake of using Karin's nicknames for me and for Gail herself. Walking along Summer Street, Gail abruptly stopped and chose to stare at the sidewalk. Every few months Gail had begun delivering once-and-for-all sidewalk judgments. These rulings were often introduced by a quick shake of her head, as if to first clear her eyes of delinquent hair, but Gail had been serving in the Naval Reserves for some weeks that summer, sporting what would be described as a three-quarter-inch brush cut, and so in this particular moment there were few curls to shake away. "All you guys are in love with Karin," she said, finally, mechanically, conclusively. "You and Cyrus and Jeremy and everybody. You say you aren't. But you are. And you always will be." She marched on—she wore a worn-out cameo choker, indigo vintage dress, and military boots, boots she clomped with authority along the cement sidewalk. "And the name is Gail. It's not Gorbals or Birdy or Boober. It's Gail. What are we—the island of misfit toys? No more baby talk! It's like you doing drugs all the time—when are you going to grow the fuck up?" I knew from last month's pronouncement that Gail had decided there was within our set of friends, nicknamed by us The Common Room, a troubling subtext of sexual repression—though, to be fair, a troubling subtext of sexual repression was Gail's assessment of any number of situations—and she thought our cutesy affinities an exercise in avoidance behaviour. "The Common Room is totally fucked up and incestuous," she said, speaking, as ever, as if the rest of us were failing to confront a crucial social truth. "There's some fucking weird telepathy between us, yeah, maybe, but I'm not sure I *like* it. Because it feels like some retarded exercise in group dating! And the Changelings? I don't know. Everything's always Cyrus, Cyrus, Cyrus. And I'll tell you something about that guy. He's never fucking satisfied. Cyrus Mair? He's

never fucking satisfied with anything. He has to be this little manic-depressive, hypersensitive type who goes off hibernating and having nervous breakdowns in his Never-Never Land, thinking everyone's going to feel sorry for him and all his precious ideas but excuse me they just aren't. Fuck it. He's an 'enigma.' Right. I get it. Whatever. But he works pretty fucking hard at it." Anyone who has been in a band will recognize these intervallic hissy fits and I knew, from previous exchanges, that it wouldn't matter what I now said—the mere mention of these names had made Gail fretful and reactionary—and, in these moods, Gail could not be argued out of her verdicts or position. "But you? You're obsessed with him. In fact, your compulsion-repulsion, thank you very much, is that you're in love with her and obsessed with him. So—here's an idea—why don't you get it over with, go fuck them both, and then talk to me?" Gail and I were phasing in and out of an undefined relationship at this time, in the same way Karin and Cyrus were phasing in and out of similar undefinables, and I will add, without whipping out too much detail, that Gail had disencumbered me of my virginity a few weeks before. Although that conjunction, very much an expedient, get-it-over-with affair, was organized by Gail in a spirit of gratuitous experimentation—she was purportedly mixed up with another boy she'd met the summer before at Camp Kadimah—I was beginning to understand that very little was gratuitous in modern life. Somebody or other ended up paying for it.

Jeremy Horvath and Cyrus Mair were two of the latest in a long line of Halifax Smart Boys. The city was rampant and replenishing with whiz kids, prodigies, and brainiacs. "There's a lot of bright kids in this town," remarked my mother. "Not all of them make it. Not all of them can handle being bright." I'm not sure if it's the isthmus mentality, or the presence of so many universities, but smarter and snootier young men you will not find for a thousand miles and I've often thought a fairly long essay might be in order to explain the sub-set of the Smart But Damaged Halifax Guy. Cyrus and Jeremy Horvath were two of the more fulfilled expressions but the traits and glistenings were manifest in many. I'm not talking about the amiable boy-next-door who rewires his phone to make a radio or who constructs a practical two-boy hovercraft out of balsa wood—that's Tom Waller. The Halifax Smart Boys, the talent of six high schools, were young men of finicky brains, highly imaginative, often socially stroppy or outright dysfunctional—and sometimes projecting such dysfunction into others, especially attractive contemporaneous girls. These fellows were needy and judgmental, derisive and awkward, sarcastic and generous and insecure—snobby, funny, rueful, aloof—and they existed in a space-time gamely managed by *Monty Python*, *Star*

Trek, Tolkien, Herbert, Gygax, Devo, *Gödel, Escher, Bach*. Gail called them the Cyrus Clones and roundly considered them too-clever-for-their-own-good, pretentious, controlling, obnoxious, sexually stifled, in a word—defective. And these were not all uniformly glabrous, smug geekinoids either. They were just as often rugged-and-comely types, long-lashed, well-formed and gifted, and in my high school years they were to a man as follows: Brian Bremner, Henry Fleming Dunham, Cat Glazov, Nick Flincher, Yi Lu, Michael Prsala, Winter Finley, Ewan Wernick, David Feagles, Ian DeGroot, and Jeremy Horvath. Out of this swarm, it was only the last three who jostled for true preeminence and Cyrus reliably referred to these last three, for reasons never made clear to me, as Mr. Hoobalee-Boobalee, The Fabled Ian DeGroot, and Jeremy Fucking Horvath. They were a little older and a little more realized than Cyrus Mair and me. David Feagles was absurdly dour in an Old Halifax High Anglican manner, ever puzzling out philosophies he perceived as reticulate. The first person to use in my presence the word Hegelian, David would pursue notions of conceptual poetics and post-modern modernity at the University of Sheffield. Son of Symphony Nova Scotia's Principal First Violinist, Ian DeGroot was one of those slack-mouthed power dweebs, slave to some repetitive fidgeting pattern, who seems border-line autistic but who all along is picking algorithms out of the middle distance. Ian would win a Rhodes scholarship, complete a post-doc in complex adaptive systems, and end up in Santa Clara, California. But Jeremy Horvath was the prince regent of these freaks and considered the smartest of the Smart Boys. He had a habit of frowning and the fluid mind of a clever young fiend. He was withdrawn and watchful, intuitive and changeable—which may be why it is difficult to successfully pin into a display case a considered analysis of his character. There was something hinky about his eyes, his eyes seemed double-lidded, sleep-deprived, his eyelashes pale and Teutonic-looking. "Creepily cerebral," was how Gail described him. "There's something weird about Jeremy. He's not really human. He's like an alien-lizard-human hybrid from the future. And he looks like the sort of guy who's been sitting on the same piece of cheese since he was twelve." Of Jeremy Horvath I was utterly emulous—I wanted to be as good as or better than him and his lot. But Jeremy Horvath was very good at being Jeremy Horvath. His teenage speaking voice implied a multi-speed intelligence, alert to ironies and switch-ups, and his smarts and moods, when taken with his musical success and other feats more assorted, made him a supremely accomplished eighteen year-old. He captained Dartmouth High to the finals of *Reach for the Top*, a nationally televised quiz show. He was the only person I knew who was offered a full scholarship to Harvard. He pretty much invented a side-

kinking on-beat style of dancing, as if he were being sort of rhythmically electrocuted, that would prove influential on male dancing in the city for years to come. He was the best rhythm guitar player for days and he was the first person I knew who recorded and released a vinyl record. That summer, the summer after John Lennon died, The Silver Hornets brought out, on their own label, a three-song EP called Girl Trap. Those three songs, "High Numbers," "Radio Dial," and "Girl Trap," were not exactly everywhere in the city, but in my brain they were ever-present and astonishing. This was one of the earliest indie recordings to come out of Halifax, later cited in anthologies for its spooky, droning pop, and Karin Friday, I noted, our Karin Friday, the Common Room's Karin Friday, was listed as guest vocalist on the last of the tracks.

Scene. Third floor, Mair House. Time: August afternoon. Cyrus is at a table covered with papers, bent over a book, reading. He wears a dark and rumpled second-hand suit—just passably acceptable as a mod suit—under an overcoat two sizes too big. I recognize the coat as one of the blue cashmere garments once owned by his grandfather and probably exhumed from the clothes racks in the attic room adjoining. Outside the afternoon is anything but frosty and inside, the way the heat is trapped within the almost airless third-floor room—windows closed, sunlight steeping through dusty smears of window glass—the temperature approaches something you might encounter in an incinerator. Cyrus does not seem to notice, however, and reads unbothered in his overcoat. No matter where he is in the calendar year, Cyrus is partial to overcoats—even overcoats, like this one, he may not grow into for another few summers. He sits diligently reading, seemingly unaware of my presence and anything else—unaware of the shiny reflection from his watch crystal that flashes an oval spotlight along the surfaces of the room and unaware, further, of a single white moth that, liberated from Cyrus's old-fangled clothing and moving like a dazzle of confetti, chases this shimmer into the shadows of the far wall. One of Cyrus's shirt collars, I notice, is twisted with the knot of his tie and the collar kinks at an odd angle toward the ceiling but Cyrus, being Cyrus, is perfectly willing to leave clothing details as they are, if, indeed, he's noticed his clothes at all. He simply continues reading. As explained, the projects of the Common Room are financed by selectively pilfering and selling off the Mair family's surplus books—the doubles and triples and over-sized volumes, anything spotted or even faintly mildewed, and all of the encyclopedia sets. (I've seen in my stays here at least two complete Eleventh Editions of the *Britannica.*) In this way, vast numbers of books *ex libris* Mair have found their way back into the world, dispersed into shelves and shops far and wee—Guzzie's

Book Exchange, Asher's Antiquarian Bookmart, Schooner Books—and so, after a quart bottle of London Dry Gin has been delivered as a surtax to Great-Aunt Emlyn, bulky uniform editions of Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens and multiple copies of *The Vicar of Wakefield* are transmuted into Peavey amplifiers, microphone stands, cables and sound boards and pre-amps. Cyrus often feels contrite if he has not read a book before its departure and, even though I push him to retire his system of read-and-release, often he withdraws, as he has done these first few weeks of August, into kooky seclusion, sequestering himself hour after hour to read through a stack of decrepit hard-covers. Deep in these ecclesiastical phases, he might read three or four days in a row, oblivious to food or weather, with wrinkled apples forgotten and teapots stone cold. "That kid reads too much," my mother remarks. "How's he going to learn anything about the world? He should get outdoors. Get some sun into his warped little body. Didn't he used to play tennis? That boy—with his strange mind and reading too much—why does he need so many books? Always stuck inside. Up in some garret." I explain it's a turret. "Garret, turret, bell tower—whatever you want to call it, get him *out* of it, Aubrey. He doesn't need all those books. No one does. He could read from now till doomsday and never finish a fifth of that crap. They'll be the death of somebody, I'm telling you." But for Cyrus each book becomes, I think, in the very act of picking it up, the center of the known universe. He is always reading as if a line from a book might change his life forever so he is determined to steer his eyes through every bit of text, even if, as my youngest sister one afternoon discovered, the volume in question is a *L'il Jinx* Comic Digest which, taking it from Katie in her sandbox, Cyrus regarded as reverentially as if it were the first translation of The Upanishads. And so he continues reading, staring into the pages of his book—but I notice it's a glazed, unrecognizing kind of staring, as if he is waiting for the right word or gesture to jolt him out of his reverie and back towards a specific moment. With Cyrus I am never sure how to phrase my references to Karin—I am not privy to their recent goings-on—and there is a migrant silence after I blurt the news about Karin singing on The Silver Hornets' record. With a quietude that speaks of a dozen ideas newly calibrating, Cyrus makes a snuffle but stays silent, as if he does not wish his run of thoughts to be interrupted, as if other people's understandings may have become a hazard for him, and I become conscious, although I am not sure I can properly quantify it, of a familiar sensation in the room. Moving further into all his smarts and percipience has given Cyrus Mair an identity but it has also isolated him within that identity. In his psychic vicinity, my thoughts become weirdly reoriented. I feel as if my ideas are being magnetized into a coherence Cyrus is slowly, stubbornly trying

to generate. Immersion in this mental atmosphere does strange things to people, I have noticed. He is a sort of Red Kryptonite to all Super-Heroes. It attracts Karin, beguiles Babba and Tom Waller, but repels Gail. She is very suspicious of his influence—in the Changelings the two have been vying for psychological control—and his strangeness makes her spiteful. And me? I sense there are contradictions present beyond my seventeen-year-old mind, but as I stand there, having delivered my news bulletin, heat prickles starting on the skin between my shoulder blades, I feel that knowing Cyrus Mair will make me smarter—knowing him will make *everyone* smarter—and I do my best to integrate his procedures.

"That's amazing," says Cyrus, speaking rapidly and with a conviction that he will be perfectly understood. "That's very amazing, actually. For Jeremy Fucking Horvath. And his silver hormones. But for us it's completely irrelevant."

"Irrelevant. Right. That's what I was thinking. Know what else? Your collar's messed up."

Putting aside his book, Cyrus stands and moves to the bookshelves, his eyes taking in the title of a Penguin paperback. "*Moonfleet*?" he says. "I don't think so. Who wants to read that again?" He tosses the book in a half-filled box on the floor and chooses another. "*Silas Marner*? Print's too small."

"You should fix it, I mean. Your collar. The one on your shirt."

"A Borges. That's a keeper. Do you know the Borges?"

"I don't know the Borges." My face is dew-dropping with moisture. With my right thumbnail, I flick away the sweat on my eyebrows. "Hey, could we crank up the radiator maybe? Anyone else feel a draft? Maybe I could get a scarf?"

Cyrus stops in front of a hardcover. "Richard Adams? Isn't this yours?" It's the copy of *Watership Down* loaned to Cyrus in our junior tennis days. I tell him he can keep it.

"But isn't this where you record all your jokes and stuff from the city?"

Because of my assorted drug-dealing connections, Cyrus confers to me an immense, and purposefully absurd, amount of street credibility, often conceding to my expertise as if, say, I am someone who has survived a number of stints as a professional street fighter in the Halifax Shipyards. "Cyrus. That was three years ago. You read it?"

He nods and lifts the book free of the shelf. "Where did you get all those jokes anyway?"

"What do you mean? I invented every one of them."

"But where did you hear them?"

"From a guy in Gdansk. Guy Lafleur. I don't know. Pliny the Elder."

Cyrus sets the book on the table with his papers. He seems unable

to leave it alone, however, and touches at it a few times so its edges are in line with the corners of the writing table—and I realize the personal force-field I've sensed in previous years has returned and seems now to permeate all his goods and chattels. *Watership Down*, a tea cup, the piles of papers, a sharpened Eberhard Faber pencil, these seem possessed by a strange life force all their own. I stand very still in the center of the room, wetly perspiring, pin-points of sweat now trickling down my spine toward the waistband of my pants, very conscious of disrupting the room's frittery hoodoo.

Cyrus takes the book he was first reading and holds it above his head. "Do you know this book?"

"Is that the Borges? I don't know the Borges."

"No. The Mayhew."

He gives me the first volume of something called *London Labour and the London Poor*—a collection of interviews with vagrants, mudlarks, and low-lifes published in 1851 by Henry Mayhew. I open it at random and alight on the following section about a street kid. I decide to read the lines out loud, in a cheesy working-class accent, in my best Torben Fludd, actually: "'Yes, he had heer'd of God who made the world. Couldn't exactly recollec' when he'd heerd on him, but he had, most sarten-ly. Didn't know when the world was made, or how any-body could do it... Didn't know what happened to people after death, only that they was buried...Had heer'd on another world; wouldn't mind if he was there hisself, if he could do better, for things was often queer here.'"

I finish my performance and take a moment to appreciate the excerpt—and the larger idea of Henry Mayhew. "The kid's right." I look to Cyrus. "Things *is* often queer here."

Cyrus is quiet, eyes quickening with new developments. He steadies his gaze by following on the wall the reflected shimmer of his watch crystal and murmurs, "We could do that."

"Do what?"

"What Mayhew did. But for Halifax."

"Interview homeless people? There's only two of them—String Bean and Crazy Maddy."

"No. Put Halifax in a book. Like your folklore of jokes. But every person. Every thought. What everybody knows. Or not what everybody knows. What we know."

"Everything *we* know? Oh. Sure. I get it." I pass the book back to him. "Here's an idea. You're insane. And that's impossible."

"Maybe," says Cyrus. "Or maybe it makes everything possible."

"You mean put Crazy Maddy in a book or our experience of Crazy Maddy?"

"Isn't it the same thing? Think about it."

"I am thinking. I don't get it."

"Right now Crazy Maddy is a secret we all know. But no one in the future will know her. It's like the Borges. 'What will die with me when I die?'"

"I don't know the Borges. Just to be clear on that."

"But if we put into a book everything we know, every little thing—"

"She does is magic?"

"Then it *becomes* what other people think is possible. Even if they disagree."

"Still not getting it."

"Exactly. It doesn't have to make sense. Or be linear. It's just an installation of moments. And the existence of a thing."

"The existence of a thing?"

"The existence of a thing," says Cyrus. "Because without it there aren't any."

2

It was called *The Halifax Book*. Other titles considered were *The Halifax Common*, *A Halifax Omnibus*, *Haligonia*, *Hafilaxity*—but what was easiest was *The Halifax Book*. It was to be a living history of the settlement known diversely as Jipugtug, Chibouctou, Chebucto, Hali, The Fax, H-Town, and it was to stand as a correcting intervention against all the bullshit, flarf, and print-and-advertising that had come down to us about the place. For this was to be a record of *our* Halifax—not the place evoked by photos of oil rigs anchored off George's Island, or by postcards of lobster traps heaped under stormy skies, or brochures featuring cheery, gap-toothed fishermen with cormorants balanced atop their Sou'Westers. On certain days your hometown can seem like a cavalcade of suckiness and all of us in the Common Room were oftentimes worried for Halifax. I know Cyrus considered it a sort of tribal accident, hopelessly superstitious, heartbreakingly sectarian, and his general conception of Maritimers—that is to say those fellows in matching rugby shirts who tunelessly bellow "Barrett's Privateers" while wavering at the urinals in The Seahorse Tavern—was linked with his general distaste for anything careless or incompetent; all the muddy corruptions and general mismanagements of thought at play in a city. Gail thought the place its own little hell but it was Babba who came closer to my own view. "Halifax is sort of frustrating and lovable," she said the night we were spritzing out a first table of contents. "It's sort of crummy and magnificent." And it was Cyrus's inspired insight to embrace the crumminess—to realize that in our hometown crumminess and magnificence were inseparable—and to

seize the given moment in the city's life as moral fact. So in the remaining weeks of that summer Halifax became our religion, we were its apostles, and this imagined book was to be its scripture and creed, its songs and psalms. We drew it up, we sketched it out, we collated blueprints, schedules, a bibliography of trees—we were going to keep at it till we got everything down on paper, every longshoreman's tattoo, every Pee-Wee hockey stick, every word scrawled in once-wet cement... And of course the thing never happened. Why? It was in possibility and conception the most ambitious of our projects, but it was only one of many summer ventures from The Common Room. There was our sponsoring of fifteen-year-old Saul Swither's Death Tour of the South End for five bucks a head, as well as a planned Super-8 music video for "Changeling Girl," comprehensive reviews of the city's draft beers... I loved *The Halifax Book*, I day-dreamed on its proofs and fascicles—it seemed something on the way to wonderful—and a plan to respond to the meanings of those scheming and dreaming and living and dying all around us seemed the best of our endeavours but the project was fated to be a perpetual work-in-progress, impossibly super-abundant, it would never be as perfect in practice as the entity we supported in our imaginations, and after a rush of disorganized optimism, the thousand pages of *The Halifax Book* petered out in false starts, dead ends, and shared neglect.

The end of that summer was full of change. We were fluctuating, life was varying, and The Common Room itself was closing. People were leaving town, traveling into the world, flying into places far flung and cities unfamiliar. We were dispersing, disbanding, differentiating—and no longer invested in the possibilities a group once implied. The Changelings would last only seventeen gigs, from winter grade eleven through summer grade twelve, our last concert played at half-strength—without Karin or Gail—at a drizzly talent night at the St. Mary's Boat Club. Music was turning over. In the flicker of two years Sid Vicious was dead, Paul Weller had become a rhythm-and-blues singer, and Jeremy Horvath, after a few detours into substance abuse, was on his way to becoming a claims adjuster in New Bedford, Massachusetts. The brief punk vogue in the city was done. In September of that year, I remember running into Robby Horvath, Jeremy's little brother and the bassist of the Silver Hornets, as he wandered baked out of his mind from a Dalhousie orientation session, slit-eyed and giggling, listening to something called UB40 on a Sony Walkman—the device ubiquitous now—his wavy red hair done over in Rasta dreads and festooned with beads and elastics, his headphones leaking sounds of snare hits and saxophone. He was carelessly humming along to a sluggish lament about Tyler-is-guilty-the-white-judge-has-said-so...and I felt a gross distortion of the zeitgeist. Mine

was not nostalgia for an age yet to come, as the Buzzcocks lyric goes, it was truly for a moment that had so swiftly come and gone. Musical trends cycle fast, I know, as fast as it takes a kid to clatter through high school, but I remember a feeling of queasy betrayal and dislocation. Why should punk be so quickly dumped? And why should we on Grafton Street co-opt every move from Carnaby—making over our styles to fit the dubby rhythms of Reggae, the blitzings of the New Romantics, the blancmange of the Synthpoppers? Punk Rock had seemed to speak to the raw contingencies of Halifax, in all its rip-roaring, gritty, who-gives-a-fuck wildness. And yet in its wake soon splashed a waterish New Wave, the bars and clubs flooding with do-it-yourself pop combos like Jumper, The Fade Aways, and The Thunderhouse Blues Band, this last act, created around the boy-next-door appeal of Boyden Burr, an immensely, incomprehensibly popular bar band that would go on to regularly headline The Middle Deck, The Shore Club, and the great Palace itself. These bands were cocky and talkative and looking to party, and theirs was a music of cover tunes and happy hour, blazers and leggings, tanned faces and popped collars, encores and last-call-to-the-bar—the good-time vibe a gateway to misbehaviour of all kinds and prejudices. It was in her guesting, paid gigs with Thunderhouse that Karin would become known in the province, hosting a three-night home stand over Chester Race Week, guesting on morning radio, and showing up in the weekend arts sections of the papers. In Halifax, as elsewhere, beauty creates interest and so it went with Karin Friday. Catch-lines for these features, at least in my mind, would trend toward 'Pretty Girl Travels Fast' or 'Cutie Ditches Oddballs' for there was a sense developing commonly that new opportunities were opening up for our lead singer. This later version of Karin would coincide with a time when the city's downtown, once a mix of funky eclecticism and stately establishment, would develop over the decades into a theme park for university kids—essentially a movable drinking game for twentysomethings—as it remains today.

A Last Scene. The Public Gardens, Streets Various, and finally Conrose Field. Time: a first Wednesday in September. The sun-bright hours before evening twilight and, as near as I can determine, we Common Roomers are dotted all over creation. Barbara Zuber walks along Hirtle's Beach with her cottage sweetheart, a divorced lobster fisherman, considering his proposal of marriage. After a second summer in the Naval Reserves, Gail Benninger shops in the McGill University Bookstore in Montréal, yanking from the shelves a copy of *Discipline and Punish* by Michel Foucault. Stalwart Tom Waller journeys towards Jadwin Hall in Princeton, New Jersey where he will begin to pursue, as he is still pursuing, the Higgs

Boson. Cyrus Mair is—who knows where? The last I remember him was after the final Changelings gig—Cyrus on Benzedrine like a madman in the drenching rain, throwing amps and gear bags in the back of a van. And me—I have gone on to spend the afternoon with Rasta Robby Horvath in the Public Gardens, smoking spliffies, gabbing music, and I walk out of the iron gates quite blasted, the world creating itself every few moments, glimmering in candy-coloured pixels, and I glimpse Karin Friday as she emerges from a jam of people along Spring Garden Road. Her hair is long and loose and sun-lightened, with front-tresses pure white, eyes green-glinting in the sun. Barefoot in open-toed sandals, she wears cut-off jeans and a sleeveless gingham smock-top. When first I met her, a few years before, she seemed to arrive out of the world's future. Here on Spring Garden Road she looks as if she has come out of the city's past, for she has swung from Tomboy Punkette to Hippie Chick Granola Supreme—I have an impression generally of braided friendship bracelets, couscous, and the swapping of home-made shawls. Whichever—she is in the full summer of her beauty and as she moves to her Vespa, one hand holding her full-face helmet, the other wiping back a rush of hair, she is sort of continuously memorable. I have no idea what I say in my opening remarks, nor how floaty and spaced out are my follow-ups, reconnecting only with contingent reality after some minutes when I am behind Karin on her scooter, listening to her Walkman as we motor down South Park and Inglis streets, Karin waving here and there at honking cars, now turning along Beaufort to race along the pavement beside the ocean inlet and railway tracks, through sleepy streets and the scent of family gardens, cooling barbecues, a sweep of darkling lawn. Everything seems a piece with summertime abundance, green leafiness all round, the city wide open, as if there are weeks of summer still on either side of us. Underneath her spare helmet I listen to the final song of side two, "Why Can't I Touch It?" by the Buzzcocks, electric guitars trading riffs amid the hiss and flutter of the old cassette tape, and I take in a number of synesthesial associations—a pink smell of shrubs and roses, eaves-trough puddles evaporating near twilight, the jagged blue shale and clover of the railway cut, the fragrance of a shadowing chestnut tree as we round the corner, the scooter's side mirrors winking with daylight, a flutter of loose butterflies squishing briefly into our faces, and I feel the entire evening seep and sparkle around me in a kind of fantasia all along the dip and rise of Beaufort Avenue. I sit close behind my driver, one hand secure around the seat strap, the other hooked into a belt loop of her cut-offs, both of us happy, pleased to be with each other, and I am aware of clean cotton and perfect girlhood and the perfume of her shampoo. Living in a house of girls and women, I know the colours and keynotes to a superfluity of

shampoos, everything from Johnson's Baby Shampoo and Wella Balsam through to Alberto-VO5, Lemon Up, and Gee Your Hair Smells Terrific. From Karin I breathe the green organic smell of Clairol Herbal Essence and this coupled with her hippie chick makeover sets off thoughts of waterfalls and ethereal damsels, circlets of flowers and pagan meadows. I contemplate the lacey white bra she wears, the shoulder-straps for which are flagrantly visible against the fabric of her smock-top, and I remember days when we smoked dope and drank and one night we were making out, on the stairs of her back porch, her mother out of town, and we had flirted randomly, truly, drunkenly, her blouse open, Karin undoing the worn plastic button on the front-release of this self-same bra, the swell of her breasts I kissed as she tried to calm her breathing when I was kneeling down, pushing her skirt above her hips, and kissing between her thighs as she pressed herself closer, her fingers filling with my hair, and another midnight besides, on an island beyond Babba's cottage, on the last of our group sleepovers, in the flaming light of a beach fire when Karin, after swimming, was changing from wet clothes and I saw how her pubic hair had been trimmed, the shaved area provoking a few pinkish stubbles on the inmost line of her thigh, and I wondered at such grown-up grooming decisions—and wondered, too, what she was thinking to show such sights to me. For she was aware of it, I'm sure—we were aware of each other in all moments—and now stopping her scooter within the greenery of the Horsefield, removing her helmet, and fingering some hair from her eyelashes, Karin turns away from me, almost as if she is privy to my run-on ideas and embarrassed by their intimacy, closing her eyes to angle her face toward the warmth of the setting sun. I close my eyes, too, letting the sun blaze the insides of my eyelids scarlet, and for a few moments I feel as if I am thinking back on this person from a time when I will no longer know her—sensing a time in the future when I would be recalling these very scenes.

"You ever been to France?"

I open my eyes to see Karin blinking at me.

"I was just thinking that."

"If you've been to France?"

"If you were going to ask me about France." Pulling from my pocket the remains of the joint I smoked with Robby Horvath, I light it and offer it to Karin. "You?"

"I did," says Karin, pinching the roach between finger and thumb. "I just asked you."

"I mean are you going to France?"

"It's a plan, obviously." She sucks on the roach, one eye squinting from the smoke. "As one does."

"Who were those guys you were waving to?"

"Oh," says Karin, exhaling a single plume of smoke. "Just some guys who think they know me. Happens a lot now."

"Totally. Guys are noticing me a lot now, too, I find. It's actually not that interesting. Whatever."

She swings her lower jaw to one side, quizzical, regarding me as if I might be someone peculiar, and returns the roach to me. "There was a psychic at Babba's craft fair today."

"A real psychic?"

"She said I was a very new soul."

"Where were you before that?"

"On another planet." Karin touches at a tiny blemish beneath her eye. I am perversely grateful to see this blemish, an incipient pimple, on the edge-point of her cheekbone. "Probably you were, too, Tudball."

"Probably."

I offer her a last toke but she shakes her head. "You and your magic beans. Holy Frijole. Can I ask you a question? You know your friend Cyrus Mair?"

"He's so unfair, that Cyrus Mair. That psychotic scheming freak."

"That's the one. Have you seen him?"

"Not so much. I think he's in an attic somewhere, you know, biting the heads off pigeons. I called him a couple times."

"Yeah," says Karin. "That's a little iffy considering he hasn't answered his phone in three weeks. As one does." Karin tugs on the frayed hem of her cut-offs so that a loose, flapping pocket is properly covered. She glances at me, her eyes revealing some concern. "Everything's a little drastic at the moment. Not that it hasn't happened before. There just seems to be a bunch of *extenuating* circumstances this time around."

"He's good at those."

"He doesn't really talk to you and then maybe you'll get a long, weird letter from him in a year explaining it all."

"He's a weird guy."

"*Everyone's* a weird guy. And I'm not sure how everything works, okay? I don't always have the right Super Decoder ring."

I am nodding, thinking what to say next, when I simply return her Walkman. "Your mix tape, Madame."

"Thank you, kind sir." She reaches for it. "What would I do without my mix tape?" Her hand closes around the controls, by chance her middle finger squeezing the rewind button. There is a sound of high-speed whirring, a sharp click, and then the spools abruptly slow and stop. Karin opens the casing to see the worn-out tape twisted off the capstan shaft and coiled beneath the pinch roller.

"It's busticated?" Karin picks at the damaged tape. "Crapsticks. It got eaten by the machine. I guess it was going to happen sooner or later. It's just—that was my favouritest thing." With a shrug, she closes the casing, a ribbon of tape trickling into the wind, and drops the Walkman in the front basket of her scooter. Karin gazes at the cassette, abstracted. "I know this sounds silly," she says to no one in particular. "But my whole life I've always wanted big boobs."

"Who doesn't?"

"Oh, Aubrey, I don't know. I really don't. Sometimes it's better when it's just me and Babba and Boober. Not that we're always having, you know, *life* conversations but I think I understand things better with girls."

"Boys are gross?"

"Not necessarily. Girls aren't always so great. I mean you can tell a lot about a girl by how she gets you out of the way of the mirror in the bathroom to put on make-up." Karin wipes at her left eye, fiercely, pushing a finger deeply into its socket, then, as if she feels she can't sustain such boldness, she arranges a wisp of hair behind her ear. "Boys aren't always so perfect either. But you guys are different. Most guys are usually scared to commit to stuff—because what if it doesn't work out? Then they look bad. Then they think they suck at everything. I know I do." Bending forward slightly, she tugs again on the hem of her cut-offs. "Like that guy in Toronto who made me that mix tape. He talked about doing lots of stuff. But he never did any of it. You guys did."

"You did, too, Wiggins! You were there."

"That's not what I mean. Because you guys keep turning yourselves into so many projects and I'm always trying to be as good as you. But you're always so much better than me at everything. And I'm not. I mean I know you guys can be a little woo-woo but you're still out there trying all these spiffy balls and, I don't know, maybe I fucked up all my gizmos because I'm not always as with it and together as you guys think I am." She closes her eyes another moment. "Plus the whole love, sex, destiny, babies thing? I'm not really as up on those things as I should be."

"I think you have to figure those out in the next hour, Friday. Before nightfall. What're you doing tonight?"

"Tonight?" With a backward flip of her head, Karin indicates the ocean and the direction of the Royal Nova Scotia Yacht Squadron. "Dinner with Boyden's family, the whole schmear. And I'm already late."

"I see. Extenuating circumstances. Hog roasts." I have noticed a butterfly, faintly flapping, in the wheel-well of the scooter's front tire. Squatting to examine it, I see it's full-grown, mustard-coloured, and presumably from the swarm we motored through.

"Tudball," says Karin. "Tell me something. And I know this shouldn't

be a big, giant mystery but—are you even listening? Aubrey?"

My outward attention is still on the butterfly—its thorax has been dented into an edge of molded plastic—but inwardly I am considering Karin and all her queries and variables, her unisex flirting, her sundry senses of humour, her responses to life, these really *have* been like revelations to me, the way her eyes gleam with fun-seeking girliness, sharing the moment with you—and all through the evening I have been grateful to feel the joy of her looks—but ultimately I am sort of glum and disappointed. What bothers me is that she is able to smile so easily—and they aren't dishonest smiles at all but they come so quickly, so reflexively, they seem a reaction to almost everything and I want, finally, to be on the other side of the smiles that *matter*. For I feel as if I am just one of several young men Karin keeps in motion around her, the rest of whom are all taller and more striking than I am. And to learn now that she is going around with Boyden Burr's crowd—the great fraternity of Vuarnets and backward baseball caps—more than dismays me. It seems a betrayal of brilliance. All the different guys who drift in and out of Karin's life, some in a platonic, recreational way, many not, the transience of the relations, the almost disposable quality of the social life, I find curious, beautiful, and appalling. And kneeling there in the Horsefield beside her scooter I realize that not only will I never sleep with Karin Friday, and of course this has been something I have thought about—*a lot*—but I feel I will never really know her again at all.

"When I was little," says Karin, softly, watching me as I begin to blow on the damaged butterfly. "I thought butterflies were flowers that escaped." In the next moment, the creature falls away from the white plastic. Alighting briefly on Karin's elbow, it rises suddenly above our heads and follows an erratic up-and-down flight pattern before gently floating off toward the sea and horizons unknown. "You have a big heart—" Karin says, staring after it. "Aubrey McKee."

"Got to start somewhere." I turn to her. "Now what was it—what's your big, giant mystery?"

But Karin has retreated into private quiet, the sunset off her right shoulder, her face half in shadow, and though she is still vaguely smiling at me, this smile seems to have lost some force around its edges, as if her thoughts have moved on but her expression hasn't quite caught up yet. She takes a step forward and lays her head on my shoulder, resting it there a second or two, as if out of respect, or pretend respect, I am not sure. "Not that interesting," she says, standing up straight. She plops the spare helmet in the basket with the Walkman. "That was my moment and I lost it." She pulls on her own helmet, swings herself over the scooter, and spins the key in the ignition. For a half-second I see my own face—

sunburned, scruffy—in the fleeting world of one of her side-mirrors. And for a last time I consider the charm of Karin Friday, an enchantment of spiffy *champignons*, crumpled butterflies, crapsticks and budding zits, blonde wisps and bright green eyes, though I see it's a green that has a way of fading to grey near sunset, as it fades now, and not knowing what next to do, I push a swoop of hair off her forehead. "Funny little world we live in, Wiggins."

"Mm-mm," says Karin, finding her way out of the park and vanishing in a slant of evening light. "Everybody does."

Pamela Langevin

THE ORACLE

a cruel streak
splits the sky in two
as molten cattle
morph against the thorns
and webbed grass
by the station
where she reads hairs
snagged on a post—

a finch-light strand
knotted into a nest
smaller than a freckle
a nest for galactic mycoplasma
a nest for factual aches

the torched wind
rassles with a glossy wire
gone grey at the root
a wire stripped of migraines
a wire stripped of feeling

clipboard birds thwack overhead
bow-bellied and drenched in rust
she pulls hairs pronged and greenly
curious from the post like florets
like nerved offshoots—

the women are thinning into threads
too small to use
the women are deadfall in the ditch
the women are hairless nodding dogs
left at the station gone mad

she names hairs
for the train that doesn't come
amandine laurel june
she sings hairs to keep the sky
from splitting to stop
its clicking full of bones

FALLOW

the gelatinous arm
of summer stretched
red and steaming across
the highway when his mind
went to seed
he wavered between
knowing or losing
the wind's ripple: geese
overhead disturbing stars
you call him to the table
and his eyes skip
our faces the way a child
goes numb thumping
along a chain-link fence

HEAD FULL OF PINK GLASS

the girl drifts
under a hemlock
she has begun

the climb, the slow de-
liberation of waking
a relentless wading

up to the brain
the brain gone
weightless: a sheaf

of brome grass
body heavy as a church
she treads slow

along the sun's red
reef, wonders if this
is the spine

of entropy
could her body
be extinguished

with a clap; the hook
in her side lugs her up
a cold green perch

her heads polyped
and full and good
on the line

Annie Reid

GLORIOUS KINGDOM

He's waiting for me. He's just sitting there, in his car in the parking lot outside the store, biding his time. The windows are rolled down, even though it's a cold night. The red tip of his cigarette is all I see of him from here at the front counter. One single glowing eye that never closes. There'll be frost on everything by dawn: the blades of grass, the grey husks of cornstalks still standing in the fields, coating the windows of trucks stopped on country roads. I reach down and pull my skirt down over my knees. I am not dressed for the cold. Everything is quiet and still, like we've been locked away in a deep freeze. Right now it doesn't matter that we are not the only two people in the world.

There's no moon tonight. You can barely make out the tips of the tree line across the road. The only light comes from a single street lamp, and the faint blue-and-white neon sign in our front window, the one that says Glorious Kingdom. It burns all the time, day and night. From its dim light, you can just make out the three tiny white crosses there on the side of the road. They pick up that blue glow real nice. That's where those boys from my school drove right into the great oak at the bend, drunk and hollering up until the first twist of metal, the first snap of the glass folding in on itself. Lucas, Mark, and that big George Carson, sinners and bullies all of them, and still the kids at school put on ties and dresses and cried at the funeral, and talked into the news cameras about how nice those boys had been and what a tragedy it was, even Steven who still had bruises fading from his cheek from Mark's fist. Funny how in death everything gets transformed. Almost like it cleans you right up. Just like the Lord showed us.

I saw the first two policemen on the scene because I'm the one who called them. I was sitting right there. I heard the crash. Got out of their cars, shook their heads, might of felt a little sick, to tell you the honest truth, knew it was too late. Those boys were beyond saving, though I swear I still heard noises. Older policeman gave a little laugh, almost like a cough. And that, he said, is the only way anyone gets out of this town.

I've been killing time tonight since closing, since the man pulled up in his car and shut off the headlights. I've restocked the shelves with conditioner and our good stiff hairbrushes and the mudpacks from the Dead Sea that suck the filth right out of you. I've aligned each and every lipstick according to color and gloss, counted the cash slowly into the cash

register, the oily bills smooth under my fingers, the Presidents all face up, slick in their compartments. I've smoothed out the receipts, labelled the envelopes. Now I've put on my coat, buttoned it halfway, turned off the lights. It's a nice white pea coat, polyester. Used to be real proud of it. Now there's a stain on it, the stain from once when I drank red wine with that sinner Lacey Collins at her graduation party, the only time I strayed. She said she wanted to be my friend, but I see now that she was just trying to break me. It spilled down this coat, my one nice coat, and the stain has never come out, a constant reminder, like blood that won't rinse away. I'd be a fool to think there was no purpose to that. When my mother saw that stain, she turned away like I wasn't even there. A new coat is out of the question. I'm to look at it, and remember how I strayed, how I was punished. It feels good to know there's a purpose, that there is a purpose to everything. If there was not, who could even imagine.

We're both waiting now, he in his car and me in my store. The door is not locked, but he will discover that on his own soon enough. My shift is long over. No one will come until morning. No one will notice I am missing until long past when all that frost melts in the light of tomorrow's sun. We are all alone, but for He who watches.

I work here at the Glorious Kingdom Beauty Supply House. We provide a wide selection of beauty products to enhance a true believer's glory in this world. As part of God's creation, we are part of His glory. That's what my mother has always said, and that is why she started this establishment. We help women to see their own inner beauty and reveal it right on the outside, where anyone can see. Thus God's glory expands, like a soft slow exhale out into the world.

The Bible talks about the Lord suffering for our sins, we hear it every Sunday. And I've seen the paintings, the blood flowing down like rose petals dancing in the wind. I've dreamed of the arrows that pierce the hearts of true believers, so pure and ready. I could do it too, I know I could. I could prove the fire inside of me, just like them. I could burn like an angel, roll in wheels of blades, my flesh pierced right through, blood like silk flowing behind. The Lord paid a price, he sacrificed, he was redeemed and glorified, made whole again even as the blood came from him, rivers of it washing him clean.

He's been coming into the store lately, this man who waits for me. He has his hair shaved down to nothing and his scalp shines like the sun under the bright lights of Glorious Kingdom. I can see the curve of the serpent's tail just at the base of his neck, black thick ink seeping in his skin, the lines new and precise like he was marked only yesterday. His shirt is tight; his muscles swell like ropes, straining to keep a ship in harbor under the onslaught of storm winds, his arms thick. I think of dogs

and bulls and horses when I look at him. I imagine him posing shirtless for self-portraits in mirrors, hands firm around the black barrel of his weapon, fingers aching and ready. I know what it's like to be unfulfilled, to have desires that cannot be met. In my heart, I have strayed. But that is ordinary. Everyone strays.

Most nights, at closing time, I roam the aisles of Glorious Kingdom and take my penance. I find the very things I need the most. The curling iron burns the skin of my ribcage, the soft skin beneath my arms, the curve behind my knee. The peroxide burns when you leave it too long, leaves scabs on your scalp where no one else can see, no one can know. I melt down the blocks of wax in the kit—a glorious burst of pain, then the slow welts rise on angry skin, splotchy and swollen, smooth, clear, pure, waiting, hidden. The aisles of Glorious Kingdom are my deliverance, my supplication; my practice for greater things, things that are not ordinary.

It was only a few days ago that the man came in for the first time. He wore a long black leather coat, a thick chain around his neck, sunglasses covering his eyes, though I am certain he looked straight at me the whole time. He might have been the devil came to earth to claim his own, surprise the Lord with his own kind of dark Rapture, suck up the dying and the damned, leave their shoes smoking and empty all through the land, took them all down below, leaving all the saved ones all shocked and staring, their eyes flashing *I knew you all along.*

He looks at the bows, all pink and delicate, like he wants to take them in his hands and crush them. We don't sell many men's products, though there is a small corner of brown and blue bottles, to enhance the glory of freshly shaven skin and combed hair. But he doesn't even look at that, he walks right on by. He looks at the perfume, the barrettes, the skin creams that smell like tea roses. He walks the aisles slowly, examining things, as though imagining giving it to someone, imagining running his hands over it, though he touches nothing. He is purposeful, he takes his time. Whatever he is looking for, it must be perfect, without flaw. That is what I thought, at first.

But he does not buy anything. Instead he spends twenty minutes in the aisles. I watch. At Glorious Kingdom we do have security mirrors installed at the end of each aisle. It is not that we don't think all of God's children are not perfect and do not deserve forgiveness; it is only that we must acknowledge that our garden of praise is also a garden of temptation, for some turn a blind eye to the glorification of our Lord and see only the earthly manifestations. We forgive, but we do not turn a blind eye. And so I can watch him striding down aisles. And looking up into those mirrors. More than he looks at what is on our shelves, he watches me.

Through the dark glasses I cannot see his eyes, but I know he is

looking at me. I wonder if he is also thinking of weighing me in his arms, imagining the way I'd feel to the touch.

Whatever he was looking for, he did not find. He left without turning his head, without saying a word of thanks.

Our regular clientele is predictable, reliable even. Church ladies, shy teenage girls who come in alone. We talk sometimes, about the Bible, about lipstick, about what color flatters the palest skin. It's not that I know so much, but I know more than them. It feels like my way of serving. You can't try and deny a calling when it comes, that is what my mother has always told me. Until recently I believed it was my only gift, the only service I could offer. I can tell what shade of lipstick a woman should be wearing the moment she walks through that door. I know when a shy girl really wants to wear scarlet; I can see the shine in the old school teacher's eyes when I pull the box of peroxide off the shelf. It's a gift, a God-given one, and as such it is not mine to refuse. Still, some of them don't seem to remember me the next time. Some of them don't even look at me when they pay, don't say a thing when I tell them to have a nice day.

He came back yesterday. Again, he walked the aisles, but this time he did not pretend to look at anything, not one thing. He watched me. He stood in the aisle, stared up at the security mirror, and watched me watch him. I could see the reflection of the mirrors in the shine of his sunglasses. This time I noticed the black curls of hair coming from his chest, the tightness of his jeans against his thighs, his hands thrust deep in the pockets of his long coat, clenched and unseen.

He left without saying a word, but he paused at the door, stared at me, locked eyes, though I could only see myself. Staring, afraid, clutching at my arms. He nodded. I couldn't help myself, I nodded back. That's when I knew.

This morning when I arose, I cleaned myself thoroughly, bandaged my wounds. I put on my best garments, the coat with its eternal stain. All through my shift, I waited, patient.

And just as closing time came, he arrived, just as I knew he would, just as it came to me he would. Pulled up in his car, the only one in the lot.

Lately, the papers have said that sometimes girls go missing from around here, girls with long blond hair like mine, young girls my age. Plenty of girls run away, I know that. Sometimes they find them, piles of clothes half-sunk in mud a few feet from their naked bodies all folded up like birds, gone half to dust in some field no one uses anymore. They say maybe there's a pattern. I surely hope not, I hope it's not him. Sometimes girls get lost in the numbers, their faces and names, if one man does so much. But no, that's not the way it is going to be. I know I have been chosen. I am special.

He's putting out his cigarette. I look over at the phone, think of the people I could call before it is too late—my mother, those fine young policemen who know just where to go. But instead I stand, ready to face him. This town is a small one, so small and so quiet. I could have spent a life wandering the aisles of Glorious Kingdom, I would have. But bigger things wait for me. Just outside this door, in that cold night, stillness and calm that seem to spread all over the earth.

Donovan McAbee

ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Orgasms
Cotton candy
Chocolate-covered almonds
Coffee

River stones

That time after praying when I would have doubted
my own existence before I would have doubted
God's

Tortoises
Ice-cream

ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE AGAINST THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The poor design and frequent malfunctioning of the male prostate gland

Licorice
World War II
Dysentery

The Godfather, Part III

All those times after praying when I went away
empty

Mosquitoes
Standardized tests
Every square inch of Orlando, Florida

Ben Merriman

STORIES IN ABSTRACT

"The Algerian." Two men in an Amsterdam pay toilet discuss gun violence.

"Alive." After realizing that he is living through the image of his future self, a graduate student shaves his beard.

"The Anarchist." Two rail passengers argue about the place of repression in modern life.

"An Audience with the Provost." A powerful academic recalls May of '68.

"Barb." An intoxicated ballerina slices up the narrator's fingers with a grapefruit knife.

"The Bear." A black bear eats a can of household refuse while the childish narrator cowers in fear.

"A Boring Evening." High on cocaine, the narrator fights a duel to defend the honor of German critical theory.

"Dead Inside." After returning from the tropics, the cerebral narrator considers the uses of the pathetic fallacy.

"Dead Louise." A friend's suicide is met with love and resignation.

"Distinction." A cloth roof elevates the narrator's ancestors above their neighbors.

"DMV." Sexual desire is stymied by the lusty narrator's inability to pass a driving examination.

"Donkinisme." Two authors switch identities before a violent poetry reading.

"Downtown." A crowd of urbanites watch a man struggle to find his train platform.

"Dream in Which I Receive a Major Literary Award." A dream reveals the structure of the narrator's aesthetic and personal insecurities.

"A Failed Siege." An account of the death of an eel overshadows the birth of the narrator's younger brother.

"First Time." Eros and the contemplation of natural resources law become inextricably tangled in the narrator's young mind.

"Flayed." The narrator attempts to show affection and desire for a man, but instead appears cold and detached.

"For a Slender Man." The wistful narrator scatters beautiful things on the wind in hope that they will reach a distant lover.

"Foretaste." With obscure significance, the narrator is recognized by an unfamiliar woman while exiting a bar.

"The Gar." A rotting fish disrupts a scene of eroticized mutual self-injury.

"Glass." Neighbors enlist the intrepid narrator's help in disposing of a dying rat.

"His Companion." A man drowns while trying to save a friend who fell into a frozen lake.

"Hope." A boy's desire to become a lesbian is thwarted by an Osage orange tree.

"The Intellectual." The narrator maintains a cruel detachment during a one-night stand.

"Last Thought." A man meets his own violent death as though he were watching television.

"Last Words." A great soul leaves behind a paltry final thought.

"Legible." After surviving long-term abuse, the narrator sets aside self-protection in order to submit to an attractive woman.

"Moral Luck." A freak traffic accident fails to stir the curiosity of the people in a small town.

"The Most Inspiring Message." A debater's over-identification with his partner provokes her to quit before an important tournament.

"Mouse Bells." A jeweler feels more at home after she affixes tiny bells to the rodents living in the walls of her new house.

"Night Thoughts." While spending a night in the woods, narrator and boyfriend contemplate death.

"Ordination." A spider bite gives a divinity student the power to see through illusions.

"A Philosophical Dispute." A cynical graduate student distinguishes between competing materialisms with the help of a boxcutter.

"A Real Philosopher." The youthful narrator admires the belligerence of visiting philosophy professors, and therein finds a vocation.

"Recruitment." An army recruiter extols the sartorial virtues of military life.

"Returned." The narrator's most important memories are found to have escaped into the blooms of a poisonous woodland plant, which the narrator then consumes.

"Richters." A traveling exhibition of Gerhard Richter paintings prompts ruminations on the nature of time and memory.

"Samaritan." A heavily intoxicated bystander attempts to help a man having a seizure.

"A Social Experiment." The narrator's attempt at personalized introductions results in profound isolation.

"Something About Being." The purchase of a bicycle mirror averts a dangerous confrontation with Being.

"Something About Cincinnatus." Cincinnatus suffers a private humiliation after receiving the fasces from the Roman Senate.

"Stories in Abstract." A précis of fifty stories reveals an author's fixation upon sex, death, and critical theory.

"A Trace." A lecture on grassland ecology devolves into an elaborate play of pretense and misunderstanding.

"Token." A relic of an old love affair is discarded as a new affair begins.

"Union Talk." Student leftists are baffled by supernatural events in the philosophy department.

"A Visit Home." An argumentative graduate student finds that it is impossible to go home again.

"The Voice Imitator." A talented author cannot set aside her compulsion to mimic the writing of ordinary people.

"Water Memory." A mysterious stranger shares the secret to cool drinking water, with destructive consequences.

"Well Poisoning in Comparative Perspective." Fear of an adulterated water supply reveals the kinship between paranoia and self-importance.

"You Are the Living Mirror of a Universe in Which I Have No Wish to Live." A breakup letter affirms temporal discontinuity as the governing structure of the universe.

Jami Macarty

EPILOGUE

While my mother waits in a room of my father's knowns
and unknowns, my mouth in a ruin.
I bridge thinking about the threat of death
to warrior around my childhood.

Not everything's worth
saving or repair. My father's
annoying sometimes. He refuses
salad with green peppers, leaves
the table if it faces a wall, says
I'm logic in the right argument, lobbying in the right era, free
and running down the beach.

Why did I leave—
to see a different world, to write my own writing on the wall.
My initials carved in cement, I
could have been a hometown wife, my antiestablishment wishes
taken out with the rubbish, painted over like the kitchen walls,
replaced by rural routines and local ideologies

while my motivation
hunts the Atlantic's shore and the metal horses
hostaged by Salisbury's carousel
wait to break free, for pretense to stop.

EXTREMITY

What kind of kitbag of solemn promise
was that?

A heart-to-heart so cystic, a heave so numeral
a bucket waited.

A lack was oracle in the larynx
of the poisoner.

Atlantic ice. Desert sun, a fire poker
till ears begged for a duvet.

Kissing bugs bed down in packrat nests
for a ready supply of blood meals.

What should have been a house
is a housebreaker.

There, a trial,

a triad,

a trespasser
to whom an illusory figment attached
itself.

There, a trellis
to which a fiend vined
himself.

There, a tremor,

a trench,

a fleshless trend
to which a trend-setter flaunted
himself.

There, a fight
to which a fighter trained
herself.

A desert of leafless trees
into which the rat exited its midden
punctual as an owl at dusk.

Lucy Bashford

DOORBELL

Roar of barking. 9 p.m. Movie on Pause. Stella turns on the front porch light and pulls back the curtain to see a woman in a light yellow bomber jacket and jeans standing outside. She unlocks the door and squeezes through, taking care not to let Spike and Angel surge past. The woman is thirty-something with short, curly dark hair, and brown eyes. Her talking hands tell Stella she is deaf. Out of her bag she pulls a framed photograph of herself and three children. Stella guesses them to be between the ages of three and ten, all with dark curly hair and studio smiles. Then the woman holds up a small laminated poster.

I AM A SINGLE MOTHER. I LOST MY JOB.
TO MAKE MONEY I HAVE THESE LAMINATED ALPHABET CARDS.
I AM ASKING FOR A DONATION FOR EACH OF MY THREE CHILDREN.

Flustered by the woman's boldness, Stella ties her long straight blond hair into a knot at the base of her neck. The wind blows lightly. Rain spatters the stairs. The two women stand looking at each other.

Stella is a single mother with one child and no job. Today, she applied for three.

"Did you include an email address?"

"I don't have a computer," Stella told the woman at the Customer Service desk where she filled out the application.

"We'll call you."

Stella and her daughter Annie have been on their own for eight months now. At first, she accepted the invitations of friends and family. Charity begins at home. But it made her feel desperate with shame. She sold her Frye boots and guitar, and now makes pies for the Saturday market, sharing a table with the tie-dye lady she met at the separation and divorce clinic. The group of eight sat in a circle and the counsellor went around asking each of them to offer something of themselves and their experience. Stella and the tie-day lady, Rose, had grabbed each other's hands when the guy in the wheel chair with no legs started yelling, "The fuckin' bitch won't let me see my kids." After getting over the outburst, Stella wondered if he was sure they really were his children. *Grinding poverty*, she thought. *Please don't let me slip into grinding poverty.* The woman from the clinic leading the circle asked him to watch his language. "Does anyone else

have anything they would like to share?" As the group broke up, Rose and Stella gave each other a look like, *Whoah, I'm glad that's over.* They exchanged phone numbers and Stella told her she'd get some fruit pies made for the coming weekend.

During the week, Stella walks Annie to school, then takes her two dogs, Catahoula Leopard X brothers she rescued from a high-kill shelter in Arkansas before the break-up, down to the beach where she tries to tire them out by throwing endless sticks into the waves. But she barely makes a dent. *You shouldn't really have those dogs, should you?* This question repeats itself in her head like a bad dream. "I'd rather eat crumbs off the floor," she mutters under her breath, as she puts a bag of carrots back on the shelf instead of into her basket. And some days *are* more lean than others.

The deaf woman stands patiently looking at Stella—the silence between them somehow appropriate. Stella imagines the woman as having migrated from a foreign place. Perhaps there is a war and her husband has remained behind. Some kind soul in a church basement has helped her come up with the words on her card. It's impossible to know if she "speaks" English. And what about the photo? No father. Maybe he was killed in a roadside bombing. Maybe she's a doctor.

She waves the card at Stella and looks expectant. As it happens, Stella does have twenty dollars in her sock drawer that she's saving for a small emergency. But the universe seems to know she has a secret cache and makes it a magnet for "good" causes—Brownies in uniform selling Girl Guide cookies, for instance. She's got to toughen up. That's what all the get-out-of-debt books say. *If you're serious,* they say. *I am serious,* she says, but the universe and the gods don't understand. They're working on such a grand scale. *Hey, what you've got there in your puny little wallet is chump change. Maybe to you,* she says back, *but you have no idea what it's like to live on earth. You're just a bunch of spoiled brats who start cities on fire with lightning when you don't get what you want.* Stella feels bold in her thoughts. She knows there are no gods, only the universe is real.

She mouths to the woman slowly, *I don't need the alphabet card,* shaking her head and pointing at it. She looks at the door and makes her right hand bark, thumb and index finger opening and closing, then holds her palm up and asks her to *Wait.* The woman smiles and nods and signs something. Stella squeezes back through the door. Eager dog faces look at her in anticipation. She can only disappoint. Her bedroom is just inside the door and she looks down at her six-year-old daughter asleep in the futon bed they share. Snoring quietly. She opens the top drawer of the chest-of-drawers and pulls out her lucky buckskin wallet with the beaded moose head from the jumble of socks and underwear. It's hand-tanned

and still smells faintly of smoke. She looks at the twenty-dollar bill. *How do I know she's really deaf? Her jeans have a crease down the front.* Her daughter rolls over and hugs her blanket.

Stella goes back out and hands the bill to the woman who just smiles back at Stella and puts her hand up in a gesture of *No*. Stella is puzzled and watches her go down the stairs and back out into the night. As she turns to go inside, the toe of her right slipper catches on the doormat, and she realizes now why the woman kept looking down at her feet earlier as they stood in silence. Both soles are detached from the toe to a third of the way up each slipper, and the rabbit-fur trim is mostly worn off at the ankle.

"Tonight at least, I'm not alone," she says to her dogs as she goes back inside. *Who else will open their door at this hour?*

Matt Rader

WHEN FOR A TIME I LOVED TWO WOMEN

You lived as though no one knew your name.
Across the lake, hills hummed with wildfire
So at night a rash of red-orange eyes stared
Back across the surface, a tremble of beasts
Stamping and snorting within the black—
Possessed, vatic, mercurial—ready for you
To disrobe before the cool, dark altar of water.
Already the stars were redacted by smoke
While up canyon hikers and coyotes bellied
Down in the creek to breathe out the flames.
On those nights, when you stood naked, alone
Or with company, skin ringing through
The dark city park beyond the tennis courts,
You dragged laughter across your face.

We lived as though jokes were overtures
Unexplained. It is better, we thought, to set
A sea-green kraken of aloe in a window pot
Than to keep a good journal. The rubber
Plant steered its fleshy paddles toward a shore
Made entirely of light and we noted this
Grace daily over plates of pork and rice.
Already, we wore thin jackets to help us
Forgive the wind, while helicopters blew
Rain beads off acre on acre of dark cherries.
In those days, when spiders dressed the deck
In delicate knitwear the colour of water,
And all our friends drifted off in aeroplanes,
We'd not yet heard that one about birds.

I lived as though the weather had nothing
To do with me and the tired August light
Was never disappointed to be light and be tired.
I'd swim out in the river with one woman
And then another and by a wry wave of hands
We'd hang in the current and watch galaxies
Of dust swirl by on warped panes of water.
Already crickets were assembling evening
With its failing memory for faces and light
While clouds flowed like fire across the sky.
In those years, when I saw a woman's face,
Above or below me, eyes stricken, perfect,
Closing on something too bright or distant
For me to see, I understood little of the hilarity.

CAPTAIN AHAB AND THE GREAT SHROUD OF THE SEA

The body lets no one forget. Even that child
With the cavity going right through her
Tooth to where the roots have not yet formed,
The child who falls now through the dark lake,
Opaque enamel of ice rising above her
And described in the ice a penetrating hole
Of blue light through which no one looks
Because she was just there and now gone,
Through which, after evening is inked,
Portable lights are trained. Even Jeff Buckley
In all his clothes following that speedboat
Down the secret of the Mississippi River
As if it could ever be enough to just disappear
With something as ancient and single-minded
As the Mississippi River, and go wherever it goes,
Full of mud and litter, the bodies of animals,
Abandoned cars, effluent, highway runoff
Emptying into the Gulf of Mexico. Even
The Gulf of Mexico with its deep water
Wells trembling in another ether. Even
The diver with his pneumonic devices,
His flippers and searchlight and neoprene
Descending now through the portal of ice,
Jeff Buckley singing Leonard Cohen in his mind,
And the poor family huddled on the shore
Beneath the willows, breathing out a cosmos
Of water vapour in the cold night, all the absent
Stars overhead like missing teeth in a mouth
Of such expanse that all things exist within it
And are cancelled in one last involuntary breath.

Barry Dempster

UNTITLED

It was a humid April afternoon at the Whitney when she happened upon a particular Rothko *Untitled.* Her hair was damp and disobedient; trying to pat down the sides left a thin film on her palms of what earlier that morning had been hairspray, but now felt sticky like not-quite-dry paint.

She found herself underwhelmed by a Rauschenberg, and then a Haring. An Alice Neel portrait of a woman the colour of a white crayon left her numb. It was a mistake to seek out art on such a unruly day. Life was the lens through which transcendence struggled. If she were miserable, even secretly miserable, the canvases would soak up negativity and return it to her in disturbing new ways. By the time she reached the horizontal colour palette of the Rothko, she was so toxic she could have poisoned a Turner sunrise.

What little she knew of Rothko was dreary: his emigration from Russia when he was just a boy; the death of his father soon after; the periods of depression like blots over what had otherwise been an illustrious career. And finally his suicide in 1970. She had visited the Rothkos at the Tate Modern a few years back and had almost been driven from the gallery by an overwhelming claustrophobia. She'd seen photos of the Rothko Chapel in Houston that had made her think of tombstones being rolled into place.

There was no art in her childhood. Her father, a salesman with a cruel streak, had frowned on creativity, hers and everyone else's. Her mother had once mentioned that she'd briefly entertained the notion of becoming a glass blower, to which her father had snorted out loud.

Rebellion at various crucial ages had been acts of survival. At fourteen, she wore makeup that conjured bruises and black eyes. At sixteen, she dyed her hair blond and wore it much shorter on the left side than the right. At eighteen, she brought home a boyfriend named Scoot who always stood with both hands tucked into the front of his pants, a stance that made the serpent tattoos on the backs of his hands stand out more than if his arms had simply dangled.

A stint in the design department of a city newspaper (after two years at art college) was followed by what was supposed to be a temporary position at a small advertising agency, dreaming up various versions of consumer happiness: bath products, Italian sausages, wristwatches. After a year of this, she was promoted to account manager. It wasn't until she'd been doing the job for almost another year that she was struck by the irony of having ended up in sales like her father.

Her artistic life was consigned to the occasional independent film, a relish for the twangy heartbreak music of Lucinda Williams, Gillian Welch, and Patty Griffith, and art galleries on business trips when she really should have been back at the you-can't-tell-them-apart hotels boning up on pitches and presentations.

It was the thick streak of midnight blue headlining the painting that gave her an initial shiver that day at the Whitney. It had the presence of something like fear, like endlessness. The woolly green stripe at the bottom of the canvas was what grass would look like if it was made of polyester: sensible grass that she could easily convince anyone to buy.

The yellow in the middle was egg-yolk buttercream or mashed squash drizzled with maple syrup. It was the shade of an apricot that had been grown on the sun. It was sex while still half-asleep, one hand trailing in a wake of waves. It was a crayon tucked between a five-year old genius's fingers.

Untitled was more intense than anything she could have imagined on her own. It was an accumulation of all that had gone missing over the last few years. She longed to enter the painting, boost herself onto the green swathe, reach for the blue, her bones melting the way sugar would when placed directly on the tongue. Her right hand was one flicker away from touching the painting. She could imagine the bumpy dryness of the canvas like an old woman's skin, the old woman she would one day become. But she held back, aware of the security guard keeping an eye on her from the far corner of the room: a broad-shouldered fellow with an Adam's apple too big to be swallowed.

It had been years since she'd felt anything close to passion. When she was eleven or twelve, she went through a serious crush on Jesus that made it difficult to sleep. Church had nothing to do with it. It was the fact that a man, not just any man, *the* man, supposedly understood her inside out. Christ seemed less complicated than her father. She knew that no matter how many times she let Him down, He'd just keep loving her.

But the relationship didn't last. He started repeating Himself and refusing to even consider the other side of an argument. He was already inside her body, so sex was out. Real men offered a bit of titillation, at least.

She left the Whitney feeling glum. Her throat was so dry, she wished she could cry a little, lubricate her breathing passages. Standing outside the gallery on Madison Avenue with its infamous concrete air, she noticed that the yellow cabs for which the city was famous weren't anywhere close to the sensuality of Rothko yellow. They were pale canaries instead of flames, breeze rather than wind.

The next day began with a meeting at the Chrysler Building, the gaunt boardroom table weighed down with platters of perfectly ripened fruit and pastel coffee cups. Lunch materialized at the stroke of noon as shapely bits of bread and garnish. Talk and more talk. She and her colleagues were selling Ontario, not the actual rock and root province, but an idea of it, a holiday contraption of verdant poses and storybook skies. When she was finally free, close to four, the streets of Manhattan looked like they'd spent the day indoors as well. She hailed a cab and almost said "Rothko" to the driver instead of "Whitney."

A new security guard, a chalky black man who wore his wire-framed glasses halfway down his nose, was standing close-by *Untitled*, but was watching a pair of teenaged boys mesmerized by the Neel nude. Her right hand darted across the distance and her fingertips brushed against the painting. She then lifted her hand to her nose and sniffed: beneath the bitter smell of cold coffee, she caught a whiff of oils as if she and the yellow had exchanged molecules.

If anyone had noticed her, they would have registered nothing more than a well-dressed woman strolling back through the lobby, flowing out onto Madison with complete confidence that everything she needed was just ahead of her. She kept up that pace as she made her way over to Fifth and the long, stone wall that separated the street from Central Park. Her gait was so purposeful that it might have seemed like she was about to leap over the wall. But she stopped at the first bench she came to and sat down, smoothing her grey silk skirt over her knee caps.

She felt the wooden slats of the park bench beneath her hips. She was in control of the world now and could make colour lie or tell the truth, whichever she pleased. Her fingers lay in her lap like quills or bristles. She stretched them ever so slowly, blood rushing back into her knuckles. She turned them over: there, on the tip of her index finger, was a yellow smudge that continued to spread until half of her hand had turned yellow.

By the time she'd arrived back at the hotel to check out, the yellow had extended up to her wrist. It felt as if the muscles beneath her flesh were hardening. She went into the bathroom and scrubbed at herself until she was raw. It wasn't the hand of an advertising executive anymore; it would have to be stuffed deep into her pocket in order to sneak it onto the flight home. She could already feel heat prickling in her left hand as well. And when she glimpsed down at her feet, she had a brief vision of artificial grass.

This wasn't the first time that a foolish act had transformed her. Sex with Scoot in the beginning had made her whole body feel like a huge vagina, head to toe. She'd been forced to lock herself in her room until she could feel the pulsing folds abating. And the day that her father died, her tears ran black despite the fact that she wasn't wearing any mascara.

There was no option other than to outlast the irrational (or was it pure recklessness?), patiently wait for her regular paleness to return. This wasn't a two-way street. The Rothko canvas back at the Whitney wasn't being leached of its golden yellow. The dab of her DNA was already disintegrating. She was the one in danger of losing herself.

She boarded the plane as soon as Business Class was announced. She tried to picture Toronto, wondering whether the April colours would be less vivid than the ones she was leaving behind in Manhattan. But when she closed her eyes, all she could see on the insides of her eyelids was a rose-tinted darkness. It was such a beguiling shade that she didn't open her eyes again for the entire flight, peeling back just a corner of one eyelid when a flight attendant leaned over her like a hemorrhage, offering her a tiny bag of pretzels, hardly enough to keep even a ghost of her former self alive.

CONTRIBUTORS

Sharon Bala is a member of The Port Authority, a St. John's writing group. Her short fiction has been published, or is forthcoming, in: *Grain*, *The New Quarterly*, *Room*, *Riddle Fence*, and an anthology called *Racket* (Breakwater Books, Fall 2015). Visit her at sharonbala.com.

Lucy Bashford has published creative nonfiction in *Room*, and fiction in *Grain*. She lives in Victoria, BC.

John F. Buckley has been writing poetry since March 2009, when his attempt at composing a self-help book went somewhat awry. His publications include various poems, two chapbooks, the collection *Sky Sandwiches*, and with Martin Ott, *Poets' Guide to America* and *Yankee Broadcast Network*. His website is johnfbuckley.net.

Barry Dempster's collection *The Burning Alphabet* won the Canadian Authors' Association Chalmers Award for Poetry in 2005. In 2014, he was nominated for the Trillium Award for his novel, *The Outside World*. And in 2015, he was a finalist for the Ontario Premiers Award for Excellence in the Arts for the second time.

Kim Fu's debut poetry collection *How Festive the Ambulance* will be published with Nightwood Editions in Spring 2016. Her novel, *For Today I Am a Boy* (2014), was a finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Prize, winner of the Edmund White Award, and longlisted for Canada Reads, among other honours.

Elizabeth Horneber's essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *AGNI*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Grist*, *Yemassee*, and *Monkeybicycle*. She was selected as a winner of the Loft Literary Center's 2015-2016 Mentor Series. She teaches creative writing in Mankato, MN.

Mallory Imler Powell is a writer and editor originally from Kentucky. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Synesthesia Magazine* and *Contemporary Verse 2*, and she also writes about health disparities and research. She studied at Transylvania University and received a Fulbright award to Vietnam. Visit her at malloryimlerpowell.xyz.

Originally from New Westminster, BC, **Joseph Kidney** is an MA student at McGill University. His poems have appeared in *The New Quarterly* and *Vallum*. He is a poetry editor for *Scrivener Creative Review*.

Pamela Langevin lives in Victoria, BC with her fiancé and her cat, Goblin. She has poems in *Grain* and forthcoming in *Prairie Fire*. Follow her at @pamelangevin.

Jami Macarty is a poet, editor, arts administrator, and community advocate. Currently, she teaches contemporary poetry and creative writing at Simon

Fraser University, and is an Advisory Board member and an editor of *The Maynard* poetry journal. A recipient of a BC Arts Council creative writers grant, her poems have been published or are forthcoming in Canadian and America journals, including *Arc Poetry Magazine*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Drunken Boat*, *Grain*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Interim*, and *Slant*, among other necessary journals.

Donovan McAbee lives with his wife in Nashville, TN. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *RHINO*, *Friends Journal*, *The Poetry Review*, *Reflections*, and other publications. He currently works as Assistant Professor of Religion and the Arts at Belmont University.

rob mclennan is the author of, most recently, *notes and dispatches: essays* (Insomniac press, 2014), *The Uncertainty Principle: stories* (Chaudiere Books, 2014), and the poetry collection *If suppose we are a fragment* (BuschekBooks, 2014). He spent the 2007–2008 academic year as writer-in-residence at the University of Alberta, and regularly posts reviews, essays, interviews, and other notices at robmclennan.blogspot.com.

Ben Merriman's writing has appeared in dozens of journals, including *Boston Review*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Democracy*, *n+1*, and the *Threepenny Review*. Read more at benmerriman.tumblr.com.

Elizabeth Morton is a poet and sometimes student from New Zealand. She has a keen interest in neuroscience. In her free time she collects obscure words in supermarket bags. Her poetry has been published in *Poetry NZ*, *Takahe*, *JAAM*, *Blackmail Press*, *Meniscus,* and *Shot Glass Journal*, among others.

Robert Nazarene founded *MARGIE / The American Journal of Poetry* and IntuiT House Poetry Series, where he received a publishers' National Book Critics Circle award in poetry. His first volume of poems is *CHURCH* (2006). A new collection, *Bird In The Street*, is upcoming in 2016. His poems have appeared in *AGNI*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Columbia*, *The Iowa Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Salmagundi*, *Stand* (UK) and elsewhere.

Amanda Paananen is a Vancouver-based poet. Her writing has been featured in *PulpMag*, *The Runner*, as well as *Misfit Lit.*

Alex Pugsley is originally from Nova Scotia. "Karin Finally" is the tenth published story in a narrative series about the Mair and McKee families. Earlier excerpts have appeared in *Eighteen Bridges*, *The Walrus*, *Brick Magazine*, and *The New Quarterly.* Recently, he won the Journey Prize, and last year he wrote and directed the feature film *Dirty Singles*, available now on iTunes and The Movie Network.

Matt Rader is the author of three collections of poetry, *Miraculous Hours* (2005), *Living Things* (2009), and *A Doctor Pedalled Her Bicycle Over the River Arno* (2011). He is also the author of the story collection *What I*

Want to Tell Goes Like This (2014) and several chapbooks including *I Don't Want to Die Like Frank O'Hara* (2014). His work has appeared in journals, magazines and websites across Canada including *Geist*, *The Walrus*, *The Malahat Review*, *The New Quarterly*, *Joyland*, and *Hazlitt*. His latest book, *Desecrations*, is forthcoming from McClelland & Stewart in Spring 2016.

Annie Reid is a video game writer and story editor, whose work has appeared in publications such as *American Short Fiction*, *filling Station*, and on the Canada Writes website, as a finalist for the CBC Short Fiction Prize. She is currently completing a collection of short stories and a novel.

Søren Solkær is a Danish photographer best known for his portraits of musicians. Søren's photography is characterized by finding a tension point between intimacy and edginess. His portraits are regarded as cinematic in tone with a distinctive colour palette.

Craig Takeuchi is a Vancouver-based UBC MFA Creative Writing graduate whose short fiction has been published in several anthologies, including *Best Canadian Stories 2000*. He has also written for numerous local, national, and international publications. He is currently a staff writer for the *Georgia Straight* newspaper, and teaches creative writing at Langara College.

THE LONDON MAGAZINE

Ignite Your Conversation

Six issues a year

-£33 UK

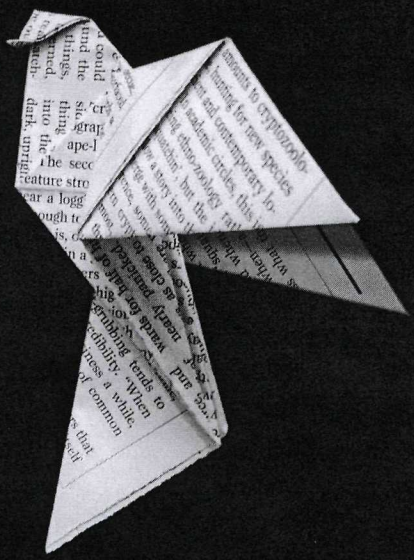
-£43 EU

-£51 ROTW

Subscribe today by simply visiting:

thelondonmagazine.org

maisonneuve
ARTS OPINION & IDEAS



A piece of mind.

www.maisonneuve.org

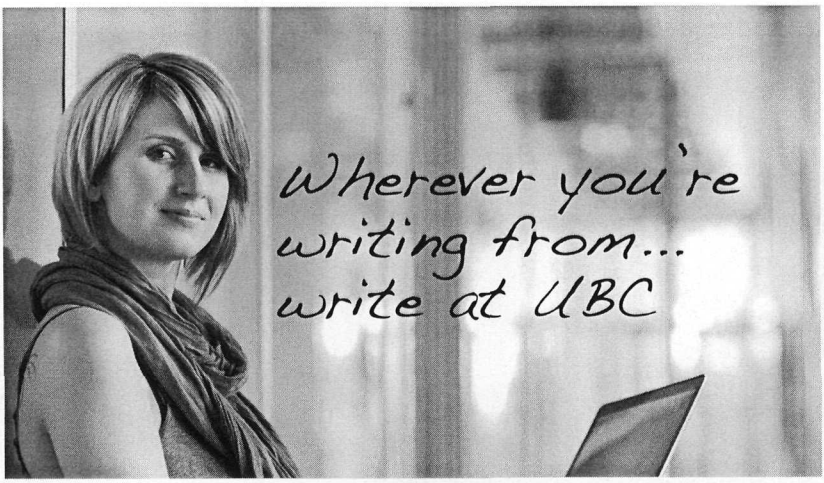
IR

INDIANA
REVIEW

Fiction
Poetry
Nonfiction
Artwork

SINCE
1976

indianareview.org
inreview@indiana.edu



Eleven Genres Of Study | On-Campus or Online | All Levels

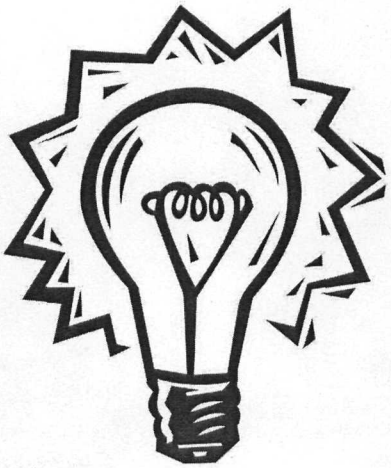
Write and learn on our breathtaking campus in Vancouver, Canada, one of the world's most livable cities. Or participate in a vibrant online community from wherever you live. UBC offers world-class creative writing programs at the BFA and MFA level, on-campus and by Distance Education. Join us.

Faculty

Alison Acheson
Deborah Campbell
Kevin Chong
Maggie de Vries
Charles Demers
Steven Galloway
Sara Graefe
Wayne Grady
Nancy Lee
Annabel Lyon
Keith Maillard
Maureen Medved
Susan Musgrave
Andreas Schroeder
Linda Svendsen
Timothy Taylor
Peggy Thompson
Rhea Tregebov
John Vigna
Bryan Wade

a place of mind
UBC

www.creativewriting.ubc.ca

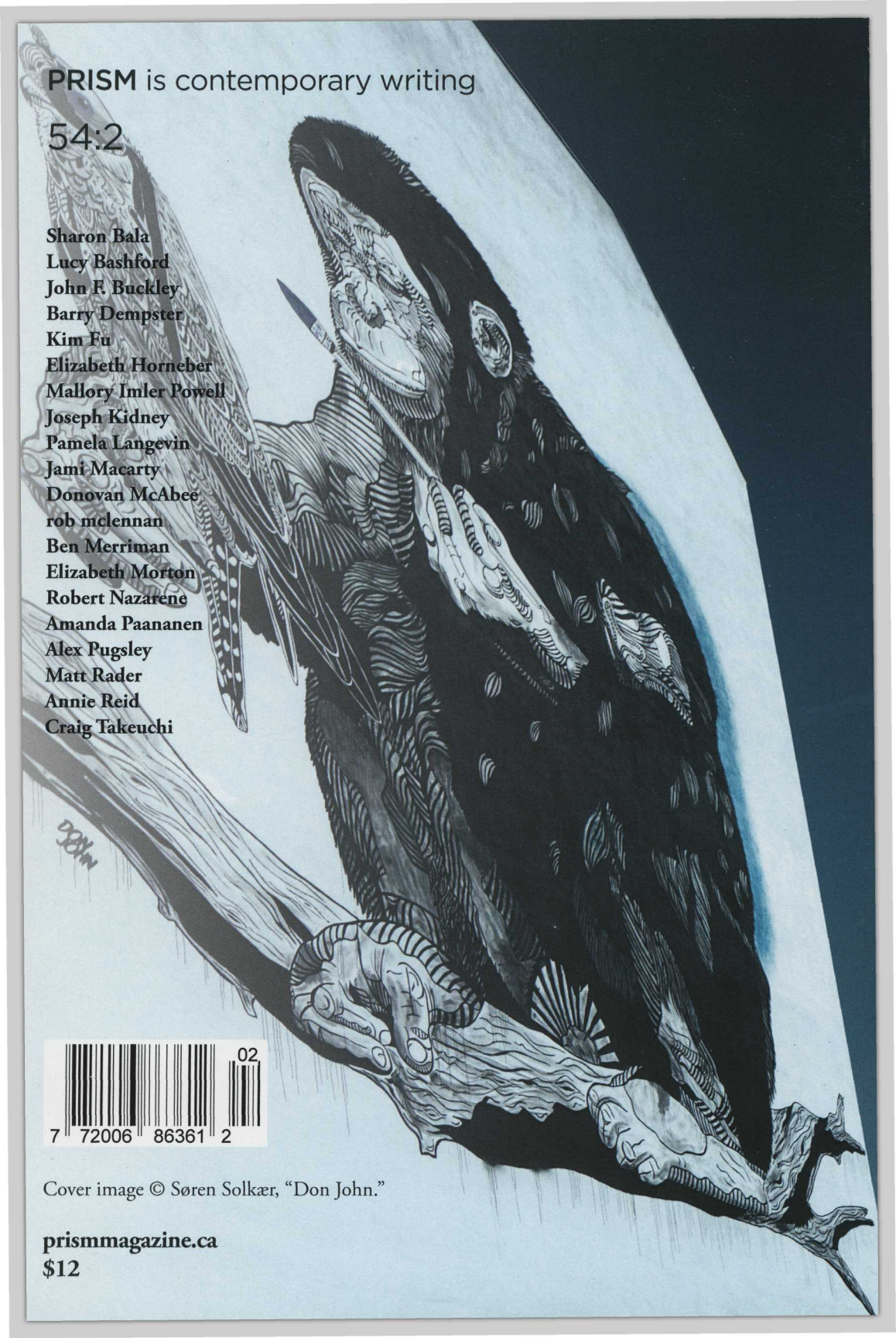


Congratulations
Creative Writers!

Rolex is proud to be the printer for PRISM international.

ROLEX PLASTICS & PRINTING LTD

www.rolexplastics.com Call Toll-free 1-888-478-5553



PRISM is contemporary writing

54:2

Sharon Bala
Lucy Bashford
John F. Buckley
Barry Dempster
Kim Fu
Elizabeth Horneber
Mallory Imler Powell
Joseph Kidney
Pamela Langevin
Jami Macarty
Donovan McAbee
rob mclennan
Ben Merriman
Elizabeth Morton
Robert Nazarene
Amanda Paananen
Alex Pugsley
Matt Rader
Annie Reid
Craig Takeuchi

7 72006 86361 2 02

Cover image © Søren Solkær, "Don John."

prismmagazine.ca
$12