PRISM international

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PRISM international

2016 EARLE BIRNEY PRIZE FOR POETRY

PRISM international is proud to announce the 2016 Earle Birney Prize for Poetry. This prize is presented annually to one outstanding poet selected from our outgoing Poetry Editor's volume. This year's winner is Amanda Paananen for her poem "It's the Chicken Parable," which first appeared in *PRISM* 54:2.

Earle Birney established UBC's MFA Program in Creative Writing in 1965—the first university writing program in Canada. The Earle Birney Prize, awarded annually and worth $500, is *PRISM*'s only in-house prize. Special thanks to Mme. Justice Wailan Low for her generous ongoing support.

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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.

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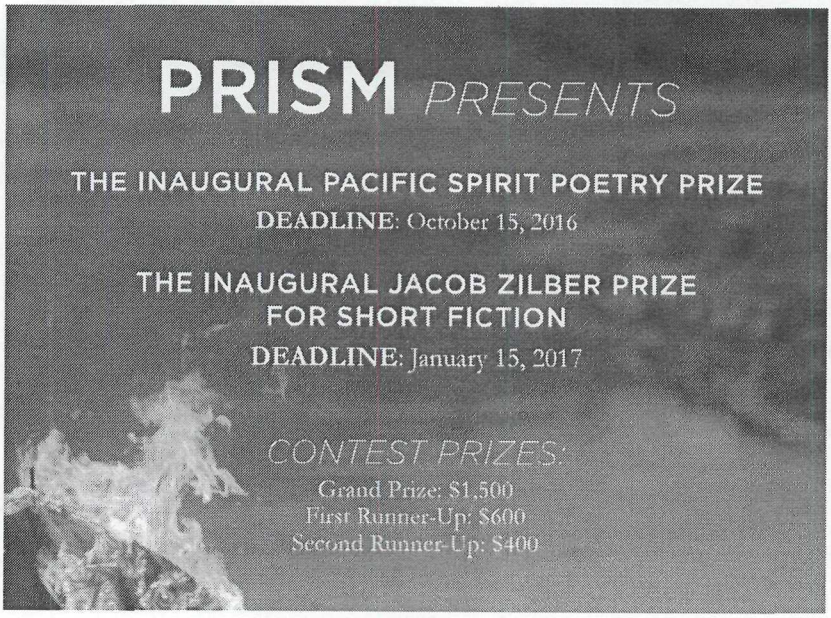

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a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Michael Meagher

USED TO IT

We wash and dry those big entrance mats you see slopped down inside offices and government buildings and banks. Our guys drive all over the city in cube vans, picking up those dirty mats before backing up to the bay doors. From the outside, the warehouse looks like a giant storage shed. Rusty, corrugated sheets of steel gunned into concrete. The floor's grey and cracked, and there must be a million clean mats, stacked neatly on shelves. Row after row after row. Waiting to be taken away. Rubber, carpet, studded, 6'x8', 6'x10', 8'x10', 10'x12'. They all have their proper place among the barrels of chemicals and cleaning solvents.

A couple guys unload the vans, and one runs the washers, and another the dryers. When a dryer bell rings, two buttons are pressed—the first tilts the hulking machine forward, the second spins the mats into a twisted mess, spitting them onto a cart in the process. I dabble a bit, but mostly untangle. Imagine trying to straighten out a boxspring-sized pretzel made of rubber. Then doing it a hundred more times. Heaving and jerking like a turtle on its back. The final—and easiest—step is folding and putting away the mats.

Before my hands hardened and withered like sun-dried tomatoes, the heat in the rubber would burn into them. Eat right through the Kevlar gloves. The work's messed up the rest of my body, too. I'm only thirty, but you'd probably guess forty, or maybe even fifty. A lifetime of steam and cancer in ten years. Battery acid seeping into all the folds and cracks of skin. My face and arms bumpy like a gourd or avocado rind. Although I'm well set and you'd be hard-pressed to find a roll of fat, you might say I've become ugly, or, at the very least, an acquired taste.

My shift runs noon 'til ten or eleven. Sometimes longer. That means a good piece of overtime with each paycheque. The idea of an extra couple hundred bucks every two weeks was nice in the beginning, but it quickly became an expectation, so it's not so special after all.

Me and Simms are always the last to take off. He runs the final loads, and I work apart the mats. "Grab the knot and tug," he said once. "If it doesn't work, go to the other side of the cart, try another angle. You always wanna be moving, always bucking. Like a bull. Never flatfooted. Remember that," he said, "'cause I won't tell you again."

Jonathan Skidmore was on the job only three days. The work seemed simple enough: pour the chemical from a larger container into a smaller one. The supplier label identified this chemical as flammable and combustible. Jonathan knew that flammable and combustible means more than simply not smoking in the area. You also have to make sure that there is no equipment nearby creating sparks, flames, or heat, and to take precautions to prevent the buildup of static electricity.

Jonathan walked over to the larger container and removed the cap. Without warning, the chemical burst into flames.

The fire burned eighty percent of Jonathan's body.

How could this senseless tragedy have been prevented?

Jonathan's employer should have told him that certain liquids may cause static electricity to build up while they are being poured.

The fire that burned Jonathan was started by static electricity.

To prevent static electricity from building up you must ground the larger container to a ground in the building, then you must bond the larger container you are pouring from to the smaller container you are pouring into.

Jonathan died three days later in the hospital.

The instructor got out of his chair and walked to the front of the room, where he'd been standing before the video started. He'd dabbed himself with cologne that morning, so he stunk of iodine and spruce. He wore a polo shirt with an insignia on the shoulder. A tiny knight's helmet. Probably the mascot of the business school he graduated from. In the chest pocket, he'd tucked three pens. One each of black, blue, and red. He wore creased khakis and a pair of dress shoes. Didn't look a day over twenty, although it's hard to tell with men like him. Men who don't work with their bodies.

The old guy, Art, would wear jeans and a Stihl or John Deere sweatshirt. And he never stood while he talked. He'd sit at the table with everyone while explaining how to clean a chemical spill. Then he'd take a stack of laminated pictures out of his binder. "This is the sign for flammable," he'd say, holding up a picture of what looked like a boy scout's campfire. "And believe it or not," he'd laugh, grabbing another sheet from the pile, a drawing of a test tube or thermometer shaped like a condom, "this still means compressed gas."

He'd turn off the lights for the video, to make the experience more cinematic. And when he related back to case studies of guys whiffing unlabelled chemicals, he'd look at us with this puzzled expression that meant *what fucking idiots*. The new guy was all business, though. He even put clinical photos on the overhead. Arms covered in blood blisters, a pussing eye socket the size of a grapefruit.

"Did anyone take notes?" he said. "That's why I keep the lights on for

training videos."

"No one took fucking notes," Simms said.

"Easy, Charlie," Tony said. "He's just doing his job."

"Just give me the fucking test."

Charlie Simms has been working the washers for a couple decades. Right out of high school, I've been told. But his skin isn't droopy like some of ours. It clings to his face like plastic wrap. Like he's been given Botox injections. So perfect it's off-putting. I'm sure that's why Tony, the manager, hasn't canned Simms—who knows what demented cells are pulsing inside, and if he's capable of charging into the warehouse with a shotgun.

"It's all right," the instructor said. "I'll be out of your hair soon."

After he handed out the tests, he pressed a button on his watch and said, "You have twenty minutes."

He walked to the head of the table and crossed his arms in front of his chest. He hadn't been bothered by Simms—this wasn't the first time a grown man had cursed at him—but the instructor still looked like a schoolboy watching a tennis match.

Maybe the test was always meant to be twenty minutes, but Art was laid back. He'd give out the tests and tell everyone to take their time, then leave the room. Go to the bathroom or down the street for a coffee. He'd knock before coming back. "Hope nobody cheated," he'd joke.

What should you do if you spot an unknown liquid on the ground? A. Taste it to see what it is B. Smell it to see what it is C. Consult your supervisor immediately D. Put on gloves and wipe it up. Nothing differed from previous years. Questions, right answers, wrong answers. Even though Art was gone, I was relieved—maybe we all were—because the whole operation hadn't changed.

There are white collars like Tony. Older guys whose work has started to catch up with them. It's happened right in front of my eyes. You can't see it at first because it's deep inside. Then one day you notice a grey moustache hair or a widow's peak receding. A step that's lost its spring. Before you know it, sick leave. Ulcers and migraine headaches. I've never worked an office job, but I've seen people come and go.

And then there are white collars like that young instructor. And like Adam, the guy who'd been hired on as the new secretary. Adam's face was clean and pale and his hair always combed to the side. Poking out the sleeves of his button-down, his hands were white and chalky as latex gloves. He reminded me of a fawn being exposed to the ugliness of the world for the first time. So cute you want to kiss or snap its neck.

It was on the bench outside the warehouse I first talked to Adam.

Right after the training video. I'd just tapped a cigarette on the pack a few times and brought it to my lips.

"I always see people do that," he said, sitting beside me.

"Do what?" I said.

"Tap their cigarettes. I've never known why."

"Me neither."

We sat there for a minute, looking out at the field. It wasn't winter yet but most of the weedy grasses had already died back. It was only in late spring and summer they looked almost alive. A couple months later the field would be hard with ice, and the garden plants on the warehouse-side of the chain-link fence flattened-out and yellow.

"Do you have an extra one of those?" Adam pointed to the pack of cigarettes lying on the bench between us.

"Go ahead."

He took one out of the pack and put it to his lips. "Do you mind? It's the wind," he said. He shielded the cigarette with his hands while I flicked the lighter.

"Thanks. I'm Adam, by the way."

"Tom." We reached out to shake hands. Me with my fat parsnip fingers and him with his hairless, pencil-thin ones. By his grip, you knew he was a typist or a secretary, and couldn't have handled a day or even an hour downstairs. Steam and boiling water and splintered backs and anger. Packed together like wet clay and chucked into the corner of the warehouse. The Pit, it's called.

"How long have you worked here, Tom?"

"Long enough, anyways."

"I should've been looking at your test, then," he said, laughing smoke out his mouth.

"That may not have helped."

"So where do you put the butts?" He held out the half-smoked cigarette.

"Just anywhere."

He dropped it on the ground, twisted it out with his foot.

"Thanks for the smoke," he said, then got up and brushed off the front of his pants.

I'd came out of the bathroom wearing my new uniform. Navy blue work pants and a white t-shirt. "They're a little tight," I said to Tony.

"You'll grow into them in no time. It's like a sauna down here," he said. "In a good way."

"Whatever you say."

"Great," Tony said, clapping his hands together. "Charlie here will

show you everything."

There were three dryers side by side. Each as big as an upright minivan. At a right angle to the row of dryers were three washers. The machines formed an L, and gave a sense of enclosure. At the near side of the dryers was an open space with a large table. This is where Charlie Simms took me. Wheeling a cart of hot, tangled mats behind.

"Watch closely" were the first words that left his mouth. While Tony had talked, Simms just stood there, eyeballing. Trying to think of one good reason not to go batshit crazy and scare me away.

Simms bent his knees and clasped one of those rubber mats. He jerked his legs straight while tugging with his arms. He tugged again and again. Like a shock absorber having a seizure. When he finally yanked out the mat, like a tooth, he slopped it on the table. "If it's not working," he said, "get angry. Anger's your friend here."

"What am I doing exactly?" I asked.

"What I just did there," he said. "And when the mats pile up on the table, fold 'em and put 'em away. Now get to work."

Part way to the washing station, he looked over his shoulder. He saw the dumb look on my face, and came right back to where I was standing. "What the fuck did I say? Start ripping those things apart or you're finished. You hear me?"

With most jobs, there's that awkward first moment—even if it's only a minute or two—where you get your instructions, where you look at one of the old-timers and try to follow what they're doing. But at the warehouse, there was no real first moment, no moment that lay somewhere between working and not working.

The door was opened. And as it closed, I heard the bristles along the bottom sweep across the concrete. Then the scuff of dress shoes as Adam came to the bench. He bent over beside me and put down an empty can of tomato sauce.

"For the butts," he said, sitting down. "Do you mind if I have a cigarette?" he said, slipping a few quarters out of his pocket.

"It's all right," I said. "Go ahead."

"Are you the only one who smokes around here?"

"No, a couple of the other guys do."

"And where are they?"

"I guess if we all took break at the same time, we'd fall behind."

"So what's it like working downstairs?"

"Well. We clean the mats and then we dry and fold the mats. That's all there is to it. And before that, we unload them from the cube vans."

"It must keep you in shape, at least. Maybe not like pushing pens

all day, though," he said, laughing while pretending to flex his biceps muscle.

A noise left the back of my throat, halfway between a huh and a laugh. "Probably nothing like that," I said.

A guy came into the lunch room an hour into his first shift. "I messed my back up some good," he said to me. He was hunched over and reaching around, squeezing his lower back with his hands.

"Then take a seat," I said. "Drink some water."

Simms stormed into the room and put his nose in the new guy's face like he was acting out some sort of mating ritual. "Get the fuck back out there," Simms said.

"I think I threw my back out, boss."

"I don't care what the fuck you did. We're falling behind. I'm gonna see you in The Pit in thirty seconds," Simms said, then left. I'll tell you now that Simms doesn't discriminate. What I mean is that nobody's off the hook. It's fuck this and faggot that with everyone. His own mother could snap her arm in half, and Simms wouldn't feel bad.

"I don't know about this, pal," the new guy said to me. "I've done my share of construction over the years, but nothing like this. No, not like this."

"You have about fifteen seconds to decide," I said, pointing at the wall clock.

Just as the new guy's lips touched the arc of water spurting out the fountain, Simms came in. "What the fuck did I tell you?"

"It's my back, boss," the new guy said.

"Stop being such a pussy and get out there."

"I think I'm finished."

"When are you off break? Five minutes?" Simms said to me.

I looked at the clock. "Seven."

"Fuck."

Simms walked out the lunch room and the new guy out the front door. I once saw a guy quit after ten minutes. "Tell your boss 'thanks but no thanks.' This work isn't for me," he said. Walking off. Something I should've done by now. Before getting on at the warehouse, I'd jumped around for a couple years. Dishwashing, food prep, mopping floors. It was easier to leave those jobs. Sure, I was younger. But I also hadn't had a ten-year habit in my system.

"Mind if I have a drag?" Adam said.

"You can just take one," I said, and grabbed the cigarettes from the bench.

"I never smoke a whole one, anyways."

"I guess not." I blew smoke out the side of my mouth and passed him the cigarette.

He brought it to his lips and inhaled. He took another drag, then passed it back, a smear of saliva across the filter. "Sorry about that," he said.

"I don't mind." I brought the cigarette to my mouth, and my lips covered the smudge. It tasted sweet. Like honey or jasmine. Kissing him flashed through my head. Then jamming my dick down his throat. Those lips. Soft as applesauce. That's what happens when you go so long without touching someone—things pop into your head from nowhere.

I blew the smoke out my mouth, then took one last drag before dropping it in the tomato can beside the bench. It was just a blotch of glue keeping the label attached.

I lit another cigarette and gave it to Adam. After he inhaled the smoke, he rested his arm on his knee, the cigarette dangling between his limp fingers.

"How's it going downstairs?" he asked, giving me the cigarette.

"We had a new guy in there this afternoon."

"How's he doing?"

"I don't think he's coming back."

"No?"

"He couldn't relax, is all. The thing is, no matter what you do, the mats keep piling up."

"So what happened?"

"The usual story. It was his back. And Simms."

"Simms," he repeated, as if turning the word over in his head.

"I guess there's nothing you can do, though." I took a long drag and looked across the frozen field. I took another, passed Adam the cigarette. "And how's it going upstairs, then?"

"The same as downstairs, probably, except that it's paper, and there was no new guy," he said, laughing.

We sat there for a minute. I looked out at the icy field and Adam stared at the ground between his feet.

"So what's the deal with Charlie?" he said.

"You mean Simms? He's a piece of shit is what's the deal with him."

"'Cause he calls me gay whenever he sees me. Nearly every day for the past two months."

"You mean he calls you faggot?"

"Right."

"And are you?"

"Of course not."

"Then I wouldn't go around feeling special about it. He's called me faggot for ten years, along with everyone else. If it's not that, it's fuck face or shit hole or pussy."

"Isn't there something we can do?"

"Not really," I said. "I'd tell you he's still around because he's loyal. And because he's a good worker. But that would be horseshit. Between you and me, I think Tony's scared of him."

"Really?"

"Maybe. I don't see what else it could be."

"Jesus," he said. "And it's just the two of you every night?"

"For the last couple hours."

"How do you do it?"

"I ignore him. And that's what you should do."

"Still. Be careful, Tom."

"I'd worry about yourself."

Barney's teeth are bucked and crooked, and his mouth's always half open. Like he's on the verge of talking. And his face sags like he's got weights hooked into the cheeks. His shoulders are sloped and he's a little bent over. As if he's constantly about to grab something off the ground. He goes fast, but doesn't run. Or even walk. He shuffles with varying degrees of speed. Loading one dryer, unloading the next. Rolling carts of spun-up mats to the folding table.

By the time I start shift, he's been running the dryers for an hour. And there's a line of carts waiting for me. We've worked together a few years, but I couldn't tell you much about him. If we're lucky, I have time to say, "Hey, Barney," and he says, "Hey, bud," and the afternoon starts off on the right foot. Otherwise, Simms tells us we're not paid to *fucking* socialize before Barney can get a word in. So I grab one of the knots of hot rubber and tug, feel the blood rush into my crapped-out back. And Barney slouches back to the machines, ready for eight or nine or ten more hours of steam and vinegar and bleach. Screaming into his eyes and palms and gums like a shattered windshield.

Sometimes I'm on a roll. Yanking mats out of the rubber snarl, flopping them onto the folding table. Like I have a gift. But sooner or later, Barney brings a lump of mats that ruins my rhythm. Even if the mind's still game, the body won't co-operate. It's irrational, but in these moments I resent Barney. He seems like a decent guy, but I want to shove his face into a vat of antifreeze.

On top of the three regulars—Barney, me, and Simms—and the guys driving and unpacking the vans, there's a drifter. A guy who works wherever he's needed. Untangling, folding, shelving. He might last a day

or a week. Or half an hour. For that, he can thank the muscles and joints in his back. Shutting down before toughening up. He can also thank his hands. Covered in blisters and boils, some of them bloody. And it's not just the heat and friction. It's the rubber studs on the mat bottoms. A thousand thumbtacks chewing across twisting palms.

This guy—the drifter—rarely straightens out a cart in under ten minutes. But someone whose hands have been burnt numb, who's okay with gripping a tar-hot mat and wrenching, not letting go 'til it's free—someone like me—can tackle a load in six or seven minutes. Once or twice—and only once or twice—I may've gone down to five minutes. If I ever did four, Simms would cry to management. "We gotta knock thirty seconds off the dryers," he'd say. "To keep him on his toes." That's because a dry cycle's twelve minutes, and there are three dryers. Which means every four minutes, Barney wheels over a cart.

My back and hands may be hardened, but I've never gotten used to the bells. A buzzer means something's ready, but a bell means something needs to be done. A dryer bell clangs every four minutes, which is fifteen bells an hour. In a twelve-hour shift, 180 emergencies. And double that with the washing machines. No matter how far ahead you are, you're always on edge. Like trying to sleep under a smoke alarm with a low battery.

Bells take the place of familiar things—sun, moon, flower bud, nut sack, nipple. Naked men are in line. Marching beside a staggered row. Pyramid cedars and drying machines. One of the men is Adam. A bow tied around the base of his erection, his balls jingling. He tries to say something, but he's got a dinner bell for a face. So a metallic screech comes out. A bolt shot into my eardrum. Waking up wet. I sit, make for the lump of tangled rubber beside the folding table. But I stop and go back to bed. The people in those banks and office buildings don't know about this. Or that I even exist. A mat's taken away, another's slopped down. If my body hadn't been cut out for the warehouse—if I were a drifter—maybe I'd have gone to college. And become a filer. Hiding behind staples and pencils and stacks of paper by day. Cold sweating over them by night.

Adam was already sitting on the bench, which meant something wasn't right. He was looking at the field, all its grasses soggy from the spring rain.

I sat down, then lit a cigarette and passed it over.

"I'll see if I can't quit once and for all," he said. "A fresh start."

"What's wrong?"

"Today's my last day," he said. "I wanted to tell you sooner, but

couldn't. I don't know why."

I took a drag, then dropped the cigarette in the can. The label that said tomato sauce was gone. The wind and rain had been sneaking under, peeling the strip of paper from the steel. I don't know how many times I've walked over to the green garbage container and dumped a full can of butts. I never get them all out, though. Some always cling to the bottom. Wet and brown and permanent.

"I don't think I've ever seen you leave a cigarette unfinished," Adam said.

I've spent my warehouse years losing touch with everyone I know. At first, I'd still go out on weekends. I was proud of my thick arms and thick fingers. Stained with sweat and solvent. Dark as tobacco juice. I'd even bring the odd guy back to my apartment. Put my seven inches to good use. But I changed with time. And could never sleep enough. Then Adam came along.

"It's funny," I said. "How you get used to it. A job, looking out at a field, sharing a cigarette on a bench."

"Have you ever thought about leaving?" he said.

"I've thought about a lot of things."

"No. Seriously."

I squinted at the clump of maples at the far end of the field. Short and fat. Like candy apples stuck in mud. "Did Simms have something to do with this?" I said.

"With me leaving?" he said. "I wouldn't say that, but just thinking of him gives me the creeps. I had a dream a while back. I'm working upstairs as usual. Everything looks fine, except I'm alone. I hear someone walking up the stairs. Turns out it's Simms. Holding a gun in his hand. 'Hey faggot,' he says, pointing the gun at me. Just as he's about to pull the trigger, I wake up. And I never even worked with him."

"So it's because of Simms?"

"I never liked it here. The money, the hours, the work. None of it. Except you."

"Let me talk to him."

"There's no use. You said so yourself. Besides, even if he had something to do with this, it's too late."

"I guess you got a job lined up, then?"

"Yeah," he said. "It pays well."

"Maybe I can go work with you."

"A couple clerks riding off into the sunset together," he laughed.

"That would be the day, wouldn't it?"

"Let's go for a drink sometime, though. Here's my number," he said, handing me a piece of paper. "I should get going, but call me." He put

his hands on his thighs, then sat up from the bench. He patted my back and headed for the door.

I went with Adam the other day. This bar on the other side of the city. "I came here in university," he told me. Oak tables and oak chairs and oak countertop. Glazed and cloudy. Mozzarella sticks and fries and nacho cheese bubbling behind swinging doors. The place was divey enough that Adam could squeeze the inside of my leg under the table, slide his hand up the denim. But not so divey that he couldn't have his red wine.

"When we were sitting on the bench and I asked you about men," I said, "you said, 'Of course not.'"

"The same thing you would've said, right?"

He had his little boy's haircut and his collared shirt. But he drank, all right. Until we stood and walked past the table of college kids. Past the neighbourhood men slouched over the counter. So shrivelled they'd be wasted—although you wouldn't know—off a single pint. Paid the tab and fell into my car. Drove to my place. "Because I have roommates," he said. His hand on the back of my neck, the other down the front of my pants. My hands on the steering wheel. Raining outside. The red and green and yellow lights like slits. Then fumbling for the apartment key and teasing it into the key hole. Kitchen with a toaster oven, microwave, and a buzzing fridge. Dishes teetering in the sink. A mattress, and a television on a stand. Grey carpet. Musty like maggots on compost. And we're both naked, lying in bed. He's how I imagined. Chest flat as plywood. Just enough ass to grab onto. Nipples the size of fly bites. "It's been a while," I say. But no words behind his wine-pink teeth. Just his lips on my neck. Wet bodies slow. And then fast. Like mats being slapped together.

The white collars clear out. Then it's the guys driving and unpacking the cube vans. Then Barney. That leaves me and Simms. He's whipping the last of those sandy mats through the machines, and I'm working the folding table. I wait a good fifteen minutes after Barney leaves, then walk across The Pit, right up to Simms. "What the fuck are you doing, faggot? If we wanna be outta here by next week, get the fuck back over there," he says, pointing to the backlog of bloated carts beside the dryers.

"I'm gay, Simms," I say.

"I know. Why don't you unplug your fucking ears?"

"You're not hearing me," I say.

I'd planned on Simms going wild. But after skipping a beat. Trying to understand what I'd told him. It was in this confused moment that I'd hoof him between the legs. Watch him drop to the concrete. Squirm

there like a beetle. I'd roll him onto his back, press my foot into his sternum.

"Look at me," I'd say, but he'd wince.

"And this one's for Adam," I'd say, belting him a second time in the nuts. And one last shot—a bent-over haymaker—to the nose. Just to see him bleed. My wallet and keys and cigarettes would be in my pockets, but I'd leave everything else behind. Jacket, street clothes, backpack. Scrunched at the bottom of my locker. He'd be worming around like burning Jonathan Skidmore. And I'd book it to the car and twist the key in the ignition. Blaze home. "Come with me," I'd tell Adam. "Just shut up and come with me." He'd say yes, and we'd drive the gas out of the tank. Hole ourselves in a motel for the night, then keep driving. He'd find another job. And so would I.

Simms looks like a boy lost in the rain. I even give him a chance to rage, to justify messing him up. But he just stands there. This boy. So I walk out the door and drive home. Go back to work the next day, because who am I kidding? I say nothing and Simms says nothing. He never does. Only *pussy* and *fuck-o*. But no more *faggot*. What kind of logic is that?

Paisley Rekdal

KNITTED THYLACINE

Some still claim they are
alive, though the last known sighting
was in 1930, their skins so rare, London's
zoology museum has only one

knitted replica for evidence, its fecal blooms
of stripes laddering a tan backside: four-teated,
pouchless: belly a dirt-streaked cream stretched
like a child's sweater atop a hoop of willow switches.

You can make one
from a pattern you can buy, as you can knit
its spotted pelt on size 2 and 4 needles, which are

quite small, circular: you have to slit the shape in two
when finished, the way my grandmother did,

slicing my father's sweaters
through the sternum, sewing back the deckle edge
of each honeycomb and cable, as the farmers

in Tasmania taught themselves to do, lost
in the colonies of a world no white woman
would enter, and so began

to think like women, sitting before the same fire, knitting
socks and scarves and sweaters
until this work turned from necessity

to art. The first goal with knitting
is utility, and so I'm moved by the strangeness
of these yarn-pelts'

burrs and slubs, the mohair tufts
thin as a kitten's undercoat, though you can't knit
the cough-like bark, the shining teeth,

you can't knit the jaw

that unhinges like a book
with a broken spine. The knitted skins
are smaller than their wiry

counterparts, delicate, soft
as the wives the farmers dreamed of, sick of work
their fathers would have said

made them soft, waiting for wives to come and make them
grow rough beards again and trim their nails
so as not to wound the thin

pink lips their fingers opened; though perhaps
for themselves they'd already kept
nails short, beards long: loving

how wet each others' mouths felt beneath
such bristles, each like a slick surprise: the buttery sex
cut out of the sea urchin, perhaps, a toy they made

from lumps of clay and rusted sewing needles
and slipped to a friend as a secret gift, *look*

what I have fashioned for you, the figure
conjuring forth alternately the spines
of hedgehogs, porcupines, the teeth

of the little cat-shaped devil that lives
in the bush and cries and cries

like the mating cats that used to draw
my teenaged father onto the porch,
swinging his flashlight into the dark

until he saw two green sets of eyes,
and shot at them with the gun his father left him.

Then he would take his spoils back down to the house where,
for curiosity's sake, he skinned them:
slicing the pelts up through the belly, soaking the remnants

in formaldehyde: trying
to get the shape of the animals just right
on his mother's table, knowing
what they should look like but unable
to duplicate it, not even knowing
what their last expression should be, that of pain

or of desire, for they'd died in both, as his mother
sat in the dark with a farmer
my father had to call Uncle.

While an ocean away men sat
in their strained circles and pulled
one strand of yarn through the back loop
of another, trying to approximate

their sisters' stitches, sending samples in their letters
home, telling their mothers: *I am different now*;
telling their sweethearts: *I am changed*,

but keeping secret their stories
of a tiger that would steal your soul
if it found you, which is why

they called it a devil, for the way
it slept under the porch; for the way it would cry,
sounding like a lover, a brother, a friend, a mother,

sounding like an ache that can never be satisfied: how
how could they say they'd never heard it, these men
knitting and knitting the same dream over?

Of course they heard the cry. It broke them in pieces.
And when they woke,
they slipped out of bed, gathered their lights,

and rushed out into the dark to seize it.

Carolyn Watson

THE SWALLOW AND THE SQUID

Meg sat on the bottom step and listened. Upstairs, in the bedroom with the best view of the mountains, her grandfather lay dying. His green corduroy slippers were underneath the bed where she had hidden them. People had been coming and going for hours, but so far, no one had noticed. They were more concerned with her mother. "Poor Angela," they said as they made their way downstairs. "What a burden she's had."

No one said, "Poor Grandpa," and he was the one who was sick.

With this in mind, Meg moved up a few steps. She had stopped counting the flower arrangements her mother placed around the house. Every morning a man in a white van delivered more bouquets. "See how important your grandfather was," her mother would say, as if he were already dead.

The doorbell rang, and a visitor ran to answer it. More strangers entered the house, their voices hushed and concerned. The women carried cookie tins and casserole dishes covered with aluminum foil. The men held potted plants and bottles of wine. Like the others who arrived before them, these people wore fancy black clothes as if they were going to the theatre.

"How long?" someone said.

"The doctors gave him a month, but it doesn't look good."

"Oh, geez... Poor Angela. Maybe a quick departure is for the best."

Meg hugged her elbows and inched up another step. People patted her on the head as they went by. Some smiled sadly. Others offered to bring her a plate of food or a glass of punch, but she reminded them she was seven years old and could serve herself. Earlier, she had stolen a container of plain yogurt and a can of the strawberry stuff her grandfather drank through a straw. The combination made her gag. No wonder he was sick.

"I need your help," he had said the last time she snuck into his bedroom. "You mustn't tell anyone."

She put her ear to his mouth as he whispered his instructions. His voice was raspy, his breath warm on her skin. Pale blue tubes went up his nose. He hadn't sat upright in days.

"Never mind your mother," he said. "She has too much on her mind. Can I count on you?"

Meg patted his cheek. She tried not to look at the poop bag hanging

off the side of the bed.

Downstairs, a woman invited everyone to drink coffee and tea. "There's food on the table," she added, and Meg wondered if they had run out of space in the refrigerator.

The strangers ambled in groups of twos and threes toward the dining room. Their voices grew louder as they dug into the food. A few people laughed. Meg slid her bum up another step. She hoped they ate the stinky blue cheese on the top shelf of the fridge, but not the Nanaimo bars on the bottom. She hoped they finished the case of strawberry stuff and spared her grandfather further suffering.

"Not hungry?" said a voice.

Meg bristled. Lorraine stood at the top of the stairs with her arms crossed against her chest. The nurse wore a peach uniform and a beige cardigan that smelled like dryer sheets. Her pink stethoscope hung around her neck. Everyone said Lorraine was Grandpa's godsend, but Meg thought she looked like a squid. The nurse had been living at the house for months. She rarely left the yellow armchair in the hall outside the dying man's room.

"I could use a coffee," said Lorraine. This was a hint.

On principle (because who wanted to talk to a squid), Meg never responded when Lorraine spoke to her. She pressed her knees together and leaned forward. She wondered if she somersaulted down the stairs if she would survive. Her grandfather told her that death made people stupid, and she had been studying her mother for signs.

Lorraine paced from one end of the hall to the other, her white Frankenstein shoes squeaking with every step. She made little noises that some people mistook for humming, but Meg understood to be squid talk. If she got thirsty enough, the nurse would say, "I'll be a minute" and trudge down the steps to the kitchen herself. The minute usually lasted an hour. Squids gorged on stinky cheese and crackers. Meg waited patiently.

The doorbell rang again. More voices, casseroles and cookie tins. Lorraine licked her lips.

"I could use a little television right here," she said, and tapped her knuckles on the narrow table across the hall from her armchair.

Another hint. If Meg relayed it to her mother, which she would not, a television would appear within days. Lorraine needed to stay happy because Grandpa was a pain in the ass.

Meg unbuckled her shoes and buckled them up again. Her mother had insisted she wear her best dress. Meg was not sure if this was for Grandpa's sake or to impress the people downstairs. Her mother had dressed up, too, though she forgot to brush her hair. Not that Grandpa

cared. He wore a blue hospital gown and his favourite black baseball cap. He told Meg it was because he had tickets to the World Series, but her mother said he did not want people to see him bald.

"Something sure smells yummy," said Lorraine. She picked up her empty coffee mug, fingering the handle. "Where did your mother go?"

Meg pressed her lips together. On principle, she wouldn't tell people where her mother was either.

Lorraine frowned. She replaced the coffee mug on the table, stretched her arms above her head, and yawned. "A lot of people sure like your gramps," she said. "Rich people, too."

Laughter drifted up from the dining room. The visitors told lawyer jokes, comparing the dying man to pit bulls, sharks, and the plague. Meg rocked back and forth, hoping her grandfather stayed alive long enough for her to honour his request. Lorraine was making it difficult.

The doorbell rang again. Meg shot the nurse a sideways glance and scurried up another step. In the dining room, someone told a joke about a lawyer tricking the devil into signing something called a prenup.

"I should answer that," said Lorraine.

She jogged down the stairs, squeaking and huffing as she went. Meg scrambled up another step. She smoothed her skirt over her knees and stared at the nurse's squidgy back.

"Lorraine," said Meg's mother when she saw her. "You don't have to play butler."

"I was on my way to the kitchen," said the nurse. "I could use a little snack."

"Oh, by all means, help yourself. We have more food than we know what to do with."

Meg waited until Lorraine left and her mother was busy with the latest group of theatregoers. Then she raced up the remaining steps, checked over her shoulder, and slipped into her bedroom.

"Amanda," she said. "Grandpa is waiting for you."

The Springer Spaniel lay on the bed curled in a nest of blankets with her head resting on the pillow. Meg had smuggled the dog upstairs while Lorraine ate breakfast. Since Grandpa took ill, Meg's mother insisted the animal sleep in the basement. Amanda was fourteen years old. She was a wetter.

With effort, Meg coaxed the dog out of the bed. Amanda hung her head. She had left a puddle on the mattress.

"It's okay," said Meg, and she threw a pillow over the mess.

They walked down the hall together, their progress slow. Amanda dragged her hind legs and Meg kept darting to the top of the stairs to watch for Lorraine. When they reached Grandpa's room, Meg knocked

on the door.

"Go away," he said.

She laughed. "It's me."

He cleared his throat. That meant, "Come in."

She opened the door and let Amanda enter first. Grandpa lifted his head off the pillow. "There's my girl," he said, meaning the dog. "Put her up here."

Meg wrapped both arms around Amanda's belly and heaved her onto the bed. The dog stretched alongside him, putting her head on his stomach.

"Now lock the door," said Grandpa, and Meg did that, too.

He mumbled a few words to the dog, stroked her face and scratched behind her ears. Meg smiled. After a while, he looked at her. "How are you doing?" he said.

She shrugged. The room smelled like rotting vegetables and she suspected he was to blame. "You're right," she said. "The strawberry stuff is disgusting."

Grandpa chuckled. His eyes grew moist. "Want to help me die?"

Meg did not want to appear dumb, but from everything she had heard he was well on his way. "You don't need my help," she said. "Lorraine says the cancer is eating you alive."

"And how do you think that feels?"

Meg hesitated. She remembered the spider bite that crippled her the previous summer. Her leg itched and burned until green pus spurted out. "It probably hurts," she said.

"When it eats my brain," said Grandpa, "I won't recognize you or Amanda or those parasites downstairs. I won't even know my name."

"You'll be too doped," said Meg, quoting Lorraine.

Grandpa lifted his hand off Amanda's head and gestured to his bureau. "Top drawer. There's a bottle of pills hidden behind the socks."

With a quick glance at the door, Meg tiptoed across the room. She opened the drawer as quietly as possible. Her hands shook. Lorraine was due back any moment.

"There are two pills," said Grandpa. "I'll take them both."

"What about Amanda?"

He kissed his fingers and pressed them to the dog's forehead. "Don't worry about her. She'll know what to do."

Meg pushed aside his socks, which were all blue and black because he was a pig-headed man who would wear nothing else. The pill bottle lay on its side. As she picked it up, the doorbell rang. She heard running Frankenstein footsteps and someone calling her name. Lorraine, squeaking and huffing, moved upstairs, followed by Meg's mother, who

clucked impatiently. "She was on the stairs two minutes ago," said the nurse. "I didn't notice the dog."

"She won't leave that poor beast alone," said Meg's mother. "I wish I'd left it at the vet's."

When they reached the top of the stairs, there was a pause. "This place reeks of dog urine," said Meg's mother, whose nose was a powerful weapon. "She's got the darn thing in her bedroom."

Grandpa waved to Meg. His eyes were huge, frantic. "Hurry," he mouthed.

Meg remembered the spider bite, which had left a scar on her calf. She tried to imagine her grandfather not knowing her. As it was, he looked nothing like the man who had taken her to the park and pushed her on the swings. He was a shrivelled, colourless shell. "They go through stages," Lorraine had told Meg's mother. "Like the Seven Dwarves. Angry. Scary. Difficult. Dopey. 'Just embrace the morphine,' I say."

"The pills," said Grandpa. His eyes darted from the door to Meg and back again. "Please."

Meg opened the bottle. Her mother had talked about putting Amanda out of her misery, which meant giving the dog a needle so she went to sleep and never woke. When Meg protested, the response always was, "Amanda is in constant agony and that's no way for an animal to live."

She never said, "Put Grandpa to sleep," and he was in pain, too.

Taking a deep breath, Meg dumped the pills into his upturned palm. He put them in his mouth and motioned for water. She held the glass while he took a sip.

"You're my darling," he said, after he swallowed. This time, he meant Meg.

She sat on the edge of the bed and patted his cheek. She would not let herself cry, though tears blurred her vision and her throat was so tight she could barely speak. She was saving him from cancer, hungry squids, and the people downstairs who had come for the food.

"What should I tell everyone?" she said.

He sighed, relaxing into the mattress. "Tell them Amanda and I went to the World Series. If they don't believe that, just tell them we died."

Ben Ladouceur

CAMERON CARPENTER

The organist insists the infinite is hidden in his edifice.
When we clap we confirm our consensus towards this.
So he does some jumping jacks on this fart machine of his.
The dress shoes heeled and sequined and a blur.
The teardrop mohawk flopping in the airlessness.
Ultraviolent notes shed the shock before long.
Minor key for times of loss major key for times of intimacy.
Thank God he talks between etudes.
The voice of God one voice too few.
His point must be the organ contains multitudes.
And I of course a human contain organs.
Sweetbread beneath where my hands rest.
I have an assigned seat and so does everyone here.
Beyond that though I sit where I sit for complicated reasons.

MID-WINTER

Before I came here I lived in the ground.
Therein I read the story of the artist on the mesa.
Her suffering formed a bloom she threw her tongue into.
So faint her pencilwork we could not see it in 360p resolution.
You asked me what I saw in her.
It was a vast white plane.
It was damp and soft and yellow down there beneath the ground.
From below I saw the snow bisected by the dirty window.
The frost was a flash-frozen gossamer brittle and even and clear.
On the last night of that lease could you see me?
Backlit by the Keurig as its lasershow begged us for water?
If yes how whole was the form?

John Wall Barger

NIGHT OF THE PURSE POODLE

I peed on her shoes.
She shut her eyes.
My legs are numb.
My head spins.
I peed on her phone.
She hurled a soda
can. She no longer
calls my name
when she wakes,
she winces,
holds me apart.
I, once so light.
She no longer touches
her nose on mine.
I cannot walk,
I crawl down
the backyard stairs,
out of my collar
—*Big Girl*—pink,
into an immeasurable weight.
I crawl to the grass,
I cannot take it,
the chirping cicadas,
summer bursting
on all sides. Evening,
cold is growing.
Under the porch, beer cans.
Silent objects.
I know what I know:
fire & youth rise;
water & old age
flow downwards.
I was a gift. Look,
the old blue rag,
my first bed. Darkness
issues like a fog.

She was a gift
given when I had
ceased to look.
I crawl onto the rag.

LAST WORDS OF THE OLD MAN WITH THE PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY

Born with eyes cast wide
as nets, I held earth together
by my total recall.
I suffered nosebleeds.
I had no friends.
I was nine & unprepared
for my sister
her beauty. She is three,
I hold her tiny right hand,
we are crossing
a field. In her left hand
she holds a kite
tall as her. She stops,
mouth open: a deer
at the tree line.
The shoulder of the deer
rotting. A hole
dark & gaping
like some terrible insight.
I run with the string,
I tear her kite.
She sits in tall grass
in her green dress.
She isn't crying
or smiling, just looking
where the deer was.
Today it is winter,
night, cold on the lino.
Outside, city dogs
freeze. I am the deer.
Again, again
the kite in the sun:
blue light like veins
of the world.

Laura Ritland

ARRIVAL AT THE NEW COLLEGE

I had prepared everything ahead of time. Books, boxes,
the electric toothbrush and the novelty
paperweight by which I'd labour at night, writing
by the light of a lonely incandescent lamp. Year 2013,

Anno Domini. Now the real century begins. Now
to flip over the antique hourglass and herald in
a new era of intelligent inventions.
I went out and bought an ergonomic chair

which I found only later to be too expensive.
My convection heater blew a fuse
but when I looked for instructions to repair it,
I couldn't read Latin. Past the high medieval clutter

and stiff crowns of green copper, the streets gave way
to sweaty palimpsests of glass, cigarettes, a wounded
mattress and ticket transfers. To be modern,
I would have to be ready to let go

of a few things. To step past the grassy precincts
onto the curb of roaring two-way questions.
I caught a bus. I got lost.
I travelled to the sky's lowering edge.

I heard the future singing above me on steel rails.
I knew then I'd missed it by two minutes.

Tanya R. Ward

HOW DO YOU LIKE THEM EGGS?

Things my grandfather told me as a kid:

1. Eating my toast crusts would put hair on my chest.
2. Eating my toast crusts would make me whistle (effectively spraying crumbs all over my mother's beige carpet).
3. There is no such word as "can't."
4. We didn't need to buy eggs, because I could lay them.

"Squawk like a chicken," my grandfather said.

We were in the living room, my grandfather sitting in a worn leather recliner, me in front, on the brown shag carpet. The routine was simple: squat on this area of carpet, and *only* this area of carpet, facing the opposite wall, and *be one with the chicken.*

"It's not working," I said.

"That's 'cause you gotta flap them arms."

It never once occurred to me that the egg could not possibly drop out of my corduroy pants. And yet, following my grandfather's instructions, I would flap and I would squawk and I would push until my eyes bulged (*push like you're going to the bathroom*, he said—a risky thing to tell a four-year-old). And then the egg would drop onto the brown shag carpet, and I would turn around to look, and my grandfather would giggle; then my grandmother would cook the eggs however I liked and I would eat them with a huge smile on my face.

I want to tell you something now, but I'm not sure it's true. I have this memory of me, squatting in the field at school, trying to lay an egg for my best friend Lynn because she had forgotten her lunch. "Don't worry," I said to her, corduroy pants still intact, "I got this." Thing is, the field I remember is all wrong for Kindergarten—grassy and open, not sandy and small, and the little wooden structure we played in (complete with a captain's deck and a captain's wheel and a fireman's pole for quick and daring escapes), is curiously absent. And those pants didn't fit me in Kindergarten. You'd think remembering that part would be suspect too, but the clothes—the clothes I never forget.

And now I'm remembering the time I caught my cat watching the Discovery Channel—it was a show about turtles, and one of the turtles was laying a great big pile of glossy eggs—and when my cat turned to

me, eyes wide and unblinking, I giggled and said, "That's where you came from." And then the cat said, "For real, Ma?" And I said, "Damn straight, love. I picked you out of a whole pile of eggs and took you home and hatched you."

"Wow," the cat said, still unblinking. "That is so cool."

I embellish things a lot now.

This much is true: at the height of my egg-laying abilities, I peed myself on the coatroom bench at school, partly because I'd waited too long, partly because I was wearing a dress and assumed the pee would go right through the dress (and tights). And so I sat, tears welling, unable to stop the wet collecting under my bum and at my feet, making my wool tights damp and picky. That afternoon, I stood with my back against the brick wall of the schoolyard and let a soccer ball hit me in the face.

"You okay?" David said. This was a time in my life when I believed all Davids were beautiful, because I knew exactly two Davids and they were both divine. Later in life, David would say cool things like, "When were you born?" and I'd say uncool things like, "Eighty-first," but then I'd do cool things like, a soccer ball would come flying across the field and I'd stick my toe out and hook onto it just right and it would pop up into my hand and my best friend would say, "Wow. Sometimes you can be so cool."

Now, wouldn't that story have been more enjoyable if you didn't know the truth?

I don't remember the last time I laid an egg, but I do remember the last time I tried. On this day, I turned around to ask my grandfather why it wasn't working and I saw his leg swinging forwards, catapulting the egg on his toe. When the egg landed, it didn't even wobble; it just sank into the brown shag carpet. And then I stared at the brown egg on the brown shag carpet and then at my grandfather's foot in his thin black socks: first with disbelief, like when I peed myself in the coatroom; then with frustration, because I had been fooled; and finally with sorrow, because I would never lay another egg again, not even if I tried. And then, because I was a child, not a chicken, I began to cry.

"That's why I told you," my grandfather said, "to turn around and face the other way. Why did you look?"

"Come," my grandmother said from the kitchen, closing the refrigerator door with a soft hush. "Don't cry. We can still eat. How do you want your eggs?"

Michael V. Smith

PRAYER FOR PROMISCUITY

Midnight in Stanley Park,
the moon is an ally.
        Night
breathes into firs
a chill.

Men double
as tree trunks,
appear a darker
dark.

        Within, your ears
are readied eyes, sift
animal sounds
from human, some differences
of intent.

The dark
will always
see better.

As though it hides
our lovers like the dead

dead before
we met them,
the night teaches us
to miss what we never had.

Across Lost Lagoon, the apartment
complexes rise,
                pixelated
a horizon
lonelier than childhood.

If we'd been children
together perhaps
we could have saved each other.

When they lift
from the shadows of trees
what do your palms reach for?

Have you noticed
your fingertips,
bark peppering the skin?

I could lick them
clean as silence
if they rested here
and here awhile.

PRAYER FOR PATERNAL LOVE

All eight fingers
on his right hand refuse
to make him lucky
so that even at the dinner table
he cannot pinch salt from
the crowding
of his digits.
                Days after
he was born, Only dogs,
his father had said,
could ignore them.

Eight splayed
fingers on the back
yard stump, knuckles
around the wrist,
Hold still, the man says.

The boy prays the octopus
of his hand contains
a secret. Buoyancy,
or silt that storms
and settles, given time.

He has loved his father
less than either of them
would wish.

Now give it here,
his father says, and the boy
to prove the point
reaches for their axe.

Laisha Rosnau

TOP REASONS WHY WOMEN CHECK INTO PSYCH WARDS

They are tired
They are itchy all over
They hear voices
The voices are always calling them
The voices keep asking and asking and asking
No one can hear the women's voices
They refuse to speak

On the fall from bridge deck to water they believe they can fly and this conviction helps
them not to hit the water so much as disappear into it and when they surface the psych
ward is the place where they draw a breath and open their eyes

They have shown aggression
They have shown aggression toward themselves
They have shown aggression toward their children
They have shown aggression toward their husbands
They have shown aggression toward their parents
They have shown aggression toward their in-laws

They have shown aggression a way to move through them, to express a lineage of
aggression, to take the aggression of their family of origin as well as their spouse's family
and to express it as their own then pass it on to their children so that they too can show
aggression a way to move through them

They are excessively expressive
They are excessive
They are excess

They speak one language when awake, another when asleep
They refuse to speak their own language
No one can understand their language
They speak nonsense

They have been telling lies

They have told the entire village that the baby is not theirs, that the baby belongs to the
soldier, but there are no soldiers in the area and this is very upsetting to the husband.
They are not at war. There are no soldiers. They are not at war

They believe the lies people tell them
They keep telling lies
They refuse to speak

No one can hear the women's voices
The voices are always calling them

They hear voices
They are itchy all over
They are tired

Rachael Moorthy

WANING MOON SWELLS

Veiled by the plum light of dusk, the moon reeled the ocean into itself. Chandra could tell by the cove's high tide: cyclical teal waves glittered and frothed as she wobbled on the slackline.

"Oi, Jackie Chan!" Nads slapped the board-strapped roof of her piece-of-shit Civic and signalled Chandra to get in.

She cussed as she lost her foothold, swung the slackline over her shoulder and skidded around the beachstone Inuksuk Nads built to kill time while the park rangers were still lurking around. She dove into the passenger's seat and pressed her cheek to the car window. The tide would last for another six hours or so, before the moon continued on its orbit and let the water recede again.

"Damn roots." Nadia groaned as she swerved around a hillock of cement in the road.

Chandra's face conked against the window glass. Nads sighed, opened and shut her door, and the 90s mixtape carried on mid-"Whatta-Man". She figured there was a loose wire in the car. The radio cut out whenever they drove over uneven terrain or turned a sharp corner. Somewhere between the cold-pressed juice stop in Coombs and Ucluelet's gravelly back roads, Nads discovered that this could be dealt with by slamming the driver-side door. Her Civic had been confined to her parents' garage while she was away at Uni. It reeked of patchouli and stale chlorine, and was filled to the brim with almond-milk-macchiato-stained receipts, crocheted crop tops, and tarot cards—the sort of clutter that made Chandra cringe in a tangle of disgust and admiration.

They were en route to get a taste of Tofino's thirteen-foot waves before Nads left Chandra for the mainland again. She hadn't seen Nads since her last Skype call over reading break, before Nads started seeing that "actor" (really, a barista with an agent) and went all neo-luddite on her. An outdated online presence made it easy to underestimate how much she'd changed over the past year. For one, she'd gained some weight. A scarf of fat swathed her lower abdomen, and her tits, by some miracle of physics, had ballooned probably two whole cup sizes. Her once cystic acne was replaced by faint craters. Her tawny hair was thicker, shinier. Chandra figured she was on the pill now and probably having lots of sex over in Vancouver. Chandra, conversely, was not having a lot of sex. Chandra was not having any sex. All the chlorine sweat and two-a-day swim practices had caused her

to break out. Red papules bloomed on her forehead, back and shoulders. Unlike Nads' cupgrade, she was as flat as a placid lake. Her flannel button-up sloped in between her broad swimmer's shoulders like a frown. She was only fourteen percent body fat, sure, but she took up a lot of space. Bone structure. Muscle mass.

It wasn't just the freshmen fifteen, or the fact that she lost her virginity without telling Chandra, Nads was all "enlightened" now. One of her Ashtanga buddies told her she had a "purple aura." When Chandra mentioned she'd been doing hot yoga, Nads just rolled her eyes and told her that it was a "bastardization of the sacred practice." Then, she cut herself off with an "Oh God, I know, I know, ha-ha. Kill me. I am such a pretentious Vancouverite now," between sips of rosehip kombucha.

Chandra perked up as they rolled into the sardined lot. Looked like every surfer up Island heard the coconut wireless: last good swell of the summer. Nads pulled in beside a dingy Volkswagen. She parked and slammed the door for the umpteenth time. Chandra slid out of the car and tilted her head back to inhale the salty, evergreen air, reaching out to the bruised sky. The waning crescent moon looked like a toenail clipping; it's muted light softly outlined the peaks of the Sitka spruce.

"Alright, lets pitch this bitch." Nads chucked the bag of tent parts on the ground. Chandra set the lantern on the picnic table and got to work.

Nads connected the pole and assembled the frame. Chandra secured the rainfly. Nads got a fire going as Chandra unloaded the chow into the icebox: leopard bananas, blackberries, dark chocolate with toasted quinoa and hemp hearts, gluten-free graham crackers, and jumbo gelatin-free marshmallows. Carbs. Pure carbs. Chandra pulled out her precautionary cans of albacore tuna, liquid egg whites, and pea protein from her backpack. Then she squatted down to set the slackline up around a black Spruce. Her quads were sore. She'd done back-to-back Bikram yesterday; her coach had recommended yoga for cross training over the summer. No squat rack for her—breaststrokers were supposed to be lean.

Nads tore the bag of marshmallows open with her teeth. "Want one?" she asked, stabbing a stick through the candy pillows.

"Nah."

"Golden brown, just like you."

"Golden brown sugar and horse hooves."

"They're gelatin-free."

"That's what they want you to think." Chandra hopped off the slackline, galloped and neighed.

"Don't be a dick." Nads pelted marshmallows at Chandra's butt. "Did you eat anything today?"

After the fire thinned out, night's sea-chill shepherded the girls into

the tent. Go-Nads was out like a light. The rhythmic undertow of her whistling snore came in at predictable intervals: sets of three breaking off every two minutes. Chandra, who struggled sleeping at the best of times, pulled her pillow over her head and tried to drown out the noise, fidgeting and grinding her teeth until 1:56 a.m., when the snores came to an end, replaced by Nads shuffling in the neighbouring sleeping bag, the sound of the mesh door unzipping, and footsteps softening in gravel. Ocean air wafted in through the mosquito netting, a wet, glacial whip.

Chandra groaned and scooched on to her knees to close the tent flap. That's when she saw her: Nadia's heart-shaped face, framed by the stale orange glow of the lantern, eating everything.

She inhaled what was left of the marshmallows, the browning bananas, the hemp heart chocolate, the gluten-free graham crackers, the blackberries. She swallowed it all like shame, like a secret, like lost virginity. Chandra burrowed back in to her sleeping bag. She stayed awake until Nads wafted back in: chocolate and overripe banana hot on her breath.

She woke to morning light stabbing through the rainfly.

Nads' face came into focus as she peered into the tent. "Hey man, you have a tampon?"

"Hmm? No. Sorry." Chandra furrowed her brows and avoided eye contact.

"It's fine, I'll check the car. Mother nature's a beautiful bitch." Nads shook her fists at the treetops.

Chandra fumbled out of the tent to the humbling crash and roar of the ocean. It was going off, she could feel it in the way the air cowered. She crouched in a bush to piss before suiting up, then mixed her protein powder with bottled water and stirred it until it congealed. Protein pudding. How late was she? Chandra lathered her shortboard with sexwax. She'd forgotten, somehow, that periods were a thing.

They treaded in silence, past the towering sea stacks, ignoring the galls of the seagulls, focused only on the horizon. Hard-packed sand glittered like a field of burnt sugar under the ashy overcast.

Chandra gauged the conditions: low tide, perfectly peeling barrels, fifteen waves per group with nineteen second periods and minimal chop. Beauty. The water burned cold, like iced cayenne pepper. It flooded her boots, then engulfed her whole suit, colder than usual.

A wave travels away from the area of wind that created it, forming a string of swells. The wave trains have smaller waves in the lead and the rear while the big waves are at the heart of the pack. That's where they were headed. The spring swell lent itself a difficult paddle out, but God, was it

ever beautiful. Sashes of tangerine singed the melting blue sky. The kelp-saturated water looked like gold broth filled with black soba noodles.

Chandra's shoulders burned with lactic acid as she dug towards the line-up. A ridge of liquid rose above the gold lip of the horizon. She aligned herself with the freshly baked wave as it cascaded towards her. She dug her arms into the water hard as it crested. She felt the wave surge with life beneath her feet as she popped up, perfectly positioned. She envisioned a quick bottom turn: she'd hug the wall, ride the wave all the way to the sandbar. Instead, she wobbled and pearled forward, smacked in the face by ice-cold green crush. The dulcet hum of underwater ear pressure drummed on her temples. She broke the surface of the water, humiliated, with a gut full of saltwater.

Nads gained a lead. She rose over the shoulder of a wave and dropped in, her powerful legs crouched, wet hair plastered on the nape of her neck. She carved balletically as the wave peeled, rotating her torso in the direction she wanted to go. Nads carved away from Chandra.

Chandra gripped the rails of her board and duck-dived beneath an oncoming wave. Cold. Hazy green. Underwater drum. Eight months. It had been eight months since Chandra's last period.

Focus, she thought, as she hustled into position. She paddled until her shoulders screamed. She caught the wave, just barely, but enough to feel it roll and spread like butter beneath her board when she popped up. That was it, the mastery. She was an athlete, she fought through pain, the water was her territory. But her quads started to tremble. She felt a lopsided distribution of weight. Then she bailed. She was kneaded over by silver wave after silver wave. Her atrophied legs like limp celery, her ribs tender from the pressure of the board. She gripped her left leg: since when was it so small? Her solid, elite-swimmer thighs had always been her greatest allies in the surf. Her skull clanged, entire body panged. She had to tap out.

Chandra staggered in from the shore. Her celery legs gave out and she fell to her knees, vomiting up a batch of stomach acid and brine between stacks of driftwood. Planting her butt on the beach in submission, she cradled her head between her knees until the ringing started to die down. Dry surfers stared with fleeting concern, but she waved them off with an "I'm fine" and their attention returned to the swell. She could see Nads out there: a little dot of cherry-red, bobbing up and down in the turbulent water. She wasn't even looking for Chandra, didn't even glance back.

In the lot, Nads gave Chandra her Cowichan sweater and cranked the heat in her beater. TLC's *Scrubs* played in the background. Chandra's blood burned as the circulation returned to her fingertips. It was that foggy feeling, when

you come into a room looking for something but you can't remember what.

"Sorry man, lost you in the line-up."

"It's fine."

"You must be starving."

Chandra grinded her teeth. "Just had something on my mind."

"Probably a burrito." Nads twisted the ignition. She ran over a pinecone as she backed out of the lot. The music stopped. Nads swore and smacked her dashboard, "You're killing me car! The hell happened to you when I was away?" She opened and shut her door and the music started again.

Chandra stirred stevia into her matcha, feeling pathetically domestic. She hated to admit it, but she was relieved to be dry and indoors. Nads studied the chalkboard menu as she lapped the whipped cream off of her maple mocha. "I'd ride him like a wave."

Chandra swiveled her neck to eye the lumbersexual barista reorganizing the baked goods in the display case.

"Still with that actor guy?"

"Naw."

Silence swelled between sips of synthetically sweetened tea. Nads went to change her tampon. Chandra dragged her opened issue of *Island Yogi* across the table: page 47. *The Moon, Tides, and You.* Below a diagram of the lunar cycle, she learned that prior to the age of artificial light, all women ovulated and menstruated in harmony, based on the moon's phases. To resynchronize: pair ground pumpkin seeds and flax seeds during the new moon, and for the full moon: sunflower and sesame. Witchy shit, but she was into the idea of tides being at work inside of her. That's when Nads interjected with the loud clink of a glass plate. She bought Chandra a seven-dollar slice of raw vegan cheesecake.

Chandra sized it up: a lilac vat of cashews, coconut oil, and dates, approximately a hundred calories per dollar. It settled in her chest—that beneath-the-breastbone twinge, that pre-race anxiety. Nadia's healing-crystal eyes met hers, and Chandra knew she knew, so she ate it. She ate the offering to prove her fidelity to Nads, as much as it killed her. She held her fork in a tentative grip and carved out dollop after dollop of cheesecake. Her shoulders rose as the sugary crescendo of lavender surfed her tongue. She felt the phantom fat hugging her torso, petting her thighs. Nads smiled and raised her fork to Chandra's; she had cheesecake in her teeth. Laughter. Chandra's brain felt warm, and for a second, she felt normal. Like they were back on the deck of the outdoor pool after morning practice, sharing pop tarts and dishing the dirt to one another.

At the site, the air was warm and windless. The sky: rock salt spilled on black marble. Chandra found that her balance was a little better on the slackline. Nads realized she forgot to pick up pads and headed back into town alone. Chandra decide to turn in; without the soundtrack of Nads' whistling snore, she fell asleep in seconds.

Nads woke her up with a howl, holding a lantern to her face.

"What time is it?" Chandra groaned and reluctantly opened her eyes.

"Doesn't matter. Up, up, up."

Chandra rolled out of her sleeping bag with a gripe and groped her way out of the tent. "What are you on about?" She yawned as she picked the crystallized sleep from her tear ducts.

"Let's surf."

"What?"

"Put your suit on."

"Are you high?"

"Sober as a church mouse," she said, a big, dumb smile on her face. "Like I'd let you leave without a wave."

The swell had settled: sky and sea melted together into infinite charred-indigo. They trudged calf-deep into the still water before mounting their boards to paddle out into the indefinite space. The ocean became chameleonic as they got further out; white star clouds freckled the opalescent waves.

"Hey!" Nads skimmed the water with her hand again, a ribbon of sparkling bluegreen light danced after it. Bioluminescence. Chandra remembered the first time she saw living light, how she and Nads had chased it across the sandbar in PJs and gumboots. The time they swore they'd never kiss boys with their tongues as they clung their knees to their chests and denied wearing bras.

"I'm late."

"Huh?"

"Y'know, my girl thing." Chandra traced electric-blue figure eights with her foot.

"Are you like, pregnant?"

Chandra felt Nads' eyes searching for her in the darkness. "Not unless it's an immaculate conception. I'd tell my best friend if I had my v-card swiped."

"Hey man, if it'd been up to me."

"What do you mean?"

"It was weird. I was drunk. Didn't really want to. I don't know."

"Oh." Chandra hugged her arms to her chest.

"It's fine."

They glided over constellations, over light emitted billions of years ago.

The only wave Chandra caught was small. Its smooth, undulating surface unravelled beneath her. It was as captivating as it was the very first time; the living light, and how they were in the darkness, where Chandra could just barely make out Nadia's figure. How little of our bodies we are. Chandra splashed her heel in Andromeda's pancake-shaped speck of a galaxy; neon blue embers glittered for a moment, then disappeared. She tilted her head back and breathed out, the thin white moon waning into nothingness. She felt it reeling her in and wanted it to take her. To dissolve her into space: formless, weightless.

Jamie Sharpe

POOR, DELICIOUS NINE

You'll bloom.
A critical mass: everything
gravitates to you.

The sunset. Parked
on a nothing hill in a nothing town.
But, goddamn, a sunset!

Every town's light faded
and they made of it what they will.

You drank a milkshake.

For the cows, in Chilliwack,
400 suns set when they turned
out the factory lights.

Who knows what the cows made of it—
milk?

There's a statistically valid
number of you.

We're excited and confused
by outliers. (A heifer escapes
its farm and is hit by a train.)

We tell exceptional stories
that nudge extraordinary animals.

We call one such animal man
(the train engineer
who hit the cow).

Do we grieve specks—a cleansing
of flies against the windshield?

Insects against glass,
not gas, powers vehicles:

why your Pinto sputters
in the Yukon at minus thirty.

One must eat the other.

The future assumes a past,
consumes each year?

No. Our prophesy begins, *Why
is Eight afraid of Seven?*

Ann S. Epstein

JAMMING

From the Journal of Colonel Richard Greville Arthur Wellington Stapleton-Cotton
Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogogoch on Anglesey, Wales
18 June 1915, 11:30 p.m.

Tonight, with great anticipation, I begin this journal, apart from my routine daily entries, to record my undertaking to establish the first chapter of the Women's Institutes (henceforth WI) here in Llanfairpwll (etc.). If the effort proves successful among our rural populace, perchance a historian will find these notes, albeit taken by an untrained documentarian such as I, useful. The evening began with a jolly good lecture by the diminutive Mrs Alfred Watt, whom I invited to speak about the WI of Canada, where the organization originated. I believe WI is just the ticket to enlist our own ladies in the war effort, conferring on us a distinction beyond having the longest place name in Great Britain. Olive, my beloved wife, accompanied me and steered my wheelchair through copious rain and mud. She looked resplendent in a white skirt and fitted jacket, her dark hair covered by a feathered hat and, above her left breast, the matching pin I gave her for our fifth anniversary. [Note to whomsoever shall peruse this record: I include such entries of what may be deemed a more personal nature to pique the interest of lay readers like myself, as well as studies by academics.] Olive, too, waxes enthusiastic about a WI in our village. In fact, with scant urging from me, my dear Cottontail proposed the following to the gathering of two dozen women (yours truly and Tinker being the only males present): "Be it resolved that we establish the seminal WI in Great Britain, identify a suitable meeting place, and enact a charter of membership." Passage was unanimous. The Marquess of Anglesey donated a plot of land, while Mrs James Pickstock said she knew of an officers' mess for sale at Kinmel Bay army camp that could be moved to the site to provide suitable accommodations. I proffered the resources to do so, with Olive's audible affirmation. My head bursts with agricultural projects the ladies might undertake. With Britain's food self-sufficiency at a mere 35 percent, the German blockade is resulting in dire scarcity. What a boon were our women to take up chicken breeding, eggs being a good source of protein now that meat is rationed. I, of course, cannot suggest this idea, given the WI's intent to encourage the confidence and contributions of the ladies themselves.

Hence, I shall entrust the deed to Olive, who readily acknowledges the superiority of men's ideas. Imagine a women's egg cooperative serving all of Anglesey, thence becoming a model for the whole of Britain! The mind boggles. But it is long past my bedtime and incumbent upon my health to sleep. I shall whistle for Tinker, ring for Cottontail, and awake to devise a charter for her to propose at the first official WI meeting.

From the Journal of Olive Harriet Stapleton-Cotton
Llanfairpwll
19 June 1915, 8:00 a.m.

Squelching my misgivings, as usual, I went with Richard last night to a WI talk by a Mrs Watt from Ontario. My husband arranged the lecture after hearing her speak at an advisory meeting on food production at the Agricultural Organization Society. The gathering was exclusively for women, but as Richard had called it, he was permitted to attend. Tinker was the only other male in attendance, and I was obliged to comb out the terrier's snarls and wrestle him into his green wooly jacket. The dog having nipped my right thumb earlier, I protected it. So he bit the left.

It was pouring when we set out, miring the carriage wheels in the red sandstone mud. It's a wonder farmers grow anything in this soil. As we entered the hall, I maneuvered the wheelchair with one hand while holding an umbrella in the other. Since his injury, Richard has gained weight about the middle and jowls, and lost his hair, a sole tuft of which crowns his pointed head. No longer the attractive man I married (whose vigor aboard ship and in the bunk promised adventure and fulfillment, unlike the drab swains I rejected), yet as vain as ever, he wore his silk vest and plaid jacket and smoked a pipe even as I struggled—successfully I might add—to keep him dry. Meanwhile, mud stained the hem of the white frock he insisted I wear, while that hideous feathered pin drooped like a tarantula that has eaten a poisonous toad. I wanted to sneak into the hall unnoticed, but Tinker, having been kept as dry as Richard, brazenly barked our arrival.

Mrs Watt proved to be a lively and persuasive speaker. Her stature adds to her charm. She is both shorter and svelter than me, adorns herself with a simple strand of pearls, and mounds her white hair atop a smallish head. Quite a contrast to my dark curls. I can see why Canada sent her as the WI representative. She poses little threat to the menfolk, who will therefore acquiesce to their women establishing WI chapters in this part of the Empire. It would not happen otherwise.

Alas, I fear the WI will be Richard's newest and costliest obsession. I gasped in dismay when he volunteered to buy and move its new

headquarters. I'm already stretched maintaining our small gentleman's farm on his disability pension, and at times like this I resent how his five siblings have squandered the family money, most notably his thrice-divorced sister Alice and profligate brother Wellington. Not that Richard isn't equally responsible for the waste. At first, I was sympathetic to his betting on cricket. He'd been a champion bowler until his mid-20's, so when he lost the use of his legs in the Boer War, I thought it fair compensation that he follow the matches. Until his twenty-game losing streak, that is, when I had to let the nursing aide go and take on his toilet care and bathing myself. As Richard grows larger, were his arms to weaken with age, I fear I will have to pay scarce shillings to a strong country girl to help me get him in and out of bed.

Just yesterday, I made another payment we can ill afford to the mason. After abandoning cricket, Richard turned his attention to inventing brickwork patterns. Cost-free, I cheered, until he began ordering our entryway and chimney redone every two years, insisting craftsmen use the Double English Cross Bond technique. It wouldn't be so bad if the work were done in summer, when we can do without the fireplace, but he gets impatient to begin while the air is still chill. Thankfully that obsession is waning as his latest designs are indistinguishable from his older ones.

For the past several years, Richard's main interest is in agricultural projects to increase the yield of local farmers. He's trying to breed chickens that produce eggs in different colors, each with a distinctive taste, by crossing Ermine Faverolles, newly imported from northern France, with White and Black Faverolles. Richard is enamored of the scientific approach. Actually, this is the one project of his that I find appealing, being fascinated by science myself. I therefore offered to be his collaborator, but naturally he pooh-poohed the idea. Richard claims women's minds are more suited to following recipes in the kitchen than to experimenting in the laboratory.

During the refreshments that followed last night's lecture, my worst fears about a fresh obsession gripping Richard were realized. This morning, as I performed his ablutions, he said he'd stayed up late beginning a journal "for posterity." Hence my determination to provide this counterpoint, not for the annals of which he dreams, but for my own peace of mind. An accounting ought rightly be kept by a woman, and a local one, not a foreigner. Richard declares WI will be a great class leveler, uniting farm laborers and cottagers with the ladies of the manor under a single wartime banner. Perhaps that works in the Canadian wilds, but it won't take root in rural Wales, where social distinctions are as dug in as carriage wheels in the mud. Last night did breach some

boundaries, however. By the end of evening, my husband was calling Mrs Watt "Madge," while she progressed from referring to him as Colonel Stapleton-Cotton to trilling "Richard." Is the vulgar "Dick" to be heard next? The woman is more brazen than Tinker.

Richard, 16 September 1915, 9:30 p.m.

There was estimable progress at tonight's inaugural WI meeting. The ladies adopted with alacrity the mission statement I slipped to Olive to propose: "To do all the good we can; to all the people we can; and above all to study household good in any work which makes for the betterment of our home, the advancement of our people, and the good of our country." These words will appear on the membership cards which Mrs Pierpont will prevail upon her husband to print gratis. Annual membership was set at two shillings, substantial enough for affluent women to regard the endeavor as serious, yet not so costly as to prohibit the less fortunate from joining.

Olive was elected president. She was flattered, and who am I to point out that it was more likely a nod to my having brought the WI across the pond than a reflection of her competence? Madge proposed that I, and Tinker, be the sole males accorded WI membership. The show of hands only confirmed my belief that the women recognized a man's hand behind their formation.

It was further decided to meet the second Tuesday of every month, each session to have a speaker of an educational nature, a demonstration whereby women could learn a new skill, and a social time with tea. Given that food is in short supply, and that the produce now ripening will go to waste unless it is preserved, Madge suggested the group begin with jamming, much esteemed in her native Canada. Olive, perhaps feeling her oats, said women already spent too many hours in the kitchen, and proposed inviting a lecturer from Bangor University to talk about advances in the science of nutrition. She said that were we to send our boys to the front in better health to begin with, they might better withstand the rigors of food deprivation. I humbly proffered that the ladies concentrate on the home front and leave the conduct of war to generals and admirals. There were murmurs of assent, but when my Cottontail winked at me, I realized she had deliberately set the stage whereby I could contribute my sage advice. Between Olive and Madge, I am heartened that the Llanfairpwll WI is in good hands, with yours truly steering inconspicuously from my perch.

Olive, 17 September 1915, 8:00 a.m.

Richard is still asleep, with a satisfied smile on his fleshy face, having prevailed on every count at last night's meeting. Personally, I'd have favoured a less subservient mission statement for the WI. Why not organize "for women's own good" instead of "for the good of our country," which really means for the benefit of men? Or will continue to be the case until women secure the vote. Alas, given that a suffragette in Llanystumdwy was nearly tossed over a bridge into the river Dwyfor after she demanded as much from the Prime Minister, that is unlikely to happen soon.

The election for president was even more distressing. I had to smile and appear humbled that the women trusted in my ability to lead them. "You are too kind," I protested, "but I shall endeavor to live up to your belief in me." Richard pretended to look on proudly. What a charade. Did he think I didn't know that I was elected because of him? What good is any vote if it means nothing? Well, I shall make the best of it and surprise them all. I intend to push for the members to further their own enlightenment, not just the welfare of husbands, fathers, and 10 Downing Street.

I sense that I may have some support, albeit furtive, for my initiatives. When Mrs Watt (I refuse to call her "Madge" despite my husband's urging) proposed that Richard and Tinker be the sole males admitted to this exclusively female club, I was not the only one whose spine stiffened. Raised to be gracious, we naturally applauded the idea but there was an undertow of resentment. Richard was no doubt unaware of it. As was Tinker. Much as I dislike the beast, I can at least make allowances for his being a mere dog. Let our chapter adopt him as a mascot. It is Richard's membership that truly gets my goat, as he will use his position to push his damned chickens.

As for Mrs Watt negating my suggestion for a scientific talk on nutrition in favour of jamming, I say she is a traitor to women everywhere. In fact, her demeanor and conduct induce such turbulence in my soul that I cannot write further this morning. I shall instead overcook Richard's eggs in hopes of wiping that smug expression off his visage. (Oh, I am too awful.)

Richard, 10 July 1916, 9:45 p.m.

Ten months into our adventure and things are going splendidly. There are now forty WIs in Great Britain and that number is expected to triple in the next year. A Girls' Institute has been created to teach those fourteen and up the skills they need to be good farm wives and mothers. Olive

piped up that some might be prepared to pursue higher education but I said, "Cottontail, let city girls work their minds as they dither about marriage, while our lasses use their strong bodies to work the land." She grimaced and I feared I'd offended her, my wife no longer being young nor slim. I reassured her she was still vigourous and lovely in my eyes, and was rewarded with an angelic smile of relief.

Tonight's agenda was most ambitious. Miss Green opened by singing "Sussex by the Sea," with the inspiring lines, "We plow and sow, we reap and mow," followed by a brief talk on herbs. Thence came "roll call" whereby each woman shares a household hint. Madge instituted this feature, explaining it is a great equalizer as the wife of a farm laborer might have a better idea than a lady of the manor. In fact, it was poor Mrs Goodman who urged the women to try hay box cooking as a means of saving energy. She shared a vegetable stew prepared by this method, and although I am eager for Olive to apply it to roasting meat, I must admit that it was rather tasty.

Cottontail called for the jamming report. Last month the ladies preserved 500 tins of vegetables and 300 Kilner jars of fruit. Madge's suggestion last winter that we save up our sugar rations for the summer when they would be needed to make jams and preserves proved farsighted. I commented, to hearty laughter, that it is fortunate the British have a taste for bitter marmalade.

For social time and games, the ladies played pig-in-the-middle. Madge pitied that I could not join in, but I assured her my heart thrilled to see them run about. The less fortunate rarely get a chance to simply have fun. The evening closed with the announcement of the winner of this month's competition (Miss Standing, for knitting the finest jumper) and next month's challenge (mending frayed hems and cuffs). Although Madge assures me such contests are standard in Canada, it is the one routine I find distasteful. Women are not competitive by nature, nor should they be so encouraged. Leave it to menfolk to best one another, be it in wartime or peace. I jocularly proposed that if the women wanted a contest, they compete to knit a patriotic coat for Tinker. This was met by appreciative titters, but Olive chided me that making warm and durable clothes was more important in wartime. I thought her remonstrance would end the meeting on a dour note, but Madge tactfully suggested it be a secondary contest. The motion was seconded and voted in favour of. Even Olive, ever the good sport, raised her hand, while Tinker wagged his tail.

Olive, 11 July 1916, 8:00 a.m.

A frustrating evening. I invited Professor Philips from Bangor University to give a talk on "The Gathering of Wild Herbs for Medicinal Purposes." He told the legend of the lady who rose from Lake Myddfai, married a local man, and bequeathed to their sons her knowledge of curative plants before re-submerging. Although she was a fiction, science is discovering the truth of her legacy: feverfew cures bruises, rosemary prevents nausea, and thyme eases respiratory ills. Less plausible, he admitted, is that hart's tongue promotes chastity or wild clary prevents envy. Several women proposed that scavenging or cultivating the first three herbs be our summer project, joking that fathers and husbands would favour pursuing the latter two. Whereupon Mrs Watt stated forcibly that any effort taking time from food production and preservation was contrary to the WI mission.

The professor blanched, accepted tea, and hastily took his leave. Refusing to be silenced, I decided to put a motion to gather and learn more about herbs to a vote. Mrs Watt stood beside Richard's wheelchair at the back of the room, fingers brushing his shoulder, while I held the podium up front. A few hands went up, but after heads swivelled to the rear, hands went down. Richard looked pleased. I expected Mrs Watt to gloat as well, but she looked almost contrite. She approached me as the ladies regrouped for roll call, but I busied myself clearing the tea things.

Mrs Goodman's demonstration on hay box cooking, which followed, was well received. A mousy woman with six ragged children and a husband prone to drink, it has been good to see her come into her own since WI began last year. Not wanting to discourage her, I nevertheless raised the problem of bacterial growth if food does not remain hot enough during the many hours it takes to cook. I'd read a pamphlet from the University's Food Sciences division warning of the "danger zone" if food cools down to between five and sixty degrees. Rather than being cowed, Mrs Goodman asked to borrow the pamphlet and promised to obtain more information in time for our next meeting. Meanwhile, she assured us that no one in her family had gotten sick. "Although," she ventured to jest, "Mr Goodman has enough alcohol in him to kill off most germs."

Richard was testy on the way home, clutching the dog and cautioning me about every rut, as if I'd never before steered his wheelchair. Back at the house, he demanded tea (he never drinks a cup that late) and cross-examined when I'd had time to research hay boxing. "Was it when I sent you to the library for a manual on brick patterns?" I said I'd come across it while looking for a book on pickling eggs, which placated him enough to suggest I make a cuppa for myself too. "Why not invite Madge over

before the next meeting?" he asked. "If you first ascertain her stance on your ideas, you can avoid another such fracas in the future. It won't do to have my two favorite ladies at odds. It distresses Tinker, right boy?" He chuckled and scratched the beast's head.

I silently sipped the tea I didn't want. Richard turned irritable again. "Now if I can only persuade the dear lady to end those silly competitions." He pushed away from the table. By the time I'd emptied the bedpan and tucked him in, I was ready for my tea, despite its having grown lukewarm and bitter. For a man who dislikes contests among women, I thought, my husband rather enjoys the one between me and Mrs Watt. Perhaps because he fancies himself the prize.

Richard, 09 January 1917, 9:00 p.m.

A great start to the year. Having bided my time on the sidelines, I now felt confident enough to propose directly, instead of through Cottontail, that the women raise chickens and start an egg cooperative. I described my breeding experiments with Faverolles, admired for their cloddy build and extra hind toes, to produce variegated fowls and multi-colored eggs of diverse tastes. Mating Blue and White Faverolles with Coucou Malines is popular in France, but has not yet caught on in the U.K. "Imagine Wales breeding untold variations," I crowed, "and besting the French!"

The excitement was palpable. Madge seconded the idea, adding that cooperatives were enjoying great success in Canada. In fact, she said, women there competed for the number of eggs their hens laid, which not only boosted the wartime food supply, but brought an unexpected profit to their farms. I applauded. "Just the ticket to get their menfolk behind the enterprise," I exulted.

Tinker being a full-fledged member, I voiced the motion by imitating his tenor bark, to great merriment. Olive did not join in the laughter, but dutifully called the vote. It passed handily, whereupon the women formed a committee to present a plan at the next meeting.

Olive, 10 January 1917, 7:30 a.m.

I'm more steamed than a cup of Earl Grey tea. After Richard proposed the women crossbreed his beloved Faverolles, I suggested they conduct their own experiments to determine the best types of chicken and mating combinations. Richard not only ignored me, but when Mrs Watt extolled the value of egg competitions among Canadian women, my avowed anti-contest spouse figuratively leapt at the idea. It was all I could do to refrain from announcing that I'd done my own reading at the University library and knew for a fact that Faverolles are more suited to roasting in the

oven than laying eggs in the henhouse. I don't want to see the women led down the wrong breeding path, but my heart flutters with joy at the thought of Richard's featherbrained idea failing. Were I more generous, I could ask Mrs Watt which types of birds were found to be most prolific in Ontario. However, I'll be damned, literally I fear, before I seek advice from that awful woman.

Richard, 12 March 1918, 10:00 p.m.

Jolly good jamming report. The monthly production of tins and jars now routinely numbers in the thousands, thanks to the canning machines donated by our Canadian WI cousins. Root vegetables continue to feed us through the winter, and rationing has been the great social equalizer dreamed of by the WI movement. However, my dreams (Tinker's, too) of pickled eggs must be laid aside. One year on, alas, the egg cooperative is scarcely productive and we haven't time to establish a heartier Faverolle flock. It is my sole regret, but I shall rally like the good soldier I am. My nature does not succumb to the idea that a man's prospects be limited by his circumstances. As proof, after battle injuries ended my active duty in the Navy, I became a Member of the Royal Victorian Order, Commander of the Order of the British Empire, and Companion of the Order of the Bath.

I thus proposed that the women replace their breeding initiative with knitting, which, in addition to jamming, will aid the war effort. Men at the front, feet rotting in flooded trenches, are in dire need of warm, dry socks. Furthermore, I said a secondary effort to mend worn-out clothes will assist conservation efforts at home. When I inquired whether such needlework accorded with WI's mission, Madge rewarded me with a smile that registered "one hundred" on my internal thermometer. Eager to return to the genteel crafts for which the women of Wales are renowned, the ladies acquiesced. Save Olive, who said that German trenches aside, WI should help improve local sanitation. She'd taken the liberty of inviting a speaker on clean water and the health risks of uncovered rubbish tips. At lecture's end, the ladies were agitated enough to "take action" until I remonstrated that Council could not concurrently fund battles abroad and cleanup at home. "Help end the war first," I urged, whereupon Madge's incandescence lit the hall and settled the matter.

Thence came roll call where, to my surprise, it emerged the chicken matter was unsettled. Mrs Goodman, a little lady married to a big sot, reported on her own "research." According to documents she'd obtained from the University, ducks were better layers. If chicken eggs were still desired, we should raise Anconas or Belgian Bantams, whose feathers had

many intricate colour variations and were better layers than Faverolles, ideally meant for eating. Mrs Goodman disputed evidence that breeding birds of different stock resulted in diverse egg colours or flavours, but concluded "the aforementioned A and BB breeds produce more eggs which is, after all, our goal at this time." She sat down to thunderous applause. I joined in, albeit reluctantly, but inwardly I was obliged to concede the superiority of her knowledge. Is it possible that women too resist the notion of being limited by their circumstances? To act the good sport, I proposed that the women and their families feast on Faverolles this month and that Mrs Goodman head a committee to research the cost and availability of Anconas and Belgian Bantams. Everyone smiled at this idea including Olive, although were I a more sensitive sort, I might characterize hers as a smirk. Is she perhaps now jealous of Mrs Goodman as well as Madge? Good Lord, to think of women fighting over yours truly. Surely this is not the "war effort" the WI was intended to support. (Tsk, tsk.)

Richard, 13 March 1918, 1:00 a.m.

I am too agitated to sleep. Not because of the foofaraw among my own dearest ladies, rather because I begin to see all women in a different light. Their collective willingness to rally around rubbish tips, and even more, Mrs Goodman's independent pursuit of scientific evidence, remain lodged within my brain. Granted, I may be prone to exaggerate their significance due to fatigue and discombobulation. Nonetheless, I am aroil with thoughts. By rights, I should share them with Olive, but fearing another smirk, I prefer to express my thoughts to a more sympathetic female. Hence I shall write the following letter and mail it tomorrow, provided I can figure out the means to do so without my wife being apprised of its addressee. If only I'd trained Tinker to use the post.

> *Dearest Madge:*
>
> *Before the war, I was one of many who doubted the capacity of women to conduct even their ordinary business with success, but as a result of the WI, I have learned more about women these past three years than in the previous forty. I see and believe that women can bring together all classes, denominations, interests, and schools of best thought in that common brotherhood of love which we all long for in our innermost hearts. Women have the opportunity, capacity, and will to accomplish that which, judged by results, has been beyond the wit of man. Thank you for your support as I urged the establishment of the WI*

in Llanfairpwll, and indeed your gentle chiding at those times when I went astray.

My sincerest respect and admiration,
Richard

Olive, 13 March 1918, 6:00 a.m.

I've been awake for hours. Richard not only had the audacity to propose we ladies return to "the womanly arts" to support our troops, he disparaged my scientific attempts to improve health on the home front. I suppose I should be glad he's given up propounding his ridiculous chicken breeding theories, but why he consistently resists my suggestions is beyond toleration. I did gain a small measure of satisfaction when he conceded the validity of Mrs Goodman's research. His capitulation vindicated my belief in a woman's capacity to study science, proven by the farm wife least likely to demonstrate it. I am admittedly a bit jealous that it was she, not me, who stated what I have long since known, but my peevishness is cancelled by the fact that for once it wasn't Mrs Watt who persuaded him to accept an idea I had originally broached. No doubt Richard now imagines a three-way fight for his affections. My husband has scrambled eggs for brains.

Richard, 10 December 1918, 9:30 p.m.

Tomorrow marks the one-month anniversary of the signing of the Armistice. So vital was the WI contribution to winning the war that the government has awarded us an annual grant of £10,000. I humbly accepted the ladies' accolades for initiating the movement, and acknowledged Madge for inspiring me in the first place. I moved that we also hail Olive for masterfully steering our chapter as president and Mrs Goodman for her scientific redirection of our egg enterprise. It was so done.

The applause having gone to her head (or fair rump), Cottontail then proposed that with the Great War ended, the ladies focus their attention at home. She raised the question of suffrage, suggesting that once women had the vote, they run for local council seats and campaign on issues such as employment and education rights, healthcare, and child welfare. My growing admiration for the fair sex notwithstanding, this went too far for me. "Madame President," I protested, "I have come to appreciate women's competence running farms, but as men return from fighting, it is best we let them handle the broader concerns that affect our villages, towns, and cities." My attempt to soften this criticism with the quip that Olive not worry her pretty head about such matters failed. Dear Madge,

ever the peacekeeper, ventured that "Men will be so busy on the job that women can help inform them on these issues. Then men will cast their votes wisely." I agreed. As long as, I reiterated, women don't actually vote. There was not a peep of disagreement in the room. In fact, the agenda having been suspended in lieu of a celebration, the talk over tea, scones (a two-month ration of butter and sugar), and deviled eggs turned to how the WI could welcome the men home.

Olive, 11 December 1918, 5:00 p.m.

I was too enraged to write this morning and otherwise engaged this afternoon, but I must put pen to paper before Richard expects dinner. If I feed him. If I am not too busy sorting out my own needs. How dare that man pat himself on the back for the success of the WI, as if women were not responsible. I should mince and preserve him as Bitter Richard Marmalade, no sugar required.

Yet anger may be the least of my emotions at the moment. What a turbulent day I have had, and what it will take to make sense of it all, I do not know. Shortly after breakfast, having had enough of being thwarted by Mrs Watt, I confronted her in her tidy cottage. Silly Richard thinks me a jealous spouse. However, it is not their mutual affection that aggravates me, but rather her professing to favour women's empowerment, all the while using coquettishness to get her way. Even when she advances reasonable ends, such as encouraging women to conduct studies and chair committees, she plays up to him instead of outright demanding our rights.

Expecting her to get defensive, I was instead flabbergasted when she readily admitted to using subterfuge. "Olive," she explained, "there is method in my meekness. By pretending to agree with Richard, I not only allow him to acquiesce, but in the end, because he is as dense as most men, he is hoodwinked into accepting ideas anathema to him." I could not see how this pertained to last night's discussion of women's suffrage. "Simple," she said. "My ulterior motive is for women to inform themselves and thus be ready for the day they can vote." When I inquired about other times she'd stymied me, she again had perfectly reasonable explanations. In the matter of putting wild herbs to medicinal use, for example, she said women risked being called witches. "We must protect our image, choose our battles, and never fail to keep the big picture in mind."

Mrs Watt disarmed me, much as she'd defused any threat Richard may have felt in her presence. Yet, despite the logic of her argument, I admitted to being discouraged about women's progress. Men would

return from the war, victorious and more arrogant than ever in the face of our desire for change. "Never underestimate a man's ability to change, too," was her reply.

She served us tea and plain biscuits, nary a jar of jam or preserves visible in her pantry. "I don't care for the stuff," she confessed, eliciting my first laugh in days. I inquired as to what she planned to do next. "Return to Canada." Her smile was radiant. "Now that women have tasted power, they will not easily relinquish it either. I intend to recruit them across the continent." Then she made me a proposal wilder than any herbs. "Come with me," she said, "I can use your help."

"But Richard." I pointed to my legs and stuttered. "He cannot... on his own..."

"Starting next year, the organization will publish a bimonthly magazine, *WI Life*. You could write a regular column on science in the home, with fact-based tips for health and safety."

I am sorely tempted, but guilt makes me hesitate. Much as Richard infuriates me, I was raised with a British sense of obligation. Besides, suppose the man does change, as Mrs Watt suggests, although I see scant evidence he's capable of it (besides adding "please" when requesting an extra egg at breakfast). "Richard is a cripple," I finally said straight out. "I cannot leave him."

Mrs Watt winked. "The WI ladies will gladly take on the Colonel and his dog as one of their projects this winter. Richard will love the attention, especially now that he trusts women to handle matters with competence." I must have scrunched up my face because she laughed and added, "You can come back at any time, especially should your husband write of his evolution."

I thanked Mrs Watt for the invitation and said I would think hard on it. "Please call me Madge," she urged. I said that I would think on that proposition, too.

Richard, 17 December 1918, midnight

Befuddlement. Olive departed for Canada yesterday afternoon, with Madge. She packed so many bags that I asked, affecting lightheartedness, if she planned to come back. Cottontail only smiled distractedly until, placing her new hat atop her trunk, she observed, "You'll be well looked after."

Where is Tinker to warm my lap? The house is chilly. Mrs Goodman promised to send the Mr around to stoke the fire twice daily, but he won't arrive until seven hours hence. Sober, I'll grant, thanks to his wife's newly forceful nature. Mrs Pickstock, in rotation with six others ladies,

will keep me fed, and Olive and Madge arranged for the WI to set aside a portion of jam proceeds to hire a nursing aide to tend to my bodily care. I've grown rather used to my wife's attentions in these matters and frankly do not relish a return to professional help. On a more positive note, the Marquess will send a carriage round each month to escort Tinker and me to WI meetings. I am curious to see what projects the women take up now that the country can look forward to a prolonged peacetime, and will continue to document their endeavors in this journal. Nevertheless, given recent personal developments, I am of two minds whether to make these jottings available to the public. There are lessons to be learned, no doubt, but of what nature I remain puzzled.

An article in the North Wales Chronicle lauded the WI for helping to raise Britain's food self-sufficiency from thirty-five to sixty percent over the course of the war. It cited my enthusiasm in particular for sparking the formation of a hundred WI chapters throughout the U.K. and said, given the great loss of life, women will play an important role in rebuilding. Madge is eager to return home and grow the organization there, and has enlisted Olive's help. I asked Cottontail why she did not remain here to carry on the work. She said she'd appreciate my no longer using that nickname as she had a perfectly respectable first name, same as Madge. I will address my letters to her thus.

And so, with 208,000 vegetable tins, 132,000 fruit jars, 1,517 knitted jumpers, and 12,644 pairs of woolen socks produced since 1915, the Llanfairpwll WI deserves to be deemed a success. Objectively speaking. I wonder though if my enthusiasm got out of hand, a contagion that spread from me to my wife like a bad cold or worse, the Spanish flu that now rages across the continent.

Olive set her luggage by the doorway, running a hand along the new bricks. She kissed me gently, ignoring Tinker, who growled at her. Did he feel slighted? I joked that she must return and commence jamming come spring, or else the fruit in our orchard would rot. "Preserve me, too," I almost pleaded. Olive hesitated, stuck the feathered pin in her hat, and then she was gone.

Eve Joseph

THREE PROSE POEMS

Cockroaches swarmed over the decks. They cascaded out of the cutlery drawer and fell with a click into the stainless steel sink. Each one was an oracle. On calm nights, when the moon was a porthole through which our ship sailed, the pantry hummed with their prophecies. God spoke to us directly through them. I gave leftover table scraps to the workers in port—pickled herring and dark bread—and they brought me burlap sacks full of green mangoes. On long voyages, we wore gloves in bed to keep the roaches from gnawing our fingernails.

The train blew through the station without braking. Babies lifted out of their carriages and dropped back down into the arms of strangers. Nobody could figure out who belonged to whom. It was a lottery of mothers and fathers, lonely aunts and childless couples. A man who looked just like me scooped me up and together we went home to meet my mother who was working on a jigsaw puzzle at the kitchen table. I fit right into place but my father didn't. He was not blue like the sky or grey like the arched bridge. The platform was littered with hats. I set up a booth and sold them for a slight profit. My father glowed with pride.

Now that I live by the sea, I am never sure what the day will bring. Gulls stomp on the roof like heavy-footed prowlers causing me to wake in alarm. Broken shells litter the garden: clam, oyster and torn crab pincers serrated like nutcrackers. I'm standing at the window, drinking my morning coffee, when I see her. My mother is rowing against the current in the rain. I cup my hands and yell *come in for a gin and tonic*. It's not that awful rowing toward God, nothing that dramatic. It's just her, after all these years, the creak of oarlocks and a small wake trailing behind. Like the hapless Aeschylus I walk bareheaded, forgetting to look up at what might be hurtling toward me.

Iheoma Nwachukwu

POSTCARDS FROM DYSTOPIA: II. DRIFTING TO PESCARA

Have you ever travelled
a blue land where the sky is blue
like you? Seventy long-faced women
squatting on a tight little boat
with sunken-eyed men

A box of *Frutasol* apples on a coiled hose,
black barrel of water mixed with
petrol (so every sip is prudent)
have nourished us this past week

On a sunny day like this
in Eritrea, I hoed the Christian
land of my fathers. Now
only the ruins of that memory speak
when I touch the Coptic cross on my wrist

How could Jesus let boy-soldiers
bomb our church? And the Al Shabab
horde who shot my mother
as she cooked a chicken
when you kill us all
who will live in your dreamy lands?

Night falls like India ink
on the water. A man in a hooded jacket
prepares to raise a flashlight.
It will flicker several times
a British ship or an Italian ship might come
or a car or a bird or a sesame seed
or Sicilian Jesus bouncing softly
on the blood-warm waves cracking
knuckles like a nervous teen asking
in a jumpy way, *Have you all been good Christians?*

Matthew Hollett

COMFORT ZONE

Acidic air scalded my lungs and the walls oozed purple mucous. My boots sank into boggy gunk. I waded upwards through the dark, ducking past pulsing amoebas that jabbed through the air like fists. I crawled out of the stomach and into the narrow gullet. The curved, ribbed esophagus reminded me of drainage culverts I'd crawl through as a kid, the floor squishing and squelching like the algae lurking in those pipes. I slopped onward. Finally, the roof arched and daylight glimmered through a jagged crack in the wall. I was standing on the slime worm's tongue.

I can recall bright fragments of the videogames I played as an eleven- or twelve-year-old. Mostly, though, my memories are fuzzy. Blocky landscapes crumble further into abstraction, half-remembered characters jostle for attention, labyrinths hopelessly entangle. It's hard to know which details are from memory and which are imagination amplified by nostalgia. It feels like centuries since those universes meant much to me. It's from this distance that I want to write about videogames, especially the places inside them that captivated me as a kid, the dead-ends, empty rooms, and liminal zones where I happily lost so many afternoons.

Plopped into a platform-strewn obstacle course, haunted forest, or asteroid field, I would ransack every nook and cranny as if looting a couch for lost coins. I was a relentless adventurer, and one of the thrills of the 8-bit games I grew up with was that it was possible to exhaustively plunder those worlds. Even years before the internet wound its way to my small town, I could be reasonably certain that I had picked every pocket of the little planets that fit inside those plastic cartridges. There were fictional cities I knew more intimately than my own neighbourhood.

I'd draw maps of the worlds I conquered, cluttering graph paper with latticed tunnels and annotations. Invariably, the sprawling cartography of the overworld would give way to the intricate hives of hidden dungeons, maps folded within maps. Excavating one underground lair as meticulously as an archaeologist, I had plotted a tidy grid except for a gap that stuck out like a missing tooth. On a hunch, I bushwhacked back through bats and skeletons to the lone wall that might conceal a secret door, and placed a bomb in anxious anticipation. Its familiar rumble was

followed by the glittering trickle of harpsichord that meant the game had relinquished a secret. The difference on the screen was just a few pixels going black, but I *felt* those bricks fall away, the broken wall as agape as my open mouth.

When my grandparents moved to Alberta to live with my aunt, my father drove six hours to pack up their small house in Little Harbour East, where he'd grown up. He came home with the car crammed full of belongings they could neither bring to Lloydminster nor throw away: photo albums, dishes and silverware, carpentry tools. My large bedroom in our basement had formerly been a storage space, so the cardboard boxes ended up there, stacked against one wall almost to the ceiling. A few weeks afterwards, I became convinced that I could hear a soft noise in my room, a sort of hiss, like a distant waterfall. I decided it was just the pipes in the wall, and tried to dismiss it as best I could. One evening, lying in bed in the dark, I noticed a faint glow between two boxes. I reached in and pulled out an old radio, its tiny red light warm, the volume dial barely on. It had been whispering static for weeks. I switched it off and there was a subtle shift, a suddenly perceptible silence, as if someone had just stopped breathing.

After exploring every corner of a gameworld, I'd begin to probe the edges of its rules, pushing against the limitations of the system. In acts of absurd rebellion, I'd drive backward along a racetrack into a hurricane of hurtling computer opponents, use the crates meant to be thrown at the final boss to build a shelter instead, or adopt a wandering monster as a pet and follow it around. Sussing out smuggling routes across the software's borders, I loved discovering those moments when the game let its guard down. I'd sometimes find myself in half-constructed rooms, whisked unceremoniously past locked castle doors, or wading through waterfalls of glitched pixels. Other times I'd nudge the camera past its limits and realize I could look through walls, beneath floors, or peer out at the world through the thin polygons of my own hollow head.

In elementary school, anyone who knew the most arcane secrets may as well have been a wizard. I remember a friend's older brother laying his controller on the carpet with a grin. He had stomped on a turtleshell with exquisite timing, causing it to ricochet rapidly between his boot and a brick staircase, accumulating points in an infinite loop. The tiny numbers at the top of the screen whizzed past twenty, fifty, then ninety-nine lives, and onwards into scrambled glyphs that could only indicate transcendence. It was the closest any of us could come to immortality.

On Sunday mornings, if my younger brother and I woke up early, we'd conspire to sneak out of our bunkbeds, past our parents' bedroom, and downstairs to the Nintendo. We'd be careful to turn the volume down before switching on the screen, so the sound wouldn't wake anyone. If by some miracle Mom and Dad slept in, we knew, we wouldn't have to go to church. Occasionally this strategy actually worked. On other Sundays, we'd be hurried into uncomfortable clothes and herded, yawning, into the stern pews of St. David's Anglican. I'd hold the hymn book open and mouth the words, but rarely sang. Sometimes I'd skip the words *God* or *Father* or *Thy* or *Heaven. Our who art in hallowed be name.*

There were spellbound afternoons when my body didn't budge from its slump against the coffee table, while my eyes and my hands traversed entire continents. There were winter mornings when snow slowly drifted to cover the windows and darken the basement, and my horizon narrowed to the width of our small TV, but I skipped between worlds as easily as blowing a flute or blowing dust out of another plastic cartridge.

My eyes squeezed shut against the sandstorm, I slipped through the mouth of a vase. The tall room's ceramic walls shimmered with light from the opening in the roof. The dusty depths of the vase were empty, quiet, with a serenity and symmetry that was hard to come by in the madcap world above. In the vase there was space to think, to catch my breath. I could live here forever, unwinding my brain into a thin bright filament. I felt incandescent.

I have been shot by a million projectiles. I've perished hundreds of thousands of times. My body has been impaled on spikes, dissolved in acid, devoured by beasts of all sizes, and obliterated by colossal falling objects. I have stood on exploding planets. I've been drowned, poisoned, starved, frozen, and burned. My knowledge of the wounds caused by arrows probably rivals that of many medieval surgeons. There are countless bottomless pits where I suppose I am still falling, my fist thrust skyward in triumphant denial. There are hundreds of worlds I have failed repeatedly to save, their desperate populations destroyed or enslaved due to my inadequate hand-eye coordination. I have been cannonballed, captured, tortured, boiled in a cauldron. Occasionally, mercifully, I have simply faded into nothing.

I kept thinking I could hear Nikki snoring under the couch. There was the spot in the dining room where she died, shortly after Boxing Day. Then there was the spot in the backyard where we buried her, beside the

tree that Dad likes to string Christmas lights on. It was as if there was an invisible line strung between these two points. Whenever I tripped the line it flipped a switch in my head, and I could hear her toenails clicking across the kitchen tile.

What did all those lost lives teach me about death? We got Nikki from the SPCA, so we never knew how old she was.

10? She collapsed in the dining room and couldn't breathe.
09 I press buttons but my body doesn't do anything.
08 Bright digits counting down on a screen.
07 Darkness, falling.
06 My torso slumped against the table.
05 A lapse, a setback, a failed attempt.
04 A row of empty hearts above my head.
03 Silence, then a knell, then another.
02 A clock ticks in a circuit, a subtle subtraction.
01 An urgent plea to press a button, any button.
00 One last pulse. Game over.

Slipping into the river, I swam hesitantly under the arch of a heavily guarded bridge. When my eyes adjusted to the dim light, I was startled to find a fisherman standing on the riverbank. The stone bridge loomed protectively above us, and the archway felt peaceful, safe, an unlikely oasis where the evils of the world couldn't reach. The fisherman seemed similarly at ease, minding his own business, seemingly unaware that the universe above had been ripped asunder by sorcery and greed. He traded me a glass bottle he'd pulled out of the murky water.

On summer trips to Nan and Pop's cabin, we'd fill up the armrests in the back of the car with treasures. The trail winding down to Gin Cove beach was made of loose gravel that left clouds of dust behind us. The ocean regurgitated mysterious plastic bits, worn wooden floats, and glossy rocks, but it was glass that we wanted most. Beachglass was the Atlantic trying to whisper you something, slipping glistening beads into back pockets of rock, each as precious to a nine-year-old as a newly lost tooth. Our grandparents called them mermaid's tears, mostly green and amber, sometimes clear, occasionally deep cloudy blue. Once in a while I'd come across the bottom of a wine bottle, a foggy lens it was impossible not to hold up to my eye. The rarest, most brilliant bits were always pale teal, the colour of ice lucent with sunlight.

From this distance, looking down, the shack was as small as I was. Entering through the only door, I found myself in an odd treehouse, modestly furnished with a wooden bed and table. Berries danced in the branches overhead, and tiny birds hopped across the roof. I touched a mailbox and discovered a letter from the house's inhabitant, who seemed to have been kidnapped. I was accustomed to such mysteries, vast adventures set in motion by the slimmest insinuation of something missing. A sword, an incantation, an island. The most promising quests began with a letter from the princess you were intended to rescue, her apparition hovering in the air, wondering if anyone was looking for her.

I wrote so many letters like that. On the internet, girls couldn't tell that you wore glasses and were bad at sports. I sought out kindred spirits, the kind of sixteen-year-olds who scanned coloured pencil drawings of dragons, and wrote to them for years, exchanging hopes and heartache, sorrows and sympathies, half-finished poems, half-hearted plans to meet someday. Around the same time I became enamoured with E.E. Cummings, and some of my email correspondence from those days is almost incomprehensible, an all-lowercase clutter of lackadaisical punctuation, cryptic signatures, ASCII art, and wordplay. *Kingdom come, will be done, on earth as it is.*

Sometimes, having managed to save the world, I'd triumphantly return to the town where I'd found my first rusty sword, only to realize that no one was the wiser. Mothers, mentors, and townspeople would still wish me luck, fret about the bandits converging on the village, or hint at how to access an inventory screen. I'd rap on the innkeeper's door with my enchanted battle-axe and they'd warn me that the path through the forest was guarded by porcupines. Time, in games, had a strange consistency. In some ways it was comforting to know that, even though my hometown seemed frozen in a state of distress, nothing there would ever change.

In backyards, on beaches or in the woods behind our homes, we started fires. Concrete Bottom was a frequent spot, a low riverbank out of sight, accessed by a trail well-marked enough to be navigable when drunk. Maria, Bob, Jessie and I retreated there on one of the last weekends before we graduated, coaxing a fire out of cold river driftwood. We confided intently, feeling ourselves spiralling into the metamorphosis of graduation, full of questions and assertions. I won't change, I want to change. A fire crackles, whispers, speaks so you don't need to, and we gradually grew quiet, the four of us drawn to the same warm glow. We clung to firepits, cigarettes, bottles, and promises, gathering ourselves

together against the world. We thought we were shielding ourselves, only to find we were building cocoons.

My companions and I had hacked a path through hordes of demented enemies. There were spinning knights in spiked armour, savage toothed plants, grinning spiders that trapped us in balloons. I had used my last reserves of magic to lay waste to the undead horror in the final room. Humbled by gratitude, the townspeople unlocked a cellar full of treasure. We'd heard rumours of murders in a nearby forest, and my party was urged onward to vanquish greater foes. But I lingered in town for days. I spent evenings at the tavern where peasants told the same sad stories over and over, listless nights at an inn where I was ever the only guest. We'd banished all trace of evil from the fortress on the edge of town, leaving it utterly vacant. And yet, whenever I ventured back through its twisted gates, the same doomful music played. I ran through the echoing halls, tripped switches, checked and double-checked all the secret passages. There was nothing left to find, nothing at all to challenge a restless adventurer. It was all mine now.

Strolling home from school, Nadine said gently: I know something everyone is saying about you. I said: I don't want to know. She asked if I was sure. She didn't tell me. That was when I realized we were close friends.

Our Atari 2600 arrived with an eclectic assortment of controllers: a pair of Pong paddles, two plastic joysticks, a steering wheel, and a square pad of buttons with paper overlays for each game. Stacks of black game cartridges soon accumulated beside the faux-wood Video Computer System, and my brother and sister and I swapped them out compulsively. When one of the paddle controllers snapped during a feverish session of *Breakout*, my dad repaired it with the dial from an old thermostat. For the final year or so before our Atari was eclipsed by a Nintendo, I'd pilot gunships by twiddling a ring of temperatures, my thumb hovering over the words *comfort zone*.

Laura Farina

THE WIND

I concede
that sometimes
the wind is
invited
to slow dance
at the afternoon's
awkward bat mitzvah,
the limp commas
of its hands
slung over
the shoulders of trees.

And sometimes
in the blue
Freezie of the sky
it whispers
the name
of its secret crush
and then snatches
the syllables
before they rush
to the leaves
in the parking lot
of the mall.

But these days
I only write poems
to the tamed wind,
invisible and dog-shaped,
curled outside my door

like that party trick
65% of people
can do with their tongues.

PLOT FOR AN EPISODE OF SCOOBY DOO

A comet
hyped up
on Froot Loops

could not
outrun
those pesky
vampires.

The following things
are see-through —
ghosts,
Tupperware,
this statement —

I left something
in the van
you guys
go on ahead.

A map is found.
A floorboard creaks.
A cobweb is,
and then isn't.

Now there is nowhere
to go but down
and this darkness
has no
boring
pauses.

Stephen Brown

BUS WINDOW

Bus Window

a.

The overpass is a clearspan project. The concrete truss is concrete reinforced with rebar, Vierendel, and overlaid with olive and ornamental fig. Is this the difference that makes a difference? The architecture is agiel, combusting with a recalcitrant scrap of retaining wall scarred with car exhaust. If the role of illustration is allegory, and clouds are preconditions of rain, we can say that the only reason you have either is because you have both. And we can say that for almost

b.

Airstrikes. Redundant handicap signage has its effects on hospital morale. Smoke machine fog at least once a year to simulate the meaning of mall fashion. An early burial for irises *that* irisdescent. Tectonics. Shifts in the structure of dress shirts. Karaoke dry ice. Pocket size spermidical handcream.[1]

c.

Daisy flowers fibonacci the fence line. The thrown items, tennis shoes, badminton rackets, beer bottles, retain an energy, an energy of lift. It can be released—as the energy in anything lifted isn't lost. These patio lights strung from I-beam, doubling down, dumbshow originality over 1st world practicality. So cumbersome was the guncotton. Hashtag guncotton. Hashtag 20th century. Smacznego!!

d.

We keep the ducks on the back deck.
We cause a ruckus when they ransack.
We got the goat to cut the grass.
We've given thought to giving back.
We've excluded the ornamental.
We've made the absence of decor
an ornament of decor. We opiate in mini vans—then enter the buildings in a blur.

Rebecca Rustin

RIP TIDE

Zeus claims you keep beside you a most unlucky man
...send him off with all good speed:
it is not his fate to die here, far from his own people.
—Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book 5 (trans. R. Fagles)

Calypso so not surprised
you brought the big no
with you across the boozy sea.

She guesses every thriller has its cat's meow.
The day hides so many nos
inside its yeses.

Hermes
skips home to the mountain
unwhipped by longing.

Her lover gone
Calypso dropped
onto a silken sealskin

with a pitcher of Hillary Wallbangers.
Artemis and Demeter texted back i know right???
And grief

or maybe emmenagogues—vanillin and vitamin C—
unloosed a sort of flow in her.
She ran to Marathon and tried

to make mortal rites on a shell-sharded shore.
The gods shook their heads.
She envied the dead.

Wanting him felt like when
she stole something small at the drugstore,
or that time she did a whole quarter

in a bathroom stall at the club
telling her friends who were waiting outside
that the dealer was on his night off.

That clean swipe to the right side
of the brain. Sweet clarity
to the sinus cavity. Is she wolfish.

She slept on the beach
and stained the sand.
It had to be stanched.

Aegean lichen
itched
like a bitch.

The Ogygian queen fo-
raged on all fours for leftover fleece
from a sheep-shearing,

waited for moonfall to mine the alley
behind a barbershop, loitered around a Worshipful
Company of Launderers for dis-

carded linens and things that wouldn't sting
her weeping womb.
She missed her shuttle and loom.

Out of absorbent materials one
claw-fingered morning she undid
a shining braid

and trimming its tail made
the saddest pad in the world with muslin
lifted from an Athenian haberdasher.

The seven-year seducer of whom
King Alcinous heard, too
shy to go on scavenging through beaches

and backalleys for her own bloody sake,
hacked away at her lovely braids until

her head was razed.

She went to her father
who was shouldering the sky
but he didn't recognize

the suppliant in tattered robes
as his own immortal
flesh and bone.

She went back to the sea.
"Poseidon," she said,
"Come get me."

And Poseidon, whose hatred for her hero
needed no fuel
took her in his mighty grasp

and wondered what to do.
"Scatter me," she said. "I'm ashes.
I'll whisper when the waves retreat."

Poseidon agreed. When a wave
climbing bravely up a foreign shore
turns back on itself with a sigh—that's her.

S.C. Bayat

MOG-A-MOOS

You must be desperate or something. Only the desperate agree to a set-up. Go anyway. *You never know,* say the people who know. Rita called him *cultured.* He's Russian. A ballet dancer. You make a note to ask his thoughts on *Black Swan.*

You get to the bistro, *Cayenne*—how exotic. *My husband and I met at Cayenne,* you'll tell them. It is very dark, and loud with jazz music and muddled chatter. Stand in the middle of the room with your coat on. Look for someone who could be him. Your eyes are still adjusting, and the only Russian that comes to mind is Putin in a tutu. Curiosity catches the crowd and you're eyed like a five-tailed skunk. You've lingered too long. Consider bolting. At last—at last!—you find a lone man at a table by the wall. He is very tall and has sturdy thighs. He is not Putin, thankfully. You sit and smile with your whites out, and the candle between you illuminates his smooth chin and hollows his eyes. This makes him look a bit ghoulish, but then so must you. Close your mouth. He tells you his name is Sasha Mikhailov (sp?) or possibly Molotov, like the cocktail. Say that yours is Anne Jones, like the soda.

"Tell me what you do." He speaks slow, but doesn't enunciate.

"I'm a butcher."

He looks at your hands, possibly to check for blood. Put them on your lap.

"You're a ballerina," you say.

He winces, as if the word is sharp. "No longer."

"How come?"

He exhales. You feel his breath on your upper lip and dab at it with your fingertips. He begins to untie his shoe, which is black and bulky, the kind that old ladies wear. He removes the shoe and puts it on the table. The candle shudders. He stretches his leg and shows you his foot. It is deformed—the arch too high, the toes bent severely up and then down, like a claw. You think of chicken feet hanging in the display case at your shop.

"Looks painful," you say.

He stuffs his chicken-foot back into the old-lady-shoe. Don't bring up *Black Swan.* The server arrives. The special tonight is guinea fowl. Possibly-Molotov orders this. You ask for the steak salad with no steak.

"I thought you were butcher," he says.

The music is louder, the shift abrupt, as if someone has inadvertently knocked the volume knob.

"I'm a vegetarian," you shout. "Two years, now."

He responds but you can't quite hear him. *Something something like fraud*, he might have said, but you aren't certain.

"Your English is very good," you yell.

He blinks at you. The jazz quietens.

"Your English is very good," you say.

"So is yours."

"It's my first language."

"So is mine," he says.

Put your elbows on the table, and then remove them. "Guinea fowl are monogamous," you say.

"What this, mog-a-moos?" He observes the convex cling of a pencil-skirt as it walks across the room.

"How do you know Rita?"

"Once, I buy café at her café." He scratches the bottom of his nostril then leans back in his chair.

"So you don't know Rita?"

The food arrives. You both begin to eat. He forks fowl into his mouth with gusto. The dressing on your salad is spicy. You wish the server brought water.

He extends his fork to you, guinea-breast speared to its end. "Want try?"

Before you can respond, he snaps it into his mouth and chortles while he masticates. A small piece falls to his shirt. Don't tell him. The server returns. *How is everything?*

"I take go, please." He relinquishes his fork.

"Me, too."

The server takes your plates. You both watch the room.

"It's very dim," you say.

He doesn't seem to hear you.

The server returns with your boxes and you split the bill. Maybe-Molotov stands and shakes your hand—it's as limp as his gait must be. You each take your box and leave.

You arrive home and call Rita. She doesn't answer. You sit at the kitchen counter with all the lights on. Pour a glass of merlot and open the box. Inside, the exhausted remains of a guinea fowl, water-logged in its own oils. You drink some wine. You drink some more.

Lisa Baird

HARD RIME

The air here is so dry
the nosebleed scabs
on every inhale. A man
in Boston is selling his snow,
sending it away
in styrofoam coolers.

Last week frozen fog clung
to trees & cars & houses,
a billion tiny ghost teeth
on the windward side of everything.
It's called hard rime. When the ice
particles are less dense,
more like sugar: soft rime.

I caught a ride to work today;
40 below with windchill, *Metro*
Morning said. You could hear the
wince in Matt Galloway's voice.
The new ergonomic shovel hurts us
less, and sometimes the neighbours
blow out the driveway.

The crystals on the window
over the sink spiderweb out
and melt back depending on
how long we leave the dishes,
whether the water heater
gives us hot or tepid.

Sunrise whispers over
the garlic bed, splashes tangerine
on the south-facing wall a
moment earlier each day.
It still takes 25 minutes to trudge
down the hill to the clinic.

I miss my bike. Two of our plants
have died this month,
won't even compost until spring.

The river starts and stops, talks then falls
quiet, fills with the needle-like clusters
often found in rivers, did you know there's
a name for that too?
Frazil ice. From the bridge, the
Speed River seems like so much slush,
but climb down to the riverbank and
a-*ha*. "Frazil," I announce to the ducks.

They huddle together on the shore,
18 green & brown & blue, feet tucked
under feathers, not waiting

for anything.

Katherine Murray

THIS PROBLEM WITH MALLORY PETE

It was called a cotillion—a charity debutante ball. Sandra was almost eighteen; was pushed up on a stage wearing gloves and a puffy white dress; handed off by her father to a well-meaning cousin who escorted her onto the dance floor. She felt embarrassed and resentful, and her sister, Rochelle, who had made it all happen, was radiant in her delight.

Rochelle, with her delicate features and soft, curled hair, hanging off of their father. So pleased by tradition. So pleased to be pleasing. Blushing with pleasure at seeing this long-wanted moment arrive. Sixteen, and dancing with boys from good families. Pious at doing it all for a cause.

And Sandra, dragged there as part of the set. Their mother got misty-eyed pinning her hair. She said, "You're all grown up, now. It's time for the world to see who you are."

The pipes thump, the water runs; she's got maybe ten minutes to hack Andrew's phone. His birthday. 0420. The year Tupac died. The screen says "denied" every time, but there's nothing to limit the number of tries. 1111. 6666. The year he's supposed to graduate—2016. Paul's birthday. The year of the move. The street number of the house that they lived in, with Paul.

"I think my ex-husband is calling my son. No, you don't understand. He isn't supposed to do that. Look, I pay for this phone—can you give me a list of the callers? Yeah, I know there's a record saved on the phone. I don't have the passco—I don't want to call the police. I'm not—can I talk to your supervisor?"

1000. 0000. 0001. Apartment number and street address. Outside corners of the keypad. Cross. Zigzag pattern. 5555. Last four digits of the phone number. Last four digits of his driver's license. 5050.

"I can write what I want on my body. It's mine." The grease-stained kitchen with paper-thin curtains; a busted old card table off to the side. The rust that wouldn't come off of the drain. The fridge that was older than Sandra and came with the house.

"You're doing this to prove some kind of point to me," her mother said. Her lips were thin and her eyes were still fixed on the unhealed

tattoo. "You're angry with me, so you're hurting yourself. Your father didn't even want me to come here."

"I don't care what he wants."

"Well, maybe if you cared a little bit more, you wouldn't be living in some rathole, carving rude words on yourself. Your father kept you in a very nice home for eighteen years, and he gave—and *he gave you* the best education that we could afford. You want to add being poor to your misery? Fine. It's a stupid decision. It's shortsighted and spiteful. You're throwing your whole life away."

2222. 3333. 4444. 7777. 8888. 9999. The pipes thump again. The splattering sound of the water stops. The cell phone goes back in his pocket.

Paul had a truck that belonged to him and nobody else. It was all in his name; it was bought with money he made from his job in construction. He had an apartment he kit out in second-hand furniture, and he drank pretty hard—so did Sandra.

He told her, one time, that she was a poseur. He didn't say "poseur"—he said that her life was all pretty and pink; that she'd grown up in "la dee da dee da land," and that he would not be a servant to her. He said she didn't talk like real people talked, and got snotty when he would explain things to her. He said, "That's not the way things are, the way you think they are. Real people aren't like that. Real people have to fight for everything they get."

He waited long enough to say it that Sandra already felt sorry for him. He was having a really tough time with his boss, and he had had a tough time with his dad. His older brothers were always picking at him—he felt like he was small. Paul didn't have any other friends, and she felt like the kind thing to do was to just let him talk. There was nothing he could say to her that was worse than she'd already heard. She was nineteen and she didn't know better.

The police show up at the door, asking for Andrew. It's fast and efficient. They have him put his hands on his head, tell him he's under arrest, talk about calling a lawyer. The cuffs go on before Sandra can ask them what's happening. The TV's still on in the background; their half-eaten dinner is still on the table. Andrew says, "Get me a lawyer, Mom." He's calm, like he's done this before. The second cop tells her, "We have reason to believe your son assaulted one of his classmates," and gives her a number to call.

Mallory Pete. Seventeen; chipped nail polish; thinly-plucked eyebrows; dark, messy hair. She says that three boys lured her into the trees behind school—to the popular smoking spot, just past the basketball court—where they forced her to take off her shirt, shoved their hands under her clothes, and said they would hit her if she didn't give them a blowjob. Andrew is one of them.

Mallory, with her hair scraped back in court, and her shirt buttoned up to her neck, sobbing her way through the story as the prosecutor nods his head. When the defence attorney asks her why she went with them, she says, "To have a smoke." He asks her, incredulously, if there wasn't somewhere else she could have done that. He asks her if she wasn't dating one of these guys just last year. If this isn't something that she does sometimes, go off and blow her boyfriend in the woods.

Andrew stares straight ahead through all this; the courtroom is staring at Mallory. Sandra doesn't know quite where to look.

"Men are just like that, Sandra. They're boorish. They're children. They can't control themselves." Her mother. "You have to worry about your own safety. You need to stay out of his way when he's like this. If you see a tornado coming, it doesn't do you any good to stand there and say it's not fair. You can shake your fist at the wind all you like; it's still gonna blow down your house."

Macaroni and cheese—the kind with orange powder; gritty, off-brand; a chalky but comforting taste. Andrew told her he wanted to go live with Paul. He was sixteen years old. He'd been ten when she'd held his hand at the airport; given him their tickets to carry, her other arm still in a cast. He had had questions then, but he'd also been scared. He'd heard the dull, wet crunch when Paul swung the baluster, seen her scrabbling with him on the stairs.

They hadn't talked about it since, and she wasn't sure where those memories were locked in his mind—if he thought of them often, or ever, at all. He'd been forced to eat charity lunches at school, lining up separately from the wealthier kids; his friends, when he made some, were poor and rough, too. He was angry that she couldn't afford to buy him belonging—the sneakers and jackets he'd need to fit in. She wasn't sure what kind of life he imagined with Paul, or why he imagined that Paul'd even want him, but she told him that the restraining order was there for a reason. She wasn't unkind.

Andrew exploded, knocked over his glass; said, "Bitch, you made it so I can't know my own father. Don't think I forgive you for that. Don't think I forgive you for kidnapping me, and running away from my dad.

Like I've got no choice in it—like it doesn't matter what I want."

And she remembered that scared little boy, and standing between them, and trying so hard to save Andrew from anything evil, and said, "What do you think he was going to do to you after he killed me?"

It was the wrong thing to say. She was the adult and she should have had something better to give him. She didn't, and Andrew stalked off to meet up with his friends.

The verdict is returned: acquittal. Andrew is happy. He takes off the khakis and tie he was wearing in court. He starts texting his friends, and Sandra asks him—she just has to ask him—to tell her that he didn't do it. She's been focussed the whole time on helping him get through the trial; she has kept this question to herself—but she thinks about Mallory Pete, and the nervous twitch in her leg while they waited to hear, and the way she collapsed when the verdict was read. Mallory, who's had to be home-schooled since she came forward—who has people sending pizzas to her house, and calling her a whore on Facebook. Mallory who said she just wanted to go have a smoke—that she thought that these guys were her friends. She thinks about Mallory and, now that it's over—now that he's not facing prison—she just has to ask.

Andrew looks up from his text and says, "Jesus, of course I'm not guilty. How do you rape a girl who's been giving it out since sixth grade? You can't do it. It's something that can't be done."

The family tree in the parlour; a story of men, their wives severed branches that did not exist before marrying into the family. "These are your father's people."

"But who were my great, great, great grandmother's people?"

The answer, a mystified shrug. Just a few generations ago, we were chattel.

There was one visit, only, after they moved. Sandra's mother got on a plane and flew out to see them; muttered something about the "colourful" people who lived in the neighbourhood, the girls with puffy pigtails who liked to play jumprope outside the front door. Andrew was almost fifteen and he knew his grandmother only as the woman who sent them small cheques—one or two hundred dollars to keep them from getting evicted.

Rochelle had two sons by that time, and the youngest was learning to play violin. They spent Sunday afternoons at their grandparents' house; Sandra's mother would make lemonade. "You could have come home to us, after what happened with Paul," she said. "Your father would have allowed it. Every time I see you, Sandra, more and more of you's been stripped away."

Her mother picks up on the fifth ring and says, "Well, is my grandson in jail?" And Sandra, her voice gone all thick, awake until three in the morning, begins, "You know what he did to me, right?" Non-Sequitur. "You know that I left because—all of those years that you stayed, and you didn't protect us, because, what? You wanted to have a nice garden? And someone to buy you a car? Because you couldn't stand the idea that we could be poor, so you never tried to do the right thing? That you have the audacity to judge me for the way I live, after everything that I tried to do for my child..."

"Sandra, did they send him to prison or not?"

"He raped that girl. He took her out into the woods and he raped her, and how did I raise a son who would do that? I did everything—what did I do? I took him away from Paul, and I took him away from Dad, and I did everything for him myself—how did this happen?"

Her mother says, "I can get you a better lawyer, all right? It's not the end of the world. They win these things on appeal all the time."

"You're not listening to me. He isn't in jail. They acquitted him—he did it, and they said he wasn't guilty. I can't believe you're asking me about a lawyer right now."

And her mother says, "Sandra, the world can't be what we want. If Andrew's a free man, then count that a blessing; you don't want to know what they do to these young guys in prison."

"It's what they do to girls in fucking life."

Her mother says, "You can blame me, if you want to. Say I was a terrible mother, for keeping you fed—for choosing to stay in a household where you would have the best possible future. Blame yourself for what happened with Andrew—for this problem with Mallory Pete—or blame her, if you like. A girl of that age should know better. No matter who you blame, it isn't going to change anything. It's like they're made of metal, Sandra; they start to oxidize as soon as they hit the air."

Andrew, five years old, in the house by the creek. Mid-afternoon, dust in the air—they sat under the kitchen table, and pulled the chairs in behind them. He said, "This is our hideout. This is our place where we'll go to be safe, and no one from the outside can ever come in, unless they knock, and we let them. And we'll just stay here, you and me, and nothing out there can come get us."

Warm, and unlocked—the phone just set down. She scrolls through his texts and his call log. There's nothing from Paul.

Tom Wayman

THE DOOR

"I escape to the same places, the same words."
—Tomas Tranströmer, "Alkaline Reaction" (trans. John F. Deane)

A door in a wood:
two four-by-four posts capped by a crossbeam
rise from the duff of a hillside
of fir, spruce, pine.
Hinges on the squared timbers
are attached to the door: a hollow fabrication of
brown veneer, marked and scarred
with use, and with a circular hole
where a knob and lock once secured it
to a frame set in a wall. Now a rusted sliding bolt
holds the portal fast.

No sign a house or shed
once stood here. Not even a fence line
of rotted split-cedar supports for
shards and lengths of barbed wire is evident.

Easy to climb past this door on either side.
Easy to see that a door in a forest is absurd,
functionless, unnecessary.
To unbolt the door and step through
almost certainly would not lead to a new destination
nor would I be wiser
if I crossed this threshold
which can be reached only from downslope.
My behavior would be no different.
I would acquire no unfamiliar vocabulary.
In any case, I am convinced when scientists
have shown how words
do not constrain the imagination.

Yet a door stands improbably
in a wood.

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Laura Farina is the author of two books of poetry, *This Woman Alphabetical* (Pedlar Press) and *Some Talk of Being Human* (Mansfield Press).

Matthew Hollett is a visual artist and writer in St. John's. His work has most recently been published in *Riddle Fence* and *Arc*, and previously in collections such as *The March Hare Anthology* and *Shift & Switch: New Canadian Poetry*.

Eve Joseph's two books of poetry, *The Startled Heart* (Oolichan, 2004) and *The Secret Signature of Things* (Brick, 2010) were both nominated for the Dorothy Livesay Award. Her nonfiction book, *In the Slender Margin* was published by HarperCollins in 2014 and won the Hubert Evans award for nonfiction. The book was named one of the top 100 picks of the year by *The Globe and Mail*.

Ben Ladouceur is a writer living in Ottawa. His first collection of poems, *Otter* (Coach House Books), was awarded the 2016 Gerald Lampert Memorial Award for best debut poetry collection in Canada. He works at *Arc Poetry Magazine* as prose editor.

Michael Meagher recently completed an MA in Creative Writing from the University of New Brunswick, where he was the 2015 recipient of the David H. Walker Prize. His writing has appeared in journals such as *The Antigonish Review*, *Canadian Literature*, *CV2*, *The Fiddlehead*, *The Malahat Review*, *Queen's Quarterly*, and *PRISM*.

Rachael Moorthy is an emerging Canadian writer of First Nations, Sri Lankan, and Austrian heritage. She is a recent graduate of the University of Victoria, and her writing has appeared in publications such as *This Side of West* and *Young Writers of Canada*. She enjoys astronomy, learning new languages, and swimming in open water.

Katherine Murray studied Creative Writing at Saint Mary's University and the University of New Brunswick, where she also served as co-managing editor of *Qwerty*. Her writing has appeared in such places as *Grain*, *Room*, *Bright Lights Film Journal*, and *Bright Wall/Dark Room*. She currently lives and works in Toronto.

Iheoma Nwachukwu has won fellowships from the Chinua Achebe Center for Writers and the Michener Center. His poetry has appeared in *Forklift Ohio*, *The Rusty Toque*, and elsewhere. His fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Iowa Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Internazionale*, and elsewhere.

Paisley Rekdal's most recent collection of poems is *Imaginary Vessels* (Copper Canyon, 2016).

Laura Ritland completed her B.A. in Creative Writing and English Literature at UBC, and is a graduate of the Masters in Creative Writing program at the University of Toronto. Her poems have appeared in places like *The Maynard*, *The Hart House Review*, *CV2*, *The Malahat Review*, *Arc*, and *Maisonneuve*. She is the recipient of the 2014 *Malahat Review*'s Far Horizons Award for Poetry.

Laisha Rosnau is the author of three poetry collections, *Pluck*, *Lousy Explorers*, and *Notes on Leaving*, and the novel *The Sudden Weight of Snow*. Her work has been published in journals and anthologies across Canada and internationally and has been nominated for several awards, including the First Novel Award, the CBC literary awards, and the Pat Lowther Award. She lives in Coldstream, BC, where she and her family are resident caretakers of Bishop Wild Bird Sanctuary.

Rebecca Rustin lives in Montreal and works as a freelance writer and translator.

Jamie Sharpe is the author of three poetry collections, *Animal Husbandry Today* (2012), *Cut-up Apologetic* (2015), and *Dazzle Ships* (forthcoming from ECW Press in 2017).

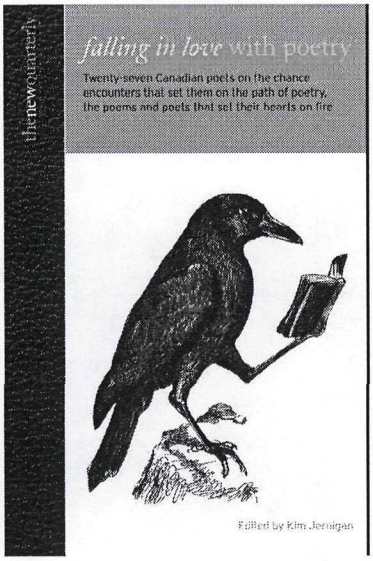
Evann Siebens makes media with movement. Based in Vancouver, she has exhibited her projects at Centre Pompidou, MOMA and on PBS. Evann recently won the Istanbul Identities Best-Video Prize, was in ISEA2015, and had photos in the VAG and Presentation House auctions. She is represented by Wil Aballe Art Projects.

Michael V. Smith is a writer, performer, and filmmaker who teaches in the interdisciplinary faculty of Creative and Critical Studies at the University of British Columbia in the Okanagan Valley. His most recent book is *My Body Is Yours*, published by Arsenal Pulp Press.

Tanya R. Ward lives and writes in Toronto. Her creative non-fiction appears in *Little Fiction | Big Truths*. She is a graduate of the University of Toronto and York University with an MA in Philosophy. She is currently working on a collection of short fiction.

Carolyn Watson's short fiction has been nominated for a National Magazine Award and the Journey Prize. Her stories have appeared in *Slice*, *Indiana Review*, *Redivider*, *Grain*, *On Spec*, and elsewhere.

Tom Wayman graduated from UBC in 1966; 49 years later, the Vancouver Public Library named him a Vancouver Literary Landmark with a plaque on the city's Commercial Drive. His newest book, *The Shadows We Mistake for Love* (Douglas & McIntyre, 2015) won the 2016 Diamond Foundation Prize for fiction. www.tomwayman.com



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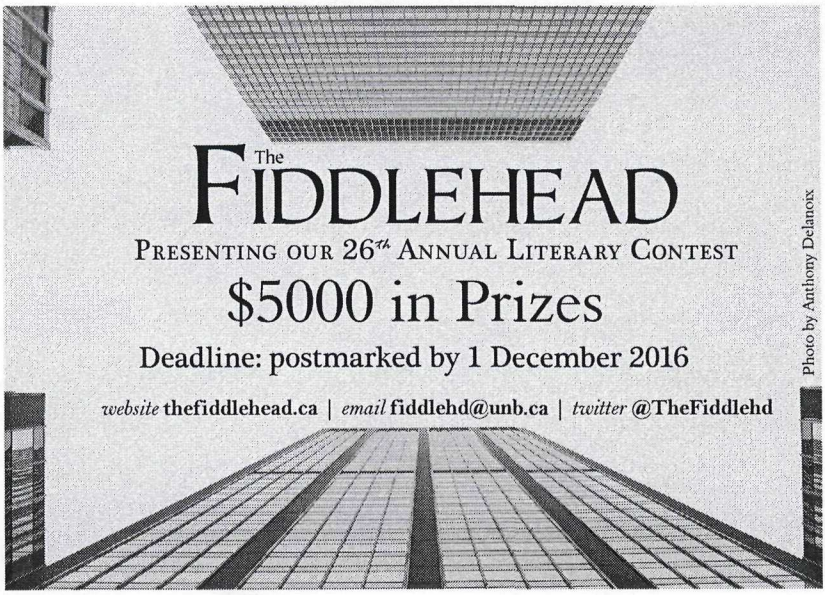

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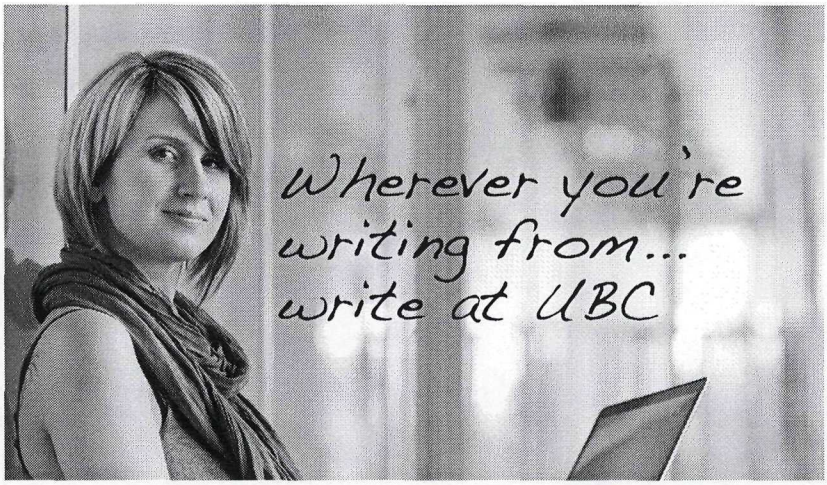

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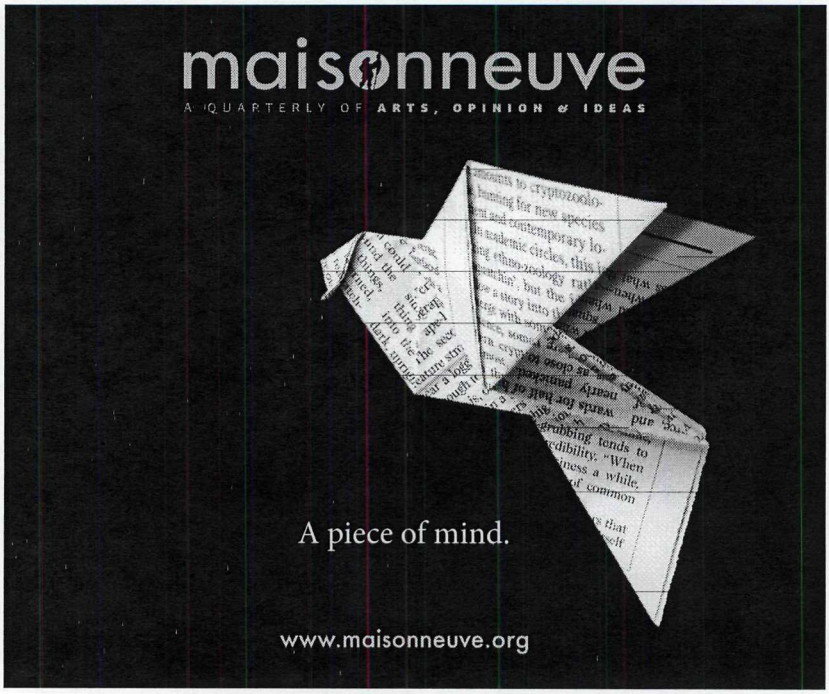
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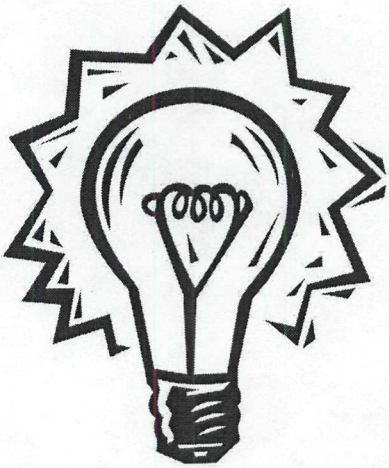

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