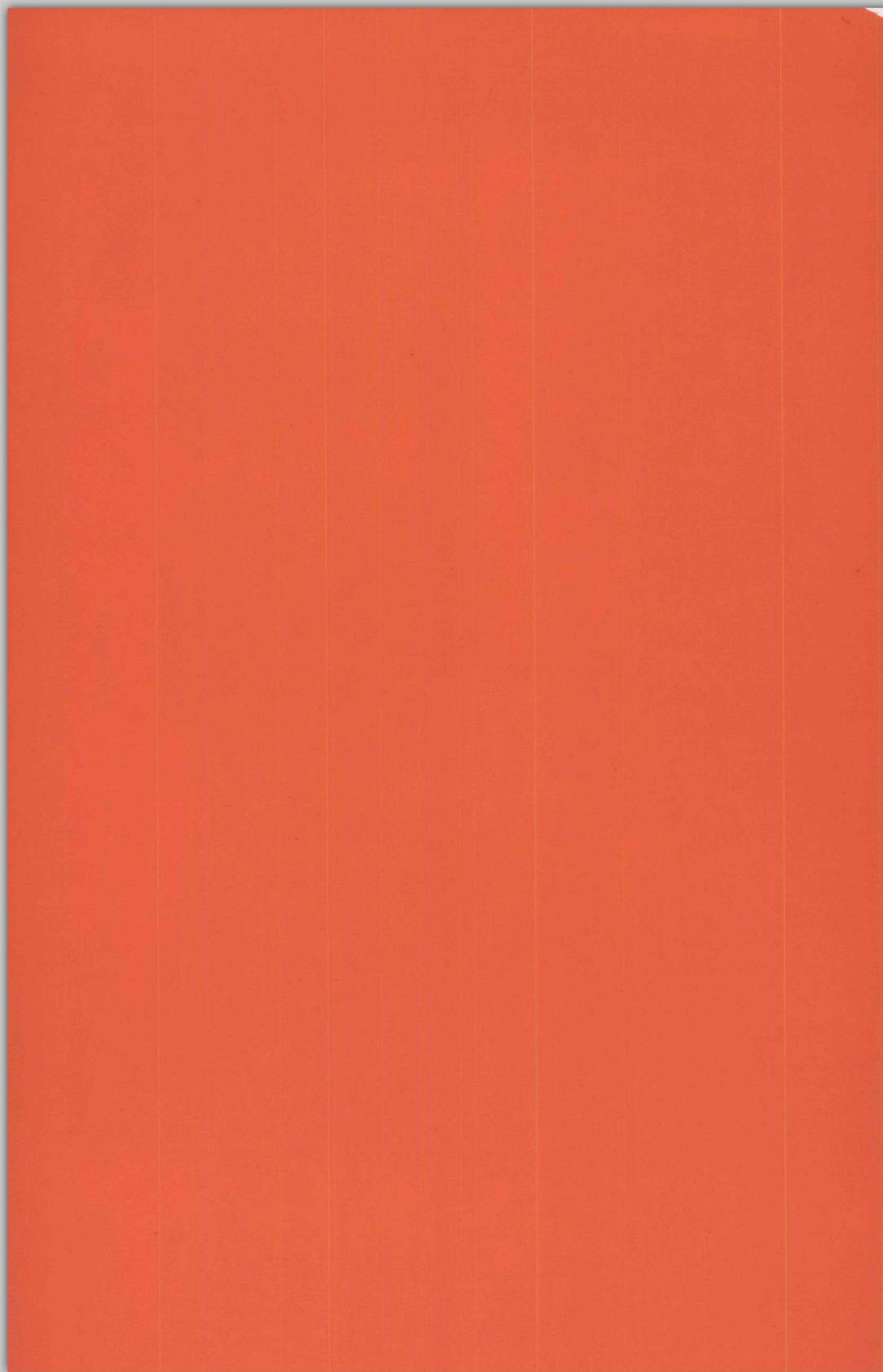




PRISM
international

SUMMER 2018



PRISM international

THE JACOB ZILBER PRIZE FOR SHORT FICTION

GRAND PRIZE

“The Baptism of Alleluia Gomez” by Michael Mendonez

FIRST RUNNER-UP

“Sisters on a Quest” by Mi-Kyung Shin

SECOND RUNNER-UP

“Pooka” by Angélique Lalonde

JUDGE

Thalia Field

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WHAT WON'T STAY BURIED

The dead do not stay dead and the past refuses to pass...How conventional, commonplace, and trite this sentence is! Yet the stories chosen for *PRISM* here (“The Baptism of Alleluia Gomez,” “Sisters on a Quest,” and “Pooka”) all reach in and steal the stool out from under just such an offhand sentiment, and in their buoyancy conjure up what fiction must unfailingly conjure: a frail and ephemeral resurgent mercy, feelings of unbidden empathy, timeless timeliness, and a literalizing of our deepest (commonplace) suspicions. Each of these stories conjures a world so unsettled that nothing stays where it should, not coffins and certainly not families, memories, ideas, or authority. What makes each story strong is that language is all that’s needed to evoke such wide-ranging conflicts of place and substance, to bring a reader inside the living and the dead without force, with open arms even, and then to make us see some terribly simple things up close. The interplay between the world (writ large, generalizable) and its smallest parts (some tangible, others mere gestures of mind or body) remains what’s at stake in the best fiction. Here are three invitations to live where it’s impossible to live unawares, three invitations to meet up with ourselves as uncanny familiars, dream-walkers, landscapers, yet more different than we’d imagined. I thank these writers for surprising me all the way through these fun-house rides, for the shock of things distorted and leaping out, the sadness of wanting what may never come, and finally for reminders of the many ways the undead stay afloat and undeniable, like a coffin moving up and down a river. All this, and laughter, smiles, nodding, and melancholy. I’ve grown richer in these stories. Enjoy them.

Michael Mendonez

THE BAPTISM OF ALLELUIA GOMEZ

ON SOME DAYS THE BOURBON-COLOURED RIVER flowed fast, spurred by rains that fell for days at a time. In 1993, when one of those torrential spells drenched the Philippine island of Mindanao, a rare swell took down a barricade near a cluster of river homes, flooding the areas dug up for reinforcement, planting, and other purposes. One small mound, so fresh and poorly filled, was taken by the strength of the river, freeing from its resting place a crude teak wood casket. The casket slumped into a trench, pushed further and further by the rushing water until finally it set off on its maiden voyage down the stretch of the river, stuff flitting from its sides.

After the rains passed, the casket was found, waterlogged and almost black, knocking against the wooden columns beneath the Zamboanga City Pier as though requesting entry onto land. The two pier guards figured it for driftwood, their cigarette smoke wafting between them in the still, warm air. But as the knocking continued with the rhythm of the water, they investigated the sound and, out of annoyance rather than duty, rolled up their pants and dragged the casket ashore.

It was a small one that might fit only a dwarf or small child and the latch looked as though it had collided with a large stone. The top didn't fit properly onto the base and it was filled with silt collected on the voyage from burial site to pier. There was no name or date etched anywhere. It could have come from any spot alongside the miles of twisting rivulets that made up the basin. One guard skimmed dirt and water off the top and let it drop through his fingers in clumps. The other urged him to open it up, but he shook his head, citing a proverb about disturbing the dead. They each took another cigarette from their packs; the guard with the soiled hand, a tall fellow with a shadow of a mustache over his thin lips, wondered aloud why something so troublesome had to happen on a beautiful day after so many rains. The other agreed: "Let's radio Jericho at the station. Then it will be his problem."

The guards hadn't brought their fishing poles this day—they were fated to find trouble. In Zamboanga there is a tradition about keeping busy. Withered men never finish a game of chess without starting a new one for fear of disorder finding them. After the guards got in touch with the station, Jericho called waste management, which claimed not to deal with bodies. He then called the morgue, which informed Jericho that they simply did not have the resources to take in a body that had already been put in a casket and buried. Their foreman radioed them on their walkie-talkie. "Do something with it," he said. "For God's sake, don't leave it on the beach."

They pushed the casket, still heavy with silt, across the gravel and pavement to their truck parked along the dock where a young boy in a yellow tank top and jeans laid against a flat wooden board propped up on the lot's curb. He heard the commotion and shot up, hair in his face and eyes adjusting to the sun. The two men in unkempt, grey uniforms stopped. One hunched over with his hands against the short end of the casket, and the other removed his square cap and ran his hand through his slicked-back hair.

"It's leaking," said the taller guard, looking on. Sure enough, the casket was split across the grain, murky water and sediment trailing from beneath the pier where they had found it. The other guard, a stout man with a blank expression and similar cap and uniform, found that he was covered with the muck. He shook his body like a wet dog.

The fifteen-year-old boy scooped up his belongings—a ring of two keys, cigarettes, and a mango, and approached the casket with a curious gait.

"The heck?" he said.

"Get out of here," the taller guard said. "Unless you're gonna help."

The guards resumed their positions.

"Not like that. If you push it that way it'll crack the wood. I'm serious. I can see it from here. You have to...well...there we go. What'd I tell you?"

The split in the grain widened and more sopping dirt spilled, causing the short guard to cover his mouth and nose against the smell.

"You found it right over there, huh?" the boy said, pointing to the landing beside the columns of the pier.

"You some kind of genius?" the stout guard asked.

"Where are you taking it?" the boy said.

"Where are we taking it?" the same one echoed.

"One step at a time. First we get it on the truck. Then, I don't know, maybe St. Peter's," the taller guard said.

"St. Peter's? They'd never take an unbaptized body," the stout guard answered. The guards carried on like the boy wasn't even there.

"Unbaptized? How do you know?"

"Well there's no cross anywhere on the casket. But either way they wouldn't take it if we didn't know for sure. They're strict about it. And filled up. You have to reserve a plot before you grow hair below your waist. My Lola was buried there."

"We might have to find where it came from."

"That even possible? We could spend weeks searching."

"You're right. Nobody has time for that." A minivan rolled by. They were already attracting attention.

"Why don't you call the police?" the boy asked.

"We *are* the police," they harmonized.

The boy mouthed a long syllable: *Ohhh*.

"You know, I give boat rides up and down the river," the boy continued. "Sometimes I hear things."

"Did you hear something?" the taller guard asked.

"I might have heard something."

"We haven't got any money."

"That's too bad."

The men looked at each other and then at the collapsing wooden box behind them. The stocky guard rolled his eyes, pulled a 100-peso bill from his wallet, and handed it over.

"Celso Guerrero," the boy introduced himself.

It had just so happened that the previous week, while Celso was ferrying a young married couple from their home in the basin to the city dock, the woman had expressed worries about the Sige-sige to her husband. There was no shortage of rumours about the Sige-sige, the latest of which accused them of selling weapons to Islamic militants living in hidden settlements on the Zamboanga peninsula. Celso figured this was nonsense. The Sige-sige as he knew them didn't care to get involved with politics or religious wars. They were more concerned with decking out their hideout with eclectic stuff or pulling people out of their houses in the middle of the night and forcing the men to fight in front of their families for pure sport. They were armed but known mostly for their kali sticks made of rattan stems, with which they were incredibly skilled. They would go straight for the body parts that stuck out the most, breaking their victims' wrists on impact and shattering their shins if they were standing with one foot in front of the other.

The young couple was right to be concerned. The woman said that the neighbour of a friend had been taken out of his home the previous night. She described where it had happened and Celso knew it well. This neighbour was forced into one of these combat contests, but the man was a war veteran and the young Sige-sige was not ready for him. With his bare hands, the veteran crushed the young challenger's throat before she even had a chance to raise her kali stick more than shoulder-height. The rest of the raiders fell upon the veteran, beating him within an inch of his life. Finding that this was not enough to satisfy their vengeance, they turned next to his family. The man's wife, they undressed and snapped pictures of, and the young girl whom the woman mentioned by name... well, that is the part of the story the woman was too choked up to finish. It wouldn't surprise Celso to find that the girl didn't make it to the next morning and she was the very one confined in the small casket that the two police guards found. But Celso wasn't going to tell them any of that. One word about the Sige-sige and the guards would be gone. Celso still had more to offer.

"Have you heard of Alleluia Gomez?" Celso asked. They shook their heads. "She was a girl who went missing earlier in the month. Last I heard, her family found her in her bathing suit face down in the basin just a week ago. Something's telling me that wasn't her last dip in the river." His eyes moved to the waterlogged casket. "Of course I wouldn't know for sure. Her family would. And I happen to know where they live."

The stocky guard spoke up. "A trip to the basin? I don't know..."

The taller guard with the faint mustache stepped away and spoke into his radio. "Hey, uh, Jericho. We're getting the thing in the truck now. Not sure where to take it. But, we got, uh, what's the word, we got a tip about where it might have come from. Possibly a location on the bereaved. They're from up in the *basin*." The guards exchanged anxious looks. Jericho's voice came hollering back instantly.

"So? Go check it out. They'll take it and rebury it. Then you can go back to rubbing sunscreen on each other's backs or whatever the hell it is you guys—" his voice cut out.

Celso smiled wide.

"Dear Cheapos of Zamboanga," he said. "This time a hundred won't cut it. It's gonna have to be at least four times that."

The guards, not used to launching any real investigations, reluctantly pushed the teak wood casket back down the pavement and gravel toward the pier. Celso's wooden dinghy tottered nearby, tied to a thick post. Celso pulled the loop from the pier, rolled up his pant legs, and waded into the shallows. He tied the rope to the hinges of the casket, which floated at the dinghy's stern, and when it was secure he held the side of his boat and hooked his arm around a pier post while the guards stepped off. The guards sat at either end while Celso climbed in, threw his flip-flops down, and sat in the middle between the oarlocks.

"Finally, brothers," Celso recited from his Sunday school lessons. "Rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace."

They rowed upstream, out of sight of the Zamboanga municipal buildings and the flags flying above them. The bourbon-coloured river turned this way after storms saturated it with mud and man-made debris that flowed past them towards the gulf. Suddenly, the landscape changed, as the urban settlements gave way to the island's thick vegetation.

"I hate snakes," the stout guard noted.

Celso took them through clusters of tall trees that blotted out the sunlight, the temperature noticeably cooler as they passed women carving with knives and kids defecating at the riverside. Some of the river homes were lopsided or completely dismantled, thin, dark-skinned families searching among the wreckage. Celso had passed this scene earlier today and many times before, but the guards watched, shaking their heads.

"One day the city will clear all this out and these people will be forced

to live in the modern way,” the mustached man said, tapping a cigarette off the side of Celso’s dinghy. “Can you imagine a worse way to live? Every day walking by a river of shit.”

The current was strong, but for Celso the ride was easy. He was used to rowing up and down the river several times a day even in the most extreme heat. Over time he could feel his muscles toughening from pulling the oars, likening his own arms to the wood of the paddles. When they reached the river knee, Celso let the dinghy float freely and then redirected it with one of his oars submerged.

The forest of canopy trees grew denser and the river narrowed. Water lapped up into the boat as Celso pulled the oars vertical to avoid the rivulet’s edge. The trailing casket dredged up dirt from the riverbed as the dinghy turned.

“It’s not much further,” Celso assured them, yet they’d already been travelling for nearly an hour. The guards had seemed to lose interest in their surroundings, leaning their heads in their palms and closing and opening their eyes. Even at his young age Celso had been taking passengers on this river for many years, so he was accustomed to the varied reactions of his customers. On occasion, he ferried tourists or people who worked for newspapers and magazines. These people interested him the most, the way they crinkled their brows and snapped pictures. Sometimes they spoke in other languages and he felt he could understand what they were saying verbatim. Of course he couldn’t, but it pleased him to pretend. After all, this was his home too, and anything his customers said about the basin they were also saying about him.

They arrived at a secluded home behind a small field of arranged crops. The men stepped out and Celso heaved the boat up a slope onto a platform of ridged wood. The casket remained in the water, barely afloat by the riverbank. Walking to the front of the humble, dark-coloured stilt house, they passed cages bursting with overgrown bitter melon gourds and cassava leaves bunched knee-high off the ground. The open-air first floor was a slab of concrete with hammocks and a rusty, functional stove. The guards investigated it to find nothing but a standing wall and curtain concealing a used bedpan. Stairs led to a door left ajar.

“Excuse me, residents!” the mustached guard called out. He marched upstairs, the steps squealing with each determined step, and knocked on the door. “We’re police officers hoping to ask some questions.” No response. He gripped the handle of the door but then stopped.

“Where have you taken us?” he shouted to Celso. “Is this a practical

joke? This house looks like it's been abandoned."

It was true. It seemed like no one had been living there for months.

"What good would it do me to play a joke on the guards of the dock where I work?" Celso asked. "I'm sure this is where the casket came from. Look over there where the land crumbled and fell into the river. And over there where there are carved wooden toys for a young child. If you're too afraid to investigate yourself, I would be happy to provide that service as well, for a price." The mustached guard looked over to the far end of the property where the roots of the mangroves burst through the soft dirt. He bared his teeth with a grimace and entered the home. The other two followed and they discovered together in what disarray the house had been left: bamboo mats strewn about and overturned, clay cups shattered on the floor, candles extinguished and cracked into pieces, a radio smashed, and a wicker basket tipped on its side surrounded by kernels of corn.

"Waste of time," the stout guard concluded. They exited, back into the breezeless day. But as they were coming down the front steps, Celso noticed they were not alone. Had they been there the whole time, or were their footsteps that quiet? Out of the mangroves and squat palms stepped their calloused feet wrapped in wicker sandals. They emerged, one at a time, from different ends of the property. Draped in baggy sweaters and shin-length skirts, hair swaddled in head wraps, the women approached the stilt house without reservation. The guards looked to the dinghy where a lackey with a hunting rifle on her back inspected the wooden boat and its curious trailer. Celso watched the colour drain from the obtuse faces of the guards. He could see the words forming on their lips: *Sige-sige*. *Sige*, the Tagalog word for "go ahead." *Go ahead and do what?*

Celso stood several feet away from them. In their nondescript grey uniforms, the duo stood out. A woman twice the size of Celso stepped up with a pair of rattan stems on her back.

"Who are these guys? Moros?" she asked the rest of her crew, staring at their faded, square caps.

"Not Moros," Celso assured her. "Men of duty."

"*Police*," she responded. "Even worse. There are no criminals here. Only people trying to survive. And you?"

"Just the boat guide, ma'am."

"We're not here to cause any disturbance," the mustached guard announced. "Only to investigate what we found at the Zamboanga dock." He pointed to the casket by the boat. The *Sige-sige* near the water's edge

made eye contact with the honcho and the honcho nodded back. "It seems we've missed the homeowners," he said. "Do you know where we could find them?"

"Next question," she responded.

"Okay...then perhaps I should have been clearer. We work for the City of Zamboanga and have come with questions about Alleluia Gomez."

The women laughed, the reason unknown to the two guards. Of course Celso knew the rumour about what the Sige-sige did to this family, and he was now realizing that he'd made a mistake in omitting this from what he told the guards. One of the women pulled gourds from the plant cages in front of the house.

"We're interested in giving Alleluia Gomez a proper burial. We wanted to find out if she was baptized," the mustached guard said.

"All of us have been baptized," the honcho said, "by this shit river right here. It floods our homes and washes away our belongings."

"It's just as I thought, that the people of the basin wouldn't even bother for a true, Christian baptism."

"You want to know the truth about Mr. and Mrs. Gomez?" she asked. It disturbed the mustached guard to be offered the truth. What could these Sige-sige know about truth? The honcho scratched the shoulder of one of her ruddy arms.

"They kept Alleluia Gomez outside the house at night like a dog. Had her on her knees praying for forgiveness for what she'd done to them by being born. Kept her praying when all she wanted to do was fall asleep, like the Apostles in the garden. They burned her skin to absolve her of her sins. What happened with Mr. and Mrs. Gomez? Probably took it too far with the girl and then...well you can open up the box and see for yourself."

"So you're saying she didn't drown?" he asked.

"Where'd you hear that?" she responded. The guards glared in Celso's direction and he saw his own lie sputtering out. But what of the honcho's? Was she also lying? Which rumours were true? Any of them?

"Yeah, Mr. Gomez was the worst of them. Sometimes you just know when someone deserves what's coming," she said.

The guards shared a nervous glance, the taller guard quickly shaking his head. The honcho stepped forward, this time right in the face of the men. She looked toward the stout guard.

"You, fat one," she said. "Do you fight?"

“Fight?” he squeaked.

“What am I saying, of course you’ve been trained to fight. You’re a guardian of the City of Zamboanga. Come, see what you can show us. Fight with one of my girls.”

He looked to his partner whose stone face told him nothing of what to do, one way or the other. Celso couldn’t help but feel a wave of amusement at the situation, but at the same time he thought about what might happen if the man were injured or worse. Other police guards would blame him and he would never be allowed to dock for his business. He felt regret, certainly about his main source of income, but also because he’d kind of grown to like the short, grumpy man and how it seemed like everything that was said, even something as simple as stating the weather, sent him into some kind of tizzy.

“Marisol,” the honcho called out.

One of the women stepped forward, a petite one with quick steps. Her head wrap was orange with a grey pattern and she tied the bottom of her dark skirt up around her thighs, revealing a pair of brown, toned legs.

“My superior would be furious to hear that I’ve engaged in fighting for sport. And with a girl no less. I would lose my job,” the stout guard insisted.

“Please, do me the honour,” Marisol said, smiling and slipping off her sandals. She had a pleasant face, Celso noticed, as he caught her giving him a wink. The stout guard looked around and counted. Each of the eight women looked meaner than the last—somehow he’d been challenged to fight the sweetest looking one. He saw no alternatives. Could he bring himself to attack this girl?

The honcho pulled the rattan stems from her back and handed one to each. The stout guard held his like a bat while Marisol gripped hers with her left hand several inches from the bottom and gracefully whipped it around her chest. As Marisol advanced, the guard disengaged, moving sideways and backwards. Celso watched her quick steps, which never sunk lower than the balls of her bare feet. She was young, Celso estimated eighteen or nineteen, and held her open hand above her shoulder. When she leapt forward, the stocky man flinched and raised his kali stick in defense. Marisol snapped her stick against his and jabbed at the man’s wrists with her open hand. His grip weakened and she brought the butt of her rattan stem down against his knuckles. He yelped in pain and once his kali stick was loose she whipped hers around to send his flying beneath the stilt house. The man slipped and fell, unarmed, as Marisol brought

her rattan stem down with almost inconceivable speed. It came to an abrupt stop just an inch from the man's temple. The women laughed, the honcho the loudest, and sporadic clapping came from all around. Marisol eased her stance. Like that, the carefree demeanour she'd shown before the start of the fight returned. The honcho came and looked down at the stout guard. He lay there trembling, liquid trailing down from the seat of his pants. The taller guard stood in front of the stilt house motionless, mouth open as though he were about to say something but deciding against it.

The boat ride back was effortless—they glided across the bourbon-coloured water, their cursed cargo in tow. It was in worse shape than ever, hardly holding together at the corner joints. The slow sloshing of Celso's oars was the only sound for awhile.

"Maybe a priest would give her a post-mortem baptism," the mustached guard finally offered. The sun was now setting and even though they had spent nearly the whole day investigating the casket, they were nowhere closer to finding a final resting place for it. What was on their minds was that they may have escaped death, but at the cost of their dignity. Finally the stout guard spoke.

"That's heresy," he said plainly. "Let's just leave it somewhere and tell Jericho that the family took it."

"It's a human body. It should be buried where her people can find her. If they ever want to look..." the other guard said.

"I wouldn't be surprised if the Sige-sige did this to the girl themselves," the stout guard said, his face still flushed.

Celso pondered everything he'd heard about Alleluia Gomez. What had really happened to her? Did it even matter? Celso rested the oars in his lap, lost in thought, letting the current take them and recalling that while the three were surrounded by the Sige-sige he'd heard the worried yips of a young girl coming from beyond the mangroves. Or had he imagined it? Could it have been her, Alleluia Gomez, concealed somewhere so that the guards wouldn't find her? Or was it just another girl, a daughter of one of the Sige-sige hoping to be fed at the wrong time?

He could find out for sure, he realized, when they pulled the casket ashore where they had found it. All he had to do was peek inside. The latch was already dismantled and the top barely sat flat. In a matter of seconds he could find out whether or not those yips in the mangroves were as meaningful as he suddenly thought.

The guards disembarked first, the stout one covering his ruined uniform bottoms as he hopped onto the pier. Celso untied the casket and pushed it through the shallows to the gravel landing. The men met him there and they moved the casket together, all three wary of its many splits and weak points. When they arrived at the lot, they lifted it, shoulder-high, like pallbearers, and slid it into the bed of the pickup truck. At this moment, the guards moved aside, lit the last of their packs, and inhaled greedily.

Celso stared at the teak wood casket. He thought back to Marisol, the way she had so nonchalantly winked in his direction, and how she was once young. And had the Sige-sige come to find her family in the night too? He thought of her sweet face and felt grateful that it was still there in his memory. He was thankful that she was out there in the world, capable of disarming you in more ways than one. He thought of his own childhood, how he'd wished every day that his father would come home with more food than the day before, and how most days that wasn't the case. And after so many years of feeding off what scraps his father left behind, bits of skin on a chicken bone or tough flesh left on fruit pits, Celso had realized that if he didn't do something about it himself he would starve. And so he'd decided that he would build a boat that could sail him to freedom. He'd done just that, far away and in secret, carving its pieces out of a fallen palm tree. Celso pressed his hand down on top of the casket, securing it in place. He rapped his hand on the side of the truck and turned to the guards. The stout one walked over and handed him his cash.

"And some extra," he said. "To never mention what happened at that river house."

Celso thanked him and listened to their conversation as the truck doors creaked open and they climbed in.

"Wait, I have some plastic bags for you to sit on."

"For Chrissakes, haven't I been embarrassed enough?"

"Not a chance."

"Where to?"

"I guess we'll take it to the station and see what Jericho says."

"He won't be happy."

"Probably kick us right out."

"Well then, can we skip that part?"

"You know, there's a rectory by St. Joseph's church. We could ask Father Benny if he knows of a place in the diocese that could..."

BLIND

There are many ways to not
see, to disappear behind

the dark. I watched her
eyes fade, pale,

and lashless remain
open, yet did not see.

I did not see the unsteady
walk but watched her pick

roses and sweet peas, hands
aware of thorns that never

pricked her fingers.
She picked from Peace,

from Mrs. Lincoln, from Sterling Silver but left
the Icebergs with their prickliness alone.

She knew where they were because
she had put them in the ground.

In our drive through groves of oranges
she knew where that sign was,

the "oranges for sale." We stopped and bought
some. She knew the way while I

did not know she could not see
the words.

She made her meals with familiar pans. I did not
notice how small it was all becoming and how

she was leaving not just me but how
little of her was left. Petals fell

from her hands and I did not notice
or I did but they did not mean anything.

On the lawn that night she said "I want to see
the moon rise because it gives everything

a shape the sun does not."
The moon gave her face a shape

I do not remember seeing.

Ashley Obscura

FROM AMBIENT TECHNOLOGY

I start to give away things that matter to me

Up against this impossible data

Despairing minimum wage and job security

Government programs

Doing things wrong

Being looked at too closely

Social surveillance

Spending money

The passing of time

I don't know I have

Writing to distract my self from feeling. Chasing pentacles along Plaza St-Hubert. Feeling depressed because I have been eating nothing but bread all week. Withdrawing money I don't have. Losing my appetite for anything resembling tenderness. Forgetting I have a body. In the dirty snow, trying to manifest a reality where winter isn't sad and disgusting and I don't feel so severed. Because you said something inside of you was broken and that it was keeping you from loving me. And that has become something that doesn't come off me. The city becomes smaller, more sinister. My existence is consuming itself. I am less like a person in love.

Lizzie Derksen

ELLA

I WANT TO WRITE A SHORT STORY about my husband's new girlfriend. I want to write it in the style of Richard Brautigan, because he's the author she told me about the first night she came over for supper. I touched her ankle for the first time and then kissed her for the first time. She felt wonderful! The three of us were all together in bed even though she didn't take off her underwear because she was still on her period. I wouldn't have cared about her being on her period. I've gone down on lots of women on their periods and it didn't need to be anything for her or me to be ashamed of.

She probably thought that I asked her what book she was reading as a way to test her. That's exactly why I asked her! We both knew that. When she said Richard Brautigan I was slightly disappointed, because I didn't know anything about Richard Brautigan, he was a nobody to me, but because I love Ella I know now.

She's only twenty, but she's really seen everything.

It's obvious she's been around the block a few times. She first emerged

spotless from the fire at Alexandria, where I was the smeared and wailing one wandering around trying to recite the texts of all of those thousands of individual books, which are now lost to us forever.

I don't know why I didn't notice her at the time (well, I was too busy ululating because that's how women in many traditional societies have mourned).

She was probably wearing a white linen shift. White is a symbol of purity, but also synthesis and complexity because white light can be fanned out into an array containing the continuity of all colours.

Whatever was worth saving at that juncture, she *was* it, or *had* it. It was under that white shift where her body is so fine-grained and strong, and (though she still wears loose, shift-like clothing) shaped with a lot of proportional integrity, like an Egyptian vase.

Next she was born Joan of Arc. She made sure she was martyred before compromising doubt set in. As much as she knew on one level that God had called her to lead France to martial victory, a couple of levels up she was starting to see through monotheistic, patriarchal religions in general and she didn't want it to trickle down and spoil the Arc of history.

I was incarnated as her mother at that point, trying in vain to teach her how to earn a womanly living while she was sneaking out to confer with Charles VII.

I knew wool-spinning. I could pass on something valuable in the form of wool-spinning. Wool-spinning I could get behind. All the rest of it, the war, the dauphin, I could take it or leave it. But I did spend the rest of my life petitioning the pope to clear her of the charge of heresy, which I'm sure wasn't bothering her at all.

She grew into Ada Byron Lovelace, surpassing her deadbeat poet father and inventing the computer she would one day incarnate. I was also using my intelligence. I was fucking a member of an aristocratic family instead of peeling potatoes in his kitchen. It was really something, much better than nothing.

She was writing to her mother:

"I believe myself to possess a most singular combination of qualities exactly fitted to make pre-eminently a discoverer of the hidden realities of nature...

Firstly: owing to some peculiarity in my nervous system, I have perceptions of some things, which no one else has; or at least very few, if any...Some might say an intuitive perception of hidden things;—that is of things hidden from eyes, ears and the ordinary senses...

Secondly;—my immense reasoning faculties;

Thirdly;...the power not only of throwing my whole energy and existence into whatever I choose, but also bring to bear on any one subject or idea, a vast apparatus from all sorts of apparently irrelevant and extraneous sources. I can throw rays from every quarter of the universe into one vast focus.”

Yup, that's her alright. Over and over, she rose at the seminal moment, innocent, all-knowing, free of everything. I like to carry everything around with me like a non-ergonomic backpack. Or like the Rubbermaid container in which a newly homeless person might still be storing their stuff, in an attempt maybe to hack the system, do this homeless thing the smart way.

Meanwhile, she is being reborn again, IRL and on the internet. Initially a folk-singing, svelte, and large-eyed hologram to me, she is becoming increasingly real.

So she can pay her brother's rent, she has taken on a third job peeling potatoes in a kitchen. She can talk to anyone including the incestuous cousins who play darts at the Empress. She's getting into pleated pants, which is so adorable. She has lovers other than my husband, including a sad lawyer who ties her up and hits her, giving her a drink without asking what she wants to drink. I understand how his behaviour could feel like a relief.

Sometimes, like today, I worry about her. That might be partly because in the twilight years of the Twentieth Century our equally deadbeat sets of parents gave us almost the same name.

It is now ten minutes to two o'clock on a sleeting Saturday afternoon in March. I am twenty-seven years old. I just had a shower and I'm drinking water out of a Nalgene water bottle and thinking about last Monday when we ate a vegan breakfast of black coffee together, and about the thousands of years of relevant human history that have led up to now. I believe in a cosmic intelligence. I believe in Ella, the girlfriend. I believe in myself, the wife. And I believe in the two of us, each the image out of one eye.

BYE

Ask yourself: do you really love the moon,
or do you love what the moon represents to you?
Poets seem to need to use things, & people,
too. A poet used a rock when he thought:
I will build a church upon it. Any rock
would have done, really. Flesh or celestial,
any body that would have obeyed, lain
pliant while you worked out your frustration.
Tidally locked to face your idealization,
the moon only has a dark side because of you.
The trouble is with what you are, not with what
you lack, remember that. It's trapped in orbit;
don't pretend it's there because it loves you back.

LITTLE ACTS

—of kindness? I don't want to call it that. More like payback. On a debt he won't admit I'm in to him. He says I'm too free with time & money, but it's all in proportion to the support that he provides me, & anyway, peace of mind's pragmatic luxury—keeping him in cabs when the city doesn't feel safe enough for the likes of us; keeping him in medicinal cannabis; keeping him in fresh air & company. Keeping him in poems while he sleeps (good morning)—doves by the windowsill behind his head, lead paint flakes on the blanket's faded wine stain. Nineteen months since he first saw through my sure-I-have-my-shit-together, my I'm-fine, & today—between interludes of socioeconomically-indentured servitude—he will no less tirelessly try to keep me on track, distracted, if not (but often) happy. What to do, Light, with a boy like that but to give back all I can afford to? Keep him full of avocado; rich with knowing he's adored, too; flush with heart emojis. Ward away his worries with a little more than what he allows me to allow, wave away his protestations that he's undeserving of it all; an unending battle, but on hold for now.

Aidan Chafe

ETERNAL OPTIMIST

It is important to imagine Sisyphus happy.

—Albert Camus

take away the boulder
leave his two good feet

even if only the mountain
he is tasked with both directions

the trick is to believe
he heads solely skyward,

climbing that unreachable peak,
unable to turn or cling to thought,

unable to sift salt from scripture,
context from circumstance,

unable to decipher the sleepy world
from the book governed by

impractical gods
who burn forests for leisure,

rattle earth like a snow globe
in their leviathan fingers

the trick is to believe atlas holds
more than earth together

that life
is not a treadmill

the trick is not to look the future
in the eye

and count the bodies falling
from the sky, shadows flailing

over bridges or into trains

the trick is to deny the weight
of your shoulders

the wildfire in your head
and the ground below so hungry

and you that boulder
never stopping to look behind

to see the distance between
rock bottom and what keeps

you rolling along

Angélique Lalonde

POOKA

POOKA LIVED IN A ROOM with carpets of all shapes and sizes woven from different cloths. Pooka picked up carpets wherever he went. Most of the time unwanted carpets were dirty or cut up or had cigarette burns in them or smelled like cat piss, so Pooka had a lot of cruddy carpets alongside the nice carpets he was gifted or able to buy during blowout sales at home furnishing stores, end of the roll off-sales, and Oriental outlets. He mixed them together because Pooka was like that, all mixed up himself. Off-white blend of kinfolk peppered down the line. Indian nearly fractioned out, they told him, because grand-maman Thérèse, already a half-breed, married Renaud Fortier, Frenchman from the logging camp upriver. Then mama took up with Gunther Poundsly, Pooka's no-good pa who gave only bruises, crooked teeth, a penchant for sauerkraut, and armfuls of meanness until he left them to go back to the Sault.

Mama said "getting lighter with each successive generation of mixing," said "despite blending in the ghosts of the ancestors are all

frayed up inside, calling to our spirits with directions we don't know how to follow, so we get lost along the way.”

Frayed up from not knowing how to live between worlds, Pooka knew—from the structural forgettings legislated on mama and grand-maman's lives, and the oceans between here and the places in the world his other people came from. Mama did some big forgetting, she said, when she was twelve years old and the government came to take her out of the bush, place her in a good white home where there wasn't no more booze, just a whole lot of work, a brother who liked to touch her up, and godliness she shed as soon as she skipped out at sixteen. Didn't see grand-maman again until Gunther left and the city streets spat her out, back to the village with her little boy. Not-quite-white-Pooka, picked on at powwow for his white-boy face, ticking the Métis box on the Census 'cause that was the closest fit. Nevermind that saying it out loud made him feel like a sham, bringing up everything he didn't know about who he was supposed to be.

Pooka felt there was no real demarcation between things. He learned from his school books that life was a mash-up of history told like a storybook of happy endings if you were on the right side and unfortunate circumstances that couldn't be reversed now if you weren't. He knew that the sullied carpets he collected had been woven from pristine cloth, that given time and human use the new carpets would become sullied. For Pooka, the mixed-up rugs felt something like a homeland. A place to collapse time and storylines, create a sanctified present from a mucked up past.

The rugs were Pooka's only furnishings. Layered and layered on each other to make a bed or a rise on which to set a coffee mug. Sometimes Pooka got creative and sculpted them into intricate replicas of couches he sat on at other people's houses.

Once, during a particularly bleak winter, he sculpted an entire IKEA bedroom suite. The lampshade was a bit tricky, and although he was usually loath to do so, for this particular project he got hold of a pair of scissors. He cut up one of the already-torn carpets so that the lampshade would fit right and not light on fire from pieces of fabric touching the bulb. He looked up videos of how to wire a lamp on YouTube and scavenged wiring from a lamp of cousin Vicky's. It made Pooka feel modern to have a lamp in his home, to live in an IKEA bedroom suite like all the women he met who worked at smart retail stores, the only ones other than cousin Vicky who would talk to him.

Pooka spent a lot of time in smart retail stores pretending to shop for things. Mostly he was getting ideas for how to sculpt his carpets, or noticing display carpets showing wear that might come on sale sometime soon because no one would want to pay full price for them. Pooka knew how to talk carpet; he could always haggle the saleswomen down. With salesmen he didn't even bother, feeling most of the time like they weren't worth the trouble of talking rug with. They wanted to seal the deal, not send the carpet to a good home. Or so Pooka thought.

Pooka was thrilled when his room of sculpted carpets was featured on a website. One of those sites where people who spend a lot of time on computers go to compare their own lives to those of other people they have never met who live in places like New York or San Francisco. Meaningful places with panache that people might imagine themselves in. Online mock-ups for how to navigate the world of things and properly curate a life. His "eclectic suite," however, was quickly taken down because of the spiteful putdowns posted by viewers who were used to staged, minimalistic homes. Homes that displayed their inhabitants' sophistication, cookie-cutter individuality, and eye for tasteful decor. Homes that had class.

"This place looks like a thrift store stocked by a blind four-year-old," wrote Micah4u. "Is this a joke?" posted dEsignBaby. "This is the most tasteless jumble of trash I've ever seen in my life," was Grendel Piker's response.

Pooka was heartbroken. This was during his 1960s Star Trek phase, when he'd actually gone so far as to spray paint some of his carpets silver and black to look like the Captain's chair. His photographer friend Peanut, who had taken the artful photos of Pooka's rug replica of the Enterprise NCC-1701, felt awful about the ordeal.

Pooka pretended not to care about what online design critics thought of the place he called home. He reckoned they couldn't see beyond the obvious, viewing things only in terms of outlines and not in terms of spirit. He saw that theirs was a gated community of taste, that they used aesthetic condemnation to keep the riff-raff out. Nonetheless, Pooka dismantled the carpet rendition of Captain Kirk's bridge.

Until then Pooka's fanciful successes in carpet sculpture had helped to keep his mind off mama's latest disappearance, let him keep pretending she was just drifting, that like every other time she had drifted before she would find her way home. But time stretched on and mama did not

resurface. With nothing to distract him, Pooka's heart broke. Pooka knew this time that mama was lost, the way tante Bernadette was lost, and Tina from high school, and Liz from the village upriver. No follow-up down at the station, no mention on the evening news or photos along the roadside. One more woman washed out of a world scripted to efface her, not even a ripple in the surface of the fabricated story in which all people belong.

Pooka's online ridicule was one more disappointment in a life he could only see through his sorrows. Alone on the outskirts of his humanity, not belonging became too much for Pooka. He ceased pretending to be Mr. Spock, wearing pointy ears and trying all sorts of foreign foods he found around town to test the Vulcan's taste buds. He couldn't remember what grand-maman had said about always being at home among his ancestors because he could not speak their tongues and had no sense of the inspirited landscapes they'd inhabited. He could not hear them because they were far gone to him, people in history books wearing clothing crafted from animal skins, weaving baskets and boxes from plants. Pioneers with fringe jackets and musket rifles, bottom of the barrel Englishmen sailing in the bowels of dank ships, German peasants tilling up whatever land they could find, uprooting hundred-year-old trees with bare hands.

Pooka's sneakers were made in China by labourers he'd never know, his skin clothed in factory cotton travelled all around the globe, though he'd barely been a hundred clicks from the one-room box he called home.

Unlike grand-maman, Pooka couldn't hear the ancestors when he walked through the furniture district downtown built atop the old fish camps. But sometimes Pooka imagined that the carpets gave voice to them, that the foreign-made rugs hoarded up in showrooms scattered all over the city might be a medium through which the relations could speak. The IKEA suite and Captain's Bridge were Pooka's attempts at coaxing them out.

After Pooka's online ventures in "carpArtry" were quashed, and with mama gone for good this time, he became unable to feel at home among his carpets. For a good five years Pooka kept things flat. He didn't shop around or notice shifting trends in rug manufacturing. He lost track of developments in loom engineering and stopped haggling for deals altogether. Pooka was down and out. During these years Pooka worked on and off as a casual labourer for various construction projects. He

experimented with crystal meth and got addicted to it, the way people do. He made other meth friends who were down and out like him. A lot of scattered spirits stimulated only by the hit, every other aspect of life losing texture, ceasing to impart meaning.

His den became littered with drug paraphernalia, unwashed dishes, and dirty laundry he couldn't bother to clean. Pooka lost sense of himself. He couldn't find space in his heart for the things that had once fed him, even though he finally had a girlfriend who cooked for him: bowls of pasta with sauce from a jar and broken light bulbs of crystal. Poor little messed up Mel who went into fits of rage when his attention went elsewhere.

When he wasn't high, and often when he was, Pooka laboured on the infrastructure for modern condos downtown, making sure to always leave jobs before getting to the interiors. Pooka didn't want anything to do with the insides people would inhabit. He always took special care not to go into the show suites, because of the shame they brought up in him about his loss of inspiration. Because they highlighted how clean people would live, people who weren't like him and couldn't understand the depths of his degradation, his loneliness and all the ways he'd been hard done by in this world. Never-loved-properly-Pooka crouching inside the cupboards, papa smashing pots overhead in the sink muttering about his uselessness.

Things would have gone on like this if it weren't for the special set of circumstances that sheared the fuzz from Pooka's synapses. They would have gone on like this until desperation led to violence, incarceration, bodily breakdown, or just plain giving up. Pooka was often up in the ironworks; it would not have been difficult to fall. Only the thought of his carpets kept him from inching off the edge, the thought of the voices trapped up in them that might be lost forever if he didn't arrange them into perceivable forms. Pooka knew for certain they'd be thrown into a trash bin by his landlord, who would find them filthy, even cringe at the thought of them, when he'd recount the story of having to haul out Pooka's decrepit stacks.

It was a deconstruction project in the warehouse district on the industrial fringes of the city that finally bridged Pooka's mind and heart. A complex of concrete blocks that had been abandoned and boarded up since before Pooka had moved to the city. The faded lettering on the awning illegible in the grimy expanse of a neighbourhood you only went to if you had something specific to get at one of the duct ventilation or fire safety supply stores.

Pooka walked into what was once *Desislava's Authentic Eastern Imports* gritty and wanting, his heart like the sandpaper tongue of a mother cow licking flies off her just weaned calf across the wire, risking the electric shock just to get some closeness. Frazzled, murky Pooka, just this side of the meth binge that had started as a helluva time but finally broke him and Mel, leaving him friendless on the other side.

Pooka didn't notice what was all around him in the dim light until he felt a full-bodied cushioning rise up through the soles of his steel-toed boots. He started, recognizing the somatic resonance of a nineteenth-century Chiprovtsi kilim. He dropped to his knees to examine the fibres, running his labour-roughened hands along the weft of the red and black threads. Pooka knew this was authentic Bulgarian, could sense in the filaments an outpouring of nationalistic sentiment from just after the Crimean War. He looked up and saw an entire storeroom of rolled and stacked rugs, dotted here and there with statuettes, vases, and urns, coated with rubble from the collapsing roof and dank from water damage at the southeast end. Pooka woke up, snapped into consciousness as if charged by an electric current running through an otherwise inert substance. He returned to his being amidst Desislava's abandoned relics, receptors in his brain sensing joy from something other than methamphetamine for the first time in years.

"The whole lot of it's for the dump," said Boss Slims, who'd hired him to do the job.

There on the kilim, Pooka sensed he'd been called upon to salvage what he could of the ruins of Desislava's treasures, precious emblems of foreign cultures cast upon his shores. He asked Slims if he could take some of the wreckage home instead of tossing it out.

"So long as you ain't turning a profit I don't see no issue with it," said Slims. "I got the call from City Hall to haul it to the trash yard before they tear it down. Don't see as anyone would mind you sifting through, so long as there ain't anything shady you intend to do with it."

He paused and Pooka twitched, both from anxiety—that he might have to resort to criminal pillage to take the kilims home if Slims didn't agree to it—and the neurotoxic effects of meth withdrawal.

"There was some kind of scandal that ended this place up in the courts some while back, so it might be someone's keeping an eye out," Boss Slims recalled.

"It was in the papers but I can't recollect the details, maybe deportation or tax fraud. No one could liquidate 'til they cleared up the ownership. In

'97 or '98 we got that real bad winter with the ice storms and frost heaves, come spring there was a crack clear through the back wall. Water's been seeping for years, no one allowed in to do anything about it. All this junk left to rot. Mould and rat shit all over the place. Can't see there's anything worth anything left, but you might find something worth keeping. Must've been a fortune here at some point."

Pooka told Boss Slims it was for an art project. Slims looked at him cockeyed, unsure about the kind of art Pooka'd make out of this mess. He told him to be discreet, not to go showing things off or anything, seeing as someone might recognize the material if they were looking for it. Pooka said he'd be selective, dump most of what was there like he was supposed to, and transform what he took beyond recognition so no one could trace things back.

Pooka lives in a room lined with carpets of all shapes and sizes and colours woven into different forms. Six years Pooka's had with the detritus of Desislava's big dreams. Six years keeping himself clean by tending to the discards of someone else's life and in so doing reimagining his own. Pooka has moved beyond stacking now, daring to dream beyond the confines of an inherited reality. Pooka unravels threads and weaves new images, reinterpreting the past. In the new tapestries, Pooka's mama lives in a nest edged by curlicues and red-leafed maples. She comes and goes as she pleases and no harm can reach her. He weaves her as a hawk, like in the stories she used to tell him. Pooka remembers that mama loved him once, before a bad life got hold of her spirit, broke her wings, and boxed her into a story she could not live out.

Pooka is joyful for mama, joyful to tell her story the way she wanted it told. He drapes her on his back and carries her to the shore to watch the waves come in, to be held in by her ancient warmth.

The act of unravelling releases the knots that ruptured the ancestor's storylines, fraying them up so that Pooka could not hear them, could feel only the schism of loss. Pooka's whole being is immersed in the work of untangling, and even though he doesn't always know what the voices of the ancestors are saying as he takes apart and remakes, he hears their joy and is able to feel hope. They come to him as if in dreams, ancestors who feel the wind in their hair, haul fish up from the river, same river out the window, same water that wetted the ancestors' tongues, upon which they travelled. Pooka envisions the wind, allowing it to tickle the water; frissons of blue, green, and white dotted here and there with the bright

silver flashes of fish coming home, souls waiting to be reborn. Streaks of grey and brown amidst the red and yellow flush of autumn, faces open to the wind as they transition between this life and the next, passing through death along the way.

This form, this life, the structure of reality that smashed him up on the inside, made his mother-folk fade in and out. Made the world a mismatch of other people's stories he could not claim as his own, his father-folk a frenetic aching coursing through his fingers. Pooka sees the holes and loops and presses love into them, easing the passage to rooms where people talk and their voices are the clacking sounds of branches and migratory birds, kinships of forest, field, fowl, fingers tapping out a tune.

Pooka builds bridges between heartbreak and happiness. Bridges to cross over his fear. Safe passage for a cluttered soul hiding out to escape the bang-up job papa did on his life, the system always pressing in to keep him down. He guts the gutters where he's lived so long among the effluents of a world that doesn't want him. He finds brethren there and gives them new forms. As he re-stories rugs, Pooka becomes a maker of worlds instead of a castoff living within the confines of his shame. Reworking threads reroutes his neural pathways. Bit by bit new patterns emerge, healing wounds rather than wearing them raw over and over and over again.

Pooka gathers plants in city parks, along sidewalks, and in the forest edging the ends of bus lines. He lends colours to bleached-out strands: alder bark and wild carrot root for orange, blackberries for purple, lichens for red and yellow, birch bark for brown. He uproots beets from the community gardens to coax a deep red, fixing the dye with vinegar from packets picked up at A&W. Blacks he gets from walnut hulls, staining his hands at the same time, and greens from nettles and peppermint that he also brews into tea. Plants, creatures, and new geographies of colour teach him to sing the songs of the city as his ancestors learned to sing the songs of the land.

Still, this is not a success story to print in magazines read by all the women who work at smart retail stores. Pooka has not remade his identity and turned his life around to become a better version of himself. He has not stepped out of destitution into a life of blissful hope. Despite his efforts, Pooka's threads sometimes lead to despair. His ancestors' sufferings and cruelties, mama's missing face smiling at him from tattered photographs, tante Bernadette, Tina, papa's big fists, and all the traumas

of life are there in the mouldy patches of Desislava's rugs. Are there in the morning when he wakes up and everything he loves has been distorted into ugliness or taken from him, hindering his heart. Pooka is often unable to build the bridges needed to traverse his emptiness. Sometimes the way out is not clear. The old ruts in his mind are mighty worn and he longs for a simple wormhole of dopamine to flood him into peace. Even though time after time these quick clicks to happiness have only led to the same sad place.

Pooka tricks himself into presence by delving into the enlivened materiality of the kilims. String by string he weaves himself into place, his fingers unravelling the fabrics of other official histories. He finds hope there for other ways of telling. He'll tie one knot, make a loop, cut here, and the fray of the thread will suggest another pattern. This is no ideal world, fabric constrained by the genesis of its being and former lives, but what is woven can be teased apart. Pooka tampers and tugs at reality, drawing it by hand, creating new pathways through the made-up world.

ORIGINS

The storyteller is weaving
a mouth onto a stone, the stone is becoming
a child

gathering wheat from the field.
There is a sky within the sky, the child
knows this much

and so, folds her palms together like water
over water,

a deepening.

Several years later, she finds a mouth
within her womb,

she finds a heartbeat, she finds a long thread
and begins to weave
a girl

out of stories within stories.
I am a body made from a spooling bloodline,

an autumnal storm that cracks open
the doubling sky.

Mother, I have your rain.

AN APOLOGY

i hold your face in my hands (mother).
cup like you used to mine.

i hold tears
suture tears (rip).

my thumbs smooth hills
fill valleys

hold ancient memories.
your face like ruins eyes dark pools

i hold earth in my hands the bones (structure)
interred. cheeks sunken over crater mouth

i will (strain) youth, dream (hope)
in the end, as always, you'll say

i didn't do enough.

Kate Gunn

GLACIER

LENA WAS WASHING HER HAIR when Nathan went missing.

She didn't know it at the time, of course. Well, maybe she felt a slight shift. A small pop, like a balloon bursting in another room or the click of a key in a door. She could have put it down to the sound of a car on Glacier Highway, the road that severed their house from Green Lake and the dark forest that spread up the mountain towards the glacier itself. Or perhaps it was an absence of sound, the space between two waves on a beach.

In any case, she rinsed the shampoo out of her hair and turned off the shower. It wasn't until she opened the bathroom door and heard only the clamour of morning cartoons that she realized he was gone. It was the only time of day she let him watch TV, just long enough to shower. She walked out of the bathroom in her towel, water dripping down her back, and looked at the empty rug in front of the TV, the overturned plastic juice cup, and Cheerios scattered across the floor.

She looked again, and again. Nathan? she said. Her voice came back

to her in an echo, as though the room had been emptied of furniture.

She looked around the corner, to the kitchen. Nothing. Nathan? she said again, and waited for the sudden, high sound of his voice to break the silence.

The panic didn't come immediately. Dawson wasn't the same as a city in the south. It wasn't a place where children were stolen or vanished into cavernous shopping malls. There was time to pick up her T-shirt and jeans from the bathroom floor, dress, and start looking methodically through the house.

Back in Vancouver, in her other life, she'd been a counsellor at a clinic for teenagers. All day, for five years, she'd talked to girls about needles and condoms and consent. She lay awake nights and imagined those same girls walking away from the clinic and out onto dimly lit streets alone. Later, one of those girls was assaulted and she was called to testify at the trial. For weeks in advance she was sick with worry, sick with fear that her words would somehow fail her. The worry took on a life of its own and walked beside her.

In some ways it had seemed reasonable when Dan had told her, You're miserable, you should quit. She was, so she did. And for a brief moment she was in the space between the waves and everything was quiet.

But then the things that happen happened. The first thing that happened was that Dan was offered a job as a flight medic, and she went with him. There was nothing to keep her in Vancouver. She got on the plane with her backpack and watched the green trees and grey mountains rise up to meet her.

The second thing that happened was Nathan. The first night in the hospital, waking up, she watched his tiny body curled on the cot beside her. She felt the weight of an anchor around her neck.

Then after that there were other things, smaller things. Dan took more overnight shifts transferring high-risk patients on the medic jet to the big hospital down south. One night when she was alone with Nathan a bear tried to break into the house. She woke up in the dark and heard the chewing and clawing from downstairs and lay helpless over Nathan's sleeping body. In the morning there were long jagged claw marks on the vinyl siding.

More recently, the darker thing. It was with her now almost all the time. There was the day she woke up and thought about the toys on the living room floor and the crumbs on the couch and Dan gone until the next morning and she could not get up. Or would not. She couldn't tell.

Nathan came and stood beside her. Mummy? he said. He touched her shoulder, her hair, possessively. He crawled over her body and pulled on her eyelids. Then he wandered off into the living room and she heard the clatter of blocks. When she woke up next she heard a crash and stumbled into the kitchen to find milk pooling on the floor and Nathan standing blinking in the bright light of the open fridge.

Now, the silence in the house closed in around her like a blanket of snow. Outside on the highway car tires hissed on the slick wet road. There was the yawning roar of a plane overhead. The glacier crept silently down the mountain.

Last summer Dan had called Lena's friend Annie in Vancouver. She'd shown up at Lena's doorstep a week later. They made lime margaritas in the blender in the afternoon while Dan was at work and drank them sprawled on the leather couch. He worries about you, Annie told her.

Later, they went to the brewery and stood outside the building in the weak sunlight, drinking beer out of smudged glasses while Nathan slept in his car seat.

Before she left, Annie gave Lena a crystal that caught the grey light in the living room as it passed over the floor and turned it into rainbows. On winter mornings, long after Annie had gone home, Lena played a game with Nathan. Who can catch the rainbow? His small hands slapped the wall as he chased the rays of light.

Lena's feet moved now of their own accord. She looked in the pantry where she kept the granola and beans and dried pasta. In Dan's office, behind the desk, the space behind the stairs between the Christmas tree stand and cross-country skis. In the carport, under the car.

She had a habit of imagining another life unfurling in parallel to the one she was living. It was like looking back into the past and imagining a series of doors not opened and walking down the hall and opening them: this one opens to the life of a librarian who lives in Vancouver and takes her dog to Trout Lake on Sunday mornings. This one opens to a cobblestone street in Paris, this one to washing blowing on a line in a meadow, to a white-shuttered house on a farm dotted with black cows.

In one parallel life, a life she visited often, she walked slowly into Green Lake and the water closed like the drawstring of a black velvet bag above her head.

She had shifted now into purposeful searching. She looked in less and less obvious places—the bathtub, the washing machine, the dryer. Her voice took the shape of Nathan's name. The sound broke out of her throat

and leapt ahead of her down the hall like fire.

She thought, senselessly, of calling Dan. He would be on a jet in all likelihood, intubating a stroke patient high above the Rockies.

The clock in the hallway read 11:02 a.m. Had it been ten minutes? Thirty? An hour?

In the bedroom she ran her hands over the rumpled fox-print duvet on the bed, Nathan's threadbare pink stuffed lamb. The folds of the blanket caved in at her touch, empty. She sat down between the pillows.

When she and Annie were children they'd spent summer evenings jumping off the ferry dock. They'd had to wait until the tide was high and the ferry had left to gather swarms of tourists and locals returning from grocery shopping in the city. When the ferry was gone and the water was calm they would hold hands and run, eyes closed, off the end. There would be the first silent rush as they arced through the air, arms outstretched, followed by the shock of cold and silver bubbles and the green water blooming suddenly before their eyes.

She closed her eyes and lay back on the bed. A dark heaviness settled over her. Stillness.

Some time later, small hands on her face. Like kisses, or raindrops. Nathan's blond hair brushing her arms. Warm breath on her neck. In her mind she walked across the road, directly towards the water.

Silently, she put her arms out. Nathan crawled onto the bed, and they slept.

rob mclennan

ONCE UPON A TIME, IN PICTON

Car radio, horns. The Bay of Quinte. Al Purdy hours. Cadence, waterways, the spine of each sentence. The alphabet ends. Across the southern shoreline: traffic, houses, smokestack. Walled, abridged. I had a book. The cold, set in. A wash of sun, of ducks, these concrete moorings. Lined with in-laws. Settled, in. A toddler's cadence, grandfathered. Steeped. How: you shield your eyes. Untethered. Stepped, around the pool. They all went in.

HOW TO LIVE

The witches gave me clear instructions on how to live:
spend time with family
be in nature
cleanses with salt water, with sage
be careful with money
spare no expense on family
give to charity
protect with black tourmaline and black onyx
there is no need for diamonds

I look back and wonder if these were steps for a spell, one
that ensured I'd be home for my father's death.

Everything they asked of me brought me to the place
where I had my hands above Dad's heart, applying
just enough pressure to keep his blood
flowing without breaking his ribs, without piercing muscle and flesh.

CEREMONY

To be in nature, I walk at Deer Lake, paddle
on water to get a closer look
at the Arthur Erickson house
with its large windows, mid-century modern
furniture, and horror movie setting. Nearby
on a public path there is a film set, shack
built to appear aged and abandoned, but the wood
smells fresh cut, more recent than the breakup
I initiated so new energy would flow to me.

One walk around the perimeter
of the lake to say good-bye
like Marina Abramovic and Ulay walking ninety days
on the Great Wall to meet in the middle
to part ways. I may have changed,
become a healthier version of myself,
but still I love the artifice, the ceremony, the drama

Charlene Kwiatkowski

TEXT TO VANCOUVER

after Elizabeth Bishop

In your next text I wish you'd say
where you are going and what you are making;
how are the shows, and between the shows
what percentage of smiles you're faking

grabbing keys and a coffee to go
driving fast even in rainy conditions
you park your dreams in metered streets
that expire before they begin

and the city looks so clean and smooth
with glass towers and designated bike lanes
and suddenly you're moving in circles
where everyone knows your name

and most of the time it is grand
like martinis around Kits pool
and the women are pretty but somehow aloof
and your words sound so terribly cool

and coming out of your top-floor condo
to the polished windows, the put-on faces,
the wind carries a scent of last night's garbage
marking the city like breadcrumb traces.

Traces, not signs, dear. I'm afraid
if it's signs you would still need more showing,
nevertheless I'd like to know
what you are making and where you are going.

Mi-Kyung Shin

SISTERS ON A QUEST

THE IDEA CAME WHEN JINHEE AND I were out for dinner in Koreatown. The restaurants there have good food, usually good enough to quench our frequent motherfood cravings.

“But I want the real thing,” Jinhee said, flipping through the menu we knew by heart.

“Mm, I have a craving for *jokbal*,” I said. “You remember those pig feet Grandpa used to bring home when we were little?”

“Yes, *jokbal*!”

Slices of braised pig trotters dipped in fermented shrimp sauce, topped with raw garlic, green pepper, a dollop of red pepper paste, all wrapped in lettuce. The sumptuousness of flavours!

We studied the menu again, vainly searching.

Two days later, we flew out of JFK. Jinhee took a week off work, citing a family emergency. It wasn't untrue. Our ninety-two-year-old Grandfather—not the pig feet Grandpa, but Dad's father—had been

diagnosed with Alzheimer's and we were going to visit him.

We landed at ICN at dawn. Korea, our motherland: 6,900 miles from New York City across the Pacific, fourteen hours ahead of EST, four seasons, capital city Seoul, measurements metric, temperature Celsius, currency won, no tipping at restaurants, the fastest internet in the world, Confucian in ethos, a moratorium on the death penalty, mounds on graves. The morning was balmy, not yet humid. May is a good time to visit, before the heat waves and rainy season start. When we had last flown out of ICN, eight months earlier, the mountains were turning red and birds were migrating. Jinhee and I watched day break, waiting for the next Seoul-bound shuttle. The sky looked like an ashen version of a Monet canvas.

Our lodging was in Apgujeong, the neighbourhood where we had lived until I was nine and Jinhee seven. We dropped off our luggage and headed out. The streets were bustling with commuters. Walking in their midst, Jinhee and I made a verbal list of things to do, "the essence of our childhood to retrieve," as we grandly put it. The list got longer and longer and more far-fetched until it was all but useless. We were trying too hard to manage. At that point, we said, forget the list, let's go take a bath!

Finding the right bathhouse wasn't easy, the no-frills sort our late Grandma used to take us to circa 1990. In the last twenty years most of them had been replaced by recreational spa centres where droves of teenagers lolled about with towel-wrapped heads taking selfies. Luckily, a street sweeper directed us to an establishment tucked away in a forlorn alley. It was the perfect bathhouse. Its changing room had a corn-yellow linoleum floor riddled with scars and some curious burn marks as though the customers had fiery talons for their toenails. One of the fluorescent tubes on the ceiling strobed in its death throes. A couple of flies circled around it. We felt bashful about stripping naked in public even though only two old women were present, immersed in the soap opera playing on a convex TV set shot through with dead pixels.

"Ooh, *unni*, you have bigger boobs than I thought," Jinhee said.

"And your thighs are thinner than I imagined," I said.

We compared our looks. I'm five-foot-six, slim, have long legs, sharp eyes, and freckles. Jinhee is two inches shorter, chubbier, has rounder eyes, bigger breasts, and a peach-like ass. We both have Dad's high nose with a bump on the bridge, a feature we lamented as younger girls.

"*Unni*, you're like an asparagus, or a string bean," Jinhee said.

"You're like a peanut. I mean two peanuts in the shell," I said.

"That's awful!"

"Why, peanut shells have sexy curves."

"Well, I guess that's true."

We entered the bathing room. The granite floor was moist and cool on my soles. A half-dozen women, all elderly with broad sagging bottoms, puckered bellies, and bushy pubic hair, moved slumberously through the steam with ultra-real fleshiness. The smell of the room awoke in me the child I once had been. Ghosts possessed me. But only for a moment, for they are a temperamental bunch.

Jinhee and I got in the hot tub. Three other women were submerged up to their chins, motionless, like hippos in a swamp. When our fingertips had crinkled, we got out and made for the washing stations. The plastic stools were so squat our knees shot up above our belly buttons. The ellipsoid soap was skewered by a metal hook attached to the wall. By its smell we could tell that it was the same soap we had used with Grandma. It was the cheapest soap, young women these days wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole. It lathered excellently. Jinhee and I scrubbed each other's back with scratchy cloths until our skin turned baby-soft.

After the bath, we walked into the first *jokbal* joint we saw.

"I don't know about this," Jinhee said, savouring her second piece.

"It's too dry and not chewy enough," I said, prodding the meat with my chopsticks.

"And the slices are too neatly cut, don't you think?"

"For sure. And this shrimp sauce is too bland. Where's that aggressive... shrimpiness?"

"Totally. Totally."

Nevertheless, we finished most of the plate and marched out of the restaurant with full stomachs, vowing to find the real pig feet.

"We are warriors." Jinhee thumped her chest.

"We are sisters on a quest." I saluted the contrail-cleft sky.

We took a digestive stroll. Sunrays licked our faces and long shadows trailed our heels. I called Dad. He didn't pick up. At the voicemail prompt, I spoke in Korean, "Hi, Dad. It's me, Soojin."

"Hi, Dad!" Jinhee piped.

"We're here. This is a rental phone. Just wondering what time we're meeting tomorrow. So, yeah, call us when you get this. Bye."

"Bye!"

We toured our old neighbourhood. All the Fifth Avenue shops had cropped up. On every block was a Starbucks or some other franchise coffee shop. Foreigners were a common sight, looking more at home under our mothersky than we did. Jinhee and I left the main street and headed toward a place where, we were confident, we would find the essence of our childhood.

My memory of the school was clear even though I had attended it for only two years, over two decades earlier. Jinhee and I pointed out changes. A digital clock tower instead of analog. A tartan track instead of chalk markings. A twelve-faucet fountain. Soccer goalposts with orange nets. A pond churning with obese koi. Giant pinwheels planted among flower bushes, probably the product of a craft class, with the sunset ricocheting off the plastic vanes as they turned languidly in the breeze.

We decided it felt like our old elementary school all right, despite some surface changes. Here we had a sense of our motherland intact. I felt satisfied. Then I didn't. My gut felt hollowed-out though it was stuffed full with meat. I dragged my feet. I almost stopped, seized by an urge to flee the school, the neighbourhood, the country itself. Our motherland? What motherland? I looked at Jinhee ambling ahead, silhouetted against the sunset-bright sky. She was hugging and un-hugging the air as though it were her lively dance partner. Her hair bounced on her back, shimmering like burning charcoal. I ran after her.

We sat on a bench and watched a dozen boys playing soccer. They surged this way and that way, stirring up dirt storms, shouting commands in clean prepubescent voices. Some local residents were taking their constitutionals around the tartan track. Jinhee and I found shapes in the clouds dappling the dimming sky: a seahorse, a broccoli crown, a ballerina in arabesque, a neighing horse head, a melting snowman, an overripe banana peel, a burst persimmon...

"*Unni...*" Jinhee hugged her knees.

I pulled my feet up too. "Mm?"

Jinhee didn't say anything, so I didn't either. Dusk was falling, the shift imperceptible and fast. It grew harder and harder to discern the boys. But the sounds grew sharper. The *ping* of the soccer ball. The eruption of dirt as the boys skidded. The cooing and flapping of the pigeons behind our bench. Finally the halogen lamps flicked on. We watched the boys go home.

The next day, we went to the university where Dad taught. At noon, he approached the main gate. Jinhee waved. Dad held up a hand. I held up mine as his fell.

"Hi, Dad!" Jinhee said.

"Hi, Dad." I stepped forward, spreading my arms. We hugged. Dad tapped me on the back, a corner of his satchel bumping at my side. I smelled the familiar cologne. I stepped back and Jinhee hugged Dad.

"Shall we go for lunch?" Dad said, checking his wristwatch.

We set off. Jinhee and Dad talked about lunch options. I walked a step behind them. There was a certain rumpledness about Dad despite his impeccable attire. Some vague aura I caught under his eyes, or around his mouth, of dilapidation.

"Then we ate *ttokbokki* and *soondae* this morning," Jinhee reported, proudly.

"For breakfast?"

"Yep!"

Dad laughed his low slow hum, hum, hum.

"Have a good day, Professor Park." Two university students stopped and bowed.

"Ah, see you next week." Dad nodded, amicable, no more, no less.

As an adolescent I had disliked Dad's stolid demeanor. He's such a *diplomat*, I would think to myself. Now, I was grateful for it. I didn't want to see Dad's interior.

We went to an Italian restaurant. It had a good view of Sinchon, a neighbourhood vibrant with university students and tourists. Classical music played in the background. While Jinhee and I discussed the menu, Dad watched us from across the table, his hands joined under his chin. The chair next to him held his satchel and suit jacket. We ordered. We spread napkins on our laps and sipped wine. We ate hard rolls. A Beethoven violin sonata began. I looked out the window at the busy Sinchon streets. Hydrants. I couldn't recall what color hydrants were in Korea. What about stamps? What persons and objects grace Korean post stamps? I should know these things.

I exhaled, and looked back at the table. Jinhee was telling Dad about her work. She spoke in bad Korean strewn with English. She vividly imitated her coworkers' mannerisms. All of us laughed hard, especially Jinhee herself. She was getting tired, I knew from her increasing glances at nowhere and laughter snagging in her throat, of staving off silence.

I pushed my torso forward. "You know, I did this project recently for

the Korean Cultural Centre. They're making a booklet for..."

I talked and talked until our food arrived.

Jinhee and I looked around Dad's one-bedroom apartment. In the living room I recognized a few furnishings. The ottoman, the coffee table, the clock. The pictures. I turned to the kitchen. The pantry held a variety of instant foods. The fridge was almost empty. A certain smell permeated the apartment. I imagined it to be a mixture of detergent, mothballs, and last dinner's residual aroma. It wasn't a bad smell but my toes curled in my socks.

Jinhee set a kettle on the stove. Dad turned on the TV and unknotted his tie. Very sunny today, sunny and then cloudy tomorrow, cloudy mostly and a chance of rain the day after...Dad's shoulders sagged, little by little, as he unbuttoned his shirt. I realized, then, that what I was feeling was worry about Dad. I had never in my life worried about my father. I looked at the desk in the living room. On it were Dad's laptop, stationery, books, and dossiers on international relations. I leafed through some printouts. Since his retirement from the Foreign Ministry two years earlier, Dad had been writing a professional memoir.

"Why don't you translate it into English for me once it's finished?" Dad said.

I laughed, replacing the papers. "My fees are pretty steep, though, you know?"

"Jinhee says you won a prize for something you wrote."

"Oh, it was nothing."

"I'm proud of you, Soojin."

"It was nothing, really."

I turned around. A dull still life was hanging on the wall by the bedroom door. I looked at it intently. I didn't like Dad expressing approval of me, letting me worry about him. I wanted my father to be the parent I had fought against, who had disapproved of me when I had rejected law school, a PhD, an office job. I wanted him to keep being fightable.

Please, Dad.

I heard him shut the bathroom door. Jinhee was in the kitchen, setting teacups on a tray. I hesitated, and stepped into the bedroom.

A sleeping mat lay along the left wall. The blanket on it had rather childish animal prints. A dresser stood along the right wall. On top of it rested the violin case, rectangular and black, zippered, with a leather handle and a latch. I saw its interior without looking. It's firmly padded

burgundy plush. The violin is ensconced in the mold, secured by a Velcro strap at the neck, and covered under a black velvet cloth. It's ochre and russet, varnished, mysterious and perfect like a Möbius strip given mass. The pattern on the wood is a study in controlled spontaneity. The vertical age marks curve around the dark pith, then continue on their linear procession. There is inexorability. There is grace.

We had tea and cookies. We laughed watching a boisterous K-pop show. When Jinhee and I got up to leave, Dad pushed an envelope into my bag.

"Don't be late with your rent," he said.

"We're doing fine, really," I said, trying to give the envelope back.

"Don't make a fuss."

I took it. "Thank you, Dad."

"I'll let you know later today, once I check with Sister Miok," he said, referring to the family gathering he was arranging. "Most likely it'll be dinner on Saturday."

"Okay. How is Grandfather?" I asked.

"Is Aunt Miok living with him?" Jinhee asked.

"Yes, she is. Grandfather is...fine, given..." Dad's hands flew up, hung in the air for a moment, and dropped. "...his condition."

Dad saw us off into the elevator.

"It's a good thing that you two have each other," he said.

The next two days, we pig feet hunted at full throttle. We went to a sprawling traditional market. It seemed to have all goods existent on earth, edible and otherwise, assembled helter-skelter in stalls stretching Escheresque to some indiscernible vanishing point. Grains heaped like sand dunes. Dried squids flattened and stacked with harsh uniformity. Clocks tick-tocking slightly different times. Mongrel puppies yelping in cardboard boxes. Plush bunnies and monkeys with maniacal plastic eyes. Hats on hooks, cutlery in vitrines, shreds of flora and fauna buoying ominously in cylindrical liquor jars.

We stopped at one of the many *jokbal* stalls. A wire rack was crammed with braised pig feet, their skin bronze and greasy, the exposed bones too white. A smattering of unplucked bristles shone gold. Next to the rack, on metal trays, were sadly grinning pig heads and some innards we weren't too keen on identifying.

"*Immo*, a medium plate, please," I asked the woman behind the counter.

We chewed and pondered.

"These are really good," Jinhee said. "But, I don't know, not the same as Grandpa's pig feet. Something's missing, I feel like."

"Yeah, I can't put my finger on it either," I said. "It could be the shrimp sauce."

"Or the seasoning, you think?"

"Maybe the pigs have changed. Genetically modified or raised differently."

"Yeah? Like organically fed pigs or something? Mozart playing while they're sleeping? Shit, that's ridiculous." Jinhee banged the countertop. "I mean, I love pigs, but..."

I laughed hysterically. Jinhee laughed hysterically. We ate more and conferred more. Our discontentment wouldn't abate. We couldn't explain it and we were annoyed. Then we were tired. Dead tired. Desolation surged. But we repelled it. Swiftly, we restocked our enthusiasm and set off in search of the next pig feet to sink our teeth into.

"It feels more like an *aglio e olio* sort of place," Jinhee said, scanning the interior of a famed pork specialty restaurant near a university in Jangchung. Its décor was so dainty that seeing *jokbal* on the menu was somewhat jarring.

"Culinary gentrification," I opined. "To appeal to the delicate sensibilities of the young generation, raised like caterpillars in the cocoon of the capital city, fine and finicky."

Jinhee considered this for a moment, and snorted. "That's crazy. Who wants to gentrify pig feet? That's totally beating the purpose, or something."

As we were cackling, a debonair male server brought our food. The pig feet slices were pretty as ravioli. The seasoning was not necessarily bad but unnecessarily complicated. The accompanying side dishes were eclectic, or confused: spicy raw oysters, boiled quail eggs in sweet soy sauce, spinach in sesame oil, pickled ginger, and macaroni salad with chestnuts and pineapple. Finally, we paid 35,000 won for the meal, compared to 12,000 at the traditional market.

"Oh well, we had to try, didn't we?" I said, leaving the restaurant.

"Leave no stone unturned," Jinhee said.

"Don't judge a book by its cover," I said.

"I totally judge books by covers. I mean, I never buy books, but..." Jinhee burped.

"I'm so full. Oh, it's getting cloudy."

"The server was pretty cute, though, right?"

The clouds had thickened by the time we arrived back in Apgujeong. We decided to check out our childhood apartment. The quaint back pathway into the residential block was still there, lined with small stores. But the stores we had known were gone. The funky-smelling general store where we had bought our snacks. The stationery store run by elderly siblings who had reminded us of Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert in *Anne of Green Gables*. The comic book rental store whose matronly owner had liked to recommend the “edifying” sort of comic books. Those stores had been replaced by a twenty-four-hour convenience store, an organic fresh produce store, and an artisanal coffee house. Jinhee and I lingered, peering into the new stores, but didn’t enter them.

We found the playground in the same spot, still looking like a Mondrian canvas. We sat on the swings and counted to the seventh floor of the apartment building in front of us.

“Behind that is the living room.” Jinhee pointed to the centre balcony window.

Where we had watched the daily animation of *Anne of Green Gables*, gorged on pig feet our late Grandpa would bring home as a treat, decorated a Christmas tree come December, its glitter found in the seams of our clothes even months later.

“That’s Grandpa’s room.” I pointed to the right of the living room.

Where Grandpa had sat cross-legged before his antennae TV, mended our broken toys, admonished us for misbehaving by slapping our palms with a chopstick.

“That’s the violin room...” Jinhee dropped her pointing finger.

We swung. The swings creaked. I could sense rain coming. The chains in my hands felt sticky, the sand under my feet doused in torpor. The clock tower indicated four o’clock. I knew it was afternoon, but the pre-rain gloom made that ambiguous to the senses.

“Who do you think lives there now?” Jinhee asked.

“Mm, who knows.”

“They must have renovated the place, right? The new people?”

“I’d think so. It was ancient when we lived there.”

“But it was nice ancient.”

“Yes.” I nodded. “It was nice ancient.”

Things that haven’t disappeared are fine. They are available. Things that disappeared long ago are all right. They are vaguely lovely, coated in time’s patina. It is the things that disappeared just a little ago that matter

in a bad way. We bend ourselves into knots, trying to skirt their void.

We left the playground for the riverside promenade. It was getting chilly. Inside the tunnel was slightly warmer. The lighting was amber-hued and the air smelled of a construction site. Splendid graffiti covered the walls. Our footsteps echoed and shadows multiplied. Four high school boys rattled by on skateboards, laughing raspy adolescent laughs and swearing at one another without malice. The phone in my bag rang, reverberating.

"Ah, there."

"Hi, Dad."

"I wanted to remind you about the dinner tomorrow."

"Yes, we haven't forgotten. Six o'clock."

"Good. Take the green line and get off at Bangbae."

"Okay. See you, Dad."

I waited till he hung up. Then I hung up.

The exit of the tunnel loomed, a parabola filled with the barely distinguishable greys of the sky and the river. When we got there, we saw that it had begun to rain. We stood at the edge of the tunnel under its roof. The Han River slithered along the promenade. A jogger passed by, his waterproof tracksuit hissing with every step. The sound grew fainter and fainter and faded.

"I sort of don't want to go tomorrow," Jinhee said, coiling her hair around a finger.

I blew a bubble with my gum. We hardly knew our relatives on Dad's side. We had last seen them eight months earlier, in September, when the mountains were turning red and birds were migrating. My gum bubble popped. "I know," I said.

I squatted, resting my arms on my knees. As *unni*, the older sister, I wanted to be strong for Jinhee. But my insides were like a sandcastle in the wake of a wave.

Jinhee squatted next to me. We were going to wait out the rain. To amuse ourselves, we spread out the motley things we had bought at the traditional market.

"Ouch."

"Don't pick too hard, dummy."

"What makes earwax anyway?" Jinhee blew at the scoop. "Dust? Shampoo?"

"Disses people say about you behind your back."

"Oh? Look, I have zero earwax."

We cackled.

I squeezed my hands into fleece socks and cupped my face. Jinhee twisted open and twisted open a matryoshka doll until the tiniest core doll emerged. Seven dolls in a row, jolly and profound. We tossed a nugget of *yeot* into our mouths. Jinhee put on bling-bling rings. I sniffed at a scented candle, couldn't decide if it smelled wonderful or kind of putrid. Jinhee painted her pinky nails with neon-pink polish. I regaled her with factoids about Korea.

"Jeju Island is famous for..."

"Tangerines!"

"Right, there's that, too. But I was thinking about camellias."

"Camellias? What's that?" Jinhee blew at her pinky nails.

"It's this intensely red flower with a yellow center."

"Oh?"

"Its meaning is I love you more than anything."

"Oh!"

"You know what's so special about camellias?"

We rolled the melting *yeot* in our mouths, swallowing its aching sweetness.

"They bloom when it's still cold," I continued, "when it's still snowing, sometimes. And when they go, they don't go petal by petal, dragging it out like most flowers do. Camellias, they just drop, the whole flower heads. You can hear them hit the ground. *Tuk*."

Jinhee copied me, "*Tuk*."

"There's no English word for it. It's not *thud* or *bam* or *thump*, you know."

"I wish I spoke Korean better."

I felt inspired and started a game, "For your edification, sis." Jinhee would say a word in English and I would match it in Korean. Jinhee began.

Exacerbate. *Akhwasikida*. Ameliorate. *Gaesunhada*. Obsequious. *Achumttunun*.

Obviously Jinhee was going for the SAT words, when, in fact, they are the easiest to translate. The real trouble is those words that a four-year-old babbles. *Like*. *Want*. *Hurt*. *Sad*. *Scared*. *Mad*. *Wish*. *Miss*. *Love*. Basic words with meanings vast and labyrinthine.

Prevaricate. *Ulbumoorida*. Garrulous. *Soodasurowoon*. Resuscitate. *Sosangsikida*.

Jinhee paused, looking thoughtful.

“Orgasm?”

“Uh...” I blinked. “Orgasm is orgasm, I think.”

We cackled and coughed. We chewed *yeot*, watching the rain threads thicken.

Eighteen of us sat around a long table in Jasmine Room. To my right sat Jinhee. To my left sat Aunt Miok, Dad’s eldest sibling. The long table had revolving trays at its quarter points, with five or six dishes on each tray. Aunt Miok, a nutritionist, ate briskly and asked Jinhee and me about our marriage plans—mostly me, as I was approaching the Terrible Thirty.

“I don’t think I will be getting married anytime soon, Aunt Miok,” I said.

“Nonsense. A charming, capable woman like you Soojin? You must have too many...”

“Who is getting married?” Grandfather shouted wheezily from across the table.

“Nobody, Father,” Dad said, seated next to Grandfather. “Sister Miok is just jabbering.”

“Here, Papa, have some more beef,” Aunt Miok said. “It’s very tender and nicely seasoned.” She reached across the table and plucked Grandfather’s plate. She ladled a plump beef patty, cut it into small pieces, added gravy, and replaced the plate in front of Grandfather. Behind his gold-rimmed glasses, his eyes had a distant quality, as though half of him were drifting in a dream. His skin was messy with liver spots but not very wrinkled. His sparse, greyish-white hair was neatly pomaded.

Grandfather ate a piece of beef, dropping gravy on his shirt collar. Dad dabbed at the drops and tucked the napkin into Grandfather’s collar like a bib. Grandfather sneezed. The infant at the far end of the room started crying. Grandfather asked whose babe that was.

“It’s Hyowon’s daughter, Papa, remember?” Aunt Miok said. “My daughter Hyowon’s daughter. Your great-grand...” She stopped with a slight shake of her head.

“This kimchi is too salty,” Grandfather grunted as he chewed.

No one responded.

“This kimchi is too salty,” Grandfather repeated, pointing at the dish with his chopsticks.

“I know, Papa. Why don’t you get some of the seasonings off?” Aunt Miok said, and scurried off to check on her wailing granddaughter.

I thought Grandfather might throw a tantrum like those Alzheimer’s

patients in Korean TV dramas. But Grandfather seemed to have forgotten about the salty kimchi. He was chewing with benign doggedness. Jinhee and I glanced at each other and at the people around us. Our two uncles were talking about stocks. Their wives seemed not too fond of each other. Our cousins were busy feeding their children and telling them to stop making a racket. The scene looked superbly normal, but also alien, as if I had walked into Orchid Room instead of Jasmine Room and found another family dining. I wondered if Grandfather felt similarly seeing these people, his offspring.

"So what does Jinhee do?" Grandfather shouted wheezily, looking at me.

"That's Soojin, Father, the eldest one," Dad explained once again. "Jinhee is the other one, there."

"I'm Jinhee, Grandfather." Jinhee raised a hand, smiling. "I'm an accountant."

"Ah...an accountant." Grandfather nodded. He seemed thoughtful, although I had noted that this didn't always mean he was thinking. "I worked for Hanguk Bank for thirty-eight years. From 1947 to 1985," Grandfather said. "I became the chief manager of the...of the..."

"Poongrim branch," Dad said.

"Yes, the Poongrim branch."

Grandfather's condition was odd. He would have moments of surprising lucidity. In particular, his memory of dates and numbers seemed intact, if not enhanced. On our way to the restaurant, he had complained, "A bottle of *soju* is 1,400 won now. In the nineties, it was 500 won." Grandfather had shaken his cane at the neighbourhood grocery store.

"And Soojin...what is it that you do?" Grandfather said, looking correctly at me.

"I'm a translator, Grandfather," I said.

"Translator..." He nodded, regarding me with narrowed eyes. He sucked in a breath. He smacked his lips. He nodded again. I couldn't get him.

Aunt Miok returned to the seat next to me. The baby had been placated, I noticed. My cousin Hyowon looked exhausted and suffused with happiness as she gazed into the pram. Aunt Miok resumed her brisk eating and served me more food as well.

"Eat, eat, eat. Jinchul, why don't you take some more shrimps?" Aunt Miok offered Dad. "Are you eating well? You seem to have lost weight."

Papa, would you like another shrimp?"

"Where is Hyowon's father?" Grandfather blurted. He meant Aunt Miok's husband, as it is customary in Korea to refer to a parent by the eldest child's name.

Aunt Miok delivered a shrimp onto Grandfather's plate. "Ai... Hyowon's father passed away two summers ago," she said. "He had a heart attack while hiking Jiri Mountain. Remember, Papa?"

Grandfather nodded. Dad coughed. With alacrity, Aunt Miok turned to me and asked me whom I was dating.

"Where is Hyowon's father?" Grandfather said, again, looking startled. His gaze travelled the length of the table. "Is he being held up at the shop?"

Aunt Miok sighed. "That's right, Papa. Saturday evenings are terribly busy, you know?"

Grandfather nodded. "Miok, you wedded in 1975, on the twenty-fourth of April."

Aunt Miok laughed, tossing her head back. "Oh boy, Papa has an astonishing memory." She squeezed my arm, like a wink.

Once the dishes had been cleared away, we set up a large cake at the centre of the table. Grandfather's ninety-third birthday was in a few days and Aunt Miok had decided to celebrate it while Jinhee and I were visiting. All of us except the infant and Grandfather sang the birthday song. We clapped, shouting, "Happy birthday, Grandfather!" Grandfather blew out the dozen candles, nine tall ones and three short ones, over many weak exhales. Two young boys, his great-grandsons, popped party poppers. Colourful paper strips and confetti rained down. Aunt Miok cut the cake and gave Grandfather a big slice.

"He so adores desserts. Don't you, Papa?"

Grandfather started on his cake. He cut the three yellow layers with the side of his fork, ate the morsel, and sucked audibly at the frosting stuck to the prongs. Watching him, I felt nervous, close to terrified, for no apparent reason.

"Some hot tea, Father?" Dad said. "It's good to have all this grease washed down."

The tea jug was almost empty. Dad pushed the button to summon our waitress. The boys were playing loudly with the debris of the party poppers. The baby awoke at the noise and began to cry haltingly. Grandfather scooped up another forkful of cake, his lips flecked with cream parting eagerly. Instead of eating, he lowered his fork. His eyes, suddenly focused,

swept up and down the table. "Jinchul," he called Dad. My toes clenched.

"Where is Soojin's mother?"

Aunt Miok sighed, glancing at Dad.

"Soojin's mother has the flu, Father," Dad said. "She caught the flu and couldn't come."

"Ai..." Grandfather nodded. His forehead was creased, signifying a great exertion of mental energy. Or perhaps it signified nothing. I couldn't tell. I couldn't interpret him.

Jinhee's eyes flitted from Dad to me to her cake. She pecked at it quickly.

"Where is Soojin's mother?"

"I just told you, Father, she has the flu! Soojin's mother had to stay home!"

The uncles and their wives looked our way, asking what was wrong.

"Oh, nothing, just Papa being Papa." Aunt Miok flapped a hand, laughing softly.

Our waitress came with a replenished jug of tea. Dad poured into Grandfather's cup. "Here, Father, let's have some hot tea. I think you've had enough of—"

"*Yi jungsin ppajin chunchidura!*" Grandfather bellowed, brandishing his fork.

Dad's hand jerked, splattering tea on the linen, and I ducked into the space between two language systems. Transferring meaning is my trade, my entrenched habit and means of defense. As Grandfather hurled words carrying the deadliest truth, I defanged it by altering its carrier: analyze the words, find their English equivalents, consider context and nuance, review syntax and sound, tweak, tweak again, produce the best possible translation of the original.

You mind-loose idiots! We buried Soojin's mother last year, on the twenty-third of September. Ai, such sorrow. Cancer is incomprehensible. Death is incomprehensible. We buried Soojin's mother in the cemetery in Gwangju next to Miok's mother who passed nineteen years ago. It was a fine autumn day. Maple trees were changing colour.

The baby whimpered. Grandfather's eyes grew foggy again. He looked at the fork gripped erect in his hand. He lowered it with unconcern and resumed eating his cake. The others, too, resumed eating and talking, at first tentatively, then decisively. Dad tilted the tea jug and filled Grandfather's cup. Jinhee was still, looking down at her plate. Only her eyelashes were fluttering. Aunt Miok squeezed my arm above the elbow.

I felt the pressure elsewhere, transposed to the right, in the dead centre of my chest.

We landed at JFK in the afternoon. It was a clear day, much warmer than when we had left a week earlier. On the taxi platform Jinhee thrust out a hand. I stood behind her, holding the violin case. I considered its weight. I couldn't tell it in kilos or pounds, only what it felt comparable to. A dozen Gala apples. Nine Campbell's soup cans. A hardcover Oxford Dictionary of English. An infant, maybe, like my cousin Hyowon's daughter.

We got in a cab and laid the violin case across our laps.

"Where you ladies from?" asked the driver.

"Korea," Jinhee said.

"Ah, Korea." He looked at us in the rearview mirror. "Sisters?"

"Yes, sisters," I said.

"Ah, sisters." He grinned at us in the mirror.

Stuck in traffic, the driver hummed along to the exuberant samba playing on the radio. His shoulders jiggled. His curly hair jumped up and down. Jinhee and I burst out laughing. We laughed and laughed and laughed, our heads bowed, teardrops hitting the violin case. *Tuk. Tuk. Tuk. Tuk. Tuk.*

PUNISHED

for every fun fuck
one-night stand
drunk walk in the dark

was she wrong to wear red high heels
drink beer?

and to smile when just the day before
men on the street told her
to smile
like she was a stuck-up bitch
for being afraid of the pack of men staring at her

tears and hot-water bottles for a week

apologies apologies

teeth and tongue taught never say no

and hate ourselves

for saying

yes

Bryce Warnes

BRILLIANT CAREER

Caught with my hand down my
toaster, I flunk the home economics exam.

I was cribbing notes from the hot wire.
I have a crush on alternating current.

The guidance counsellor is concerned for me.
She says, "You should focus your desire on

something healthy. Hairnets, humiliation,
latex, land war. College applications

are due soon, and nobody wants to read
your machine-code erotica."

She's right. Her skin is real. She looks alive.
When the bell rings, I can smell myself burning.

Ben Ladouceur

A BOY OF GOOD BREEDING

HANK DRAWS A LINE down Jerry's body, bottom lip to penis tip. The line is made of slobber, drawn with his tongue, and almost straight, detouring only for the scar on Jerry's lower stomach. Hank always goes out of his way to touch the scar, to communicate that everything of Jerry's belongs in his, Hank's, mouth, even the parts that speak of damage.

There is no music playing in the room, but an assonance rings in both of their ears, serving to remind them that they were just at a nightclub, where the music was very loud, because conversation was not the idea in that place. The idea was dancing, and being seen, and being considered beautiful. This deafness is a sensation Hank is accustomed to. Jerry is not accustomed to it, for he normally stays home while Hank goes out and does the things he finds fun.

Jerry should have stayed home this evening. He could have opted out like he always does, half-heartedly citing a sore throat, or maybe an unmissable hockey game. That wouldn't be plausible, since the playoffs just wrapped up, but Hank doesn't know these things. "What's

Edmonton's team called?" Jerry had once asked flirtatiously, about a year ago, back when the differences between them were still fascinating instead of unnerving, explored instead of unaddressed.

"Whale sharks," Hank had answered. Then they'd both laughed.

But tonight, Jerry came out to the club, thinking, vaguely, that it would be his last chance to do so, before leaving.

Leaving what? The apartment, Hank, the city? Again, the thought was vague.

Hank always calls Jerry's hometown *the sticks*, as though he grew up in a hut made of sticks, and dragged a long stick against stick-fences every morning on his way to a school made of sticks, wherein he ate sticks for lunch, earthy with dirt and sticky with sap. When they'd first met, the word *faggot* was still in Jerry's vocabulary. He'd used it to describe people who littered and hockey players who missed easy goals. Hank would always remind him that a faggot was a bundle of sticks. To this, Jerry would reply, "Sticks and stones will break my bones," as a weird little nothing joke, behind which lay a private truth. Jerry was under the impression, at that time, that words could never hurt him.

They'd met in a room in which Jerry had not been certain if he was allowed to swear. There had been a bookshelf erupting with overflow, a fancy green lamp, a giant desk between the two men, and a silence like that of a library. Hank's chair was tufted and leather; Jerry's was plastic, uncomfortable, and meant for impermanent people. He was there for help with an essay. It was still the beginning of the school year.

"I picked English as a major because I liked it in high school," he said to Hank, who would be his tutor for the next twenty minutes. "But it's so much work. So many ways to fuck it up. Sorry. Screw it up."

"You can swear here," said Hank, with a lilt in his voice. "This is a place where you can swear, Mr..." Then Hank read Jerry's name from the university database, his whole name—*Jeremiah Voth*. But Jerry told Hank to call him Jerry, as he tells everyone to do.

Months later, Hank would ask if he could call Jerry *Jeremiah* after all, for he found the name mellifluous, like a silky ribbon pulled out of the mouth, between the front teeth. Jerry was okay with this, though he suspected it was a sort of fetishizing of his Mennonite childhood, full of wooden toys and institutional racism and joyrides with thirteen-year-

olds at the wheel, and girls you closed your eyes to kiss. It was interesting if you weren't there. It was interesting to Hank, and still is.

After their tutoring appointment that day, they'd encountered each other again at the Starbucks nearby. Following Hank's instruction, Jerry was reading the novel about which he had to write an essay within the next forty-eight hours. He had gone through two coffees, and was only on page twenty-five. He had never read this much literature in one day.

The café was crowded, so Hank asked if he could share his table. That was when Jerry realized he recognized Hank's face from posters around campus. In them, Hank was shirtless and in the arms of another man, who had long blond hair. Both men wore lipstick in the photos. There was text across their arms and chests, information about some event, and a title near their heads. Now, working on his third coffee, Jerry said this title out loud, to the man he had seen shirtless everywhere.

"Animal Uproar," he said, and smirked.

"Oh, yes. That's me. A little embarrassing. But that's what I do. Not for money. I tutor for money. But acting is what I do."

Now Hank saw how little of the book Jerry had gotten through.

"Look," he said, "I felt weird about giving you this advice in the office, but I'll say it now—just read the beginning and the end. The rest you can get away with skipping. Read the first twenty pages, then the last twenty. You don't have time to finish the book. The gist will do."

There were months of togetherness between that night and this one. But those are in the middle, and Jerry skips it. If he reflects, he reflects on the beginning that took place so long ago, and the end that is taking place currently. An unread novel, a trail of slobber. *The rest you can get away with skipping.*

Jerry failing the essay about the book. Failing more essays. *Skip it.* Losing his room in residence, and not even noticing, having moved his guitar and clothes and laptop charger into Hank's apartment. *Skip it.* Hank in a pair of his, Jerry's, briefs, shimmying in his sleep like a dog that is dreaming of running. Hank in bright clothing, on his way somewhere. Hank getting up at night to write something down. Hank in the dark. Hank in his moods. Move along. Nothing to see here. *Skip.* Jerry drinking at bars alone, to watch the games. Coming home to find Hank plastered too. Smoking less but not quitting. Realizing he'd been in Toronto for six months and was yet to make any friends, aside from

this dog-man sleeping beside him. Telling Hank about his upbringing, his mother, his near-death from colitis, the months he'd spent bedridden in buttfuck nowhere; Hank always listening carefully.

Using Hank's pepper spray, thinking it was breath spray. It tasted nothing like pepper.

Why did Hank have that in his satchel? Jerry asked with his eyes, his voice being out of commission.

"Because maybe the world will see me and hate me," said Hank, as he brought water to Jerry, who was crumpled against the toilet, spitting peppery vomit or vomiting peppery spit. It was difficult to say. "And maybe," Hank continued, "it will be late at night when that happens. And there will be more of them than of me. That's life."

Not Jerry's life. But he chose to say nothing here. Everything was difficult to say. Physically and mentally. *You can get away with skipping this.* Jerry skips it, and now he is getting away.

Tonight, Hank is drawing a line down Jerry's body, thin and invisible. The skin underneath the line is colder than the skin to either side of it. It is nice that the two of them can fuck like teenagers, can find each other's bodies, their lengths, their hairs, their heats, so neat. For Jerry, this must be the effect of a teenagehood spent in the arms of females, towards whom he'd felt a strange, unwelcome, ignored emotion that he was later able to identify as indifference. Hank, on the other hand, has had male bodies near, against, all over his own, many times before. Nonetheless, something about their sex is wild to Hank, too. Hank's eagerness, as such, must originate from elsewhere. Not Jerry's maleness. There is some other component found new and exciting by Hank.

Jerry believes he has finally learned from where.

For months, Hank has been working on a new play, called *A Boy of Good Breeding*. He wrote it himself, and his friend Odie is the director. Until recently, all that Jerry knew about it was that, for every show, a basket of apples had to be purchased. Hank described the script as boring. "But the story chugs along and really, it's all about the space, the movement, the humans. You have to just *see* it," Hank said.

The *you* here was not Jerry, but people in general. Jerry did not attend Hank's plays. Hank, he has since learned, depended on this.

Why did he never attend them? Because of the one time he did go, and they both learned that it was not a good idea. This is from the middle of their story; Jerry recollects it now, but quickly.

That play, the one that Jerry attended, was called *Deepest Darkest*. On the walk home, they'd both smoked. Hank had wanted to know, what did Jerry think?

He was sure it was good, but to be honest, to him, it was just a bit weird.

Well, Jerry had missed some things then. Did he not pick up on the subtext? Hank would be happy to explain it a little. "Remember the housewife my character kept visiting? We weren't just friends. I was having an affair with her."

"Oh, I see," said Jerry. "It's just that I thought your character was gay."

The conversation stopped. Apparently, Hank had not intended his character to be gay, but could not help that voice, that *way* of his. Jerry had just spoken to the invisible border surrounding Hank, on the other side of which stood heroes, husbands, heartthrobs—meaty roles in real productions. On the other side of which stood also an easier life, one that merited less pepper spray.

Jerry was embarrassed to have said something so hurtful, but within that embarrassment was genuine surprise. Hank really couldn't turn it off. Go figure. More words would come from Hank that night, angry and shaky, but not for hours. Instead of words, their mouths for the moment formed smoke.

Two plays followed during which Jerry stayed at home. But after the first performance of *A Boy of Good Breeding*, Hank had asked Jerry how he pronounced *stoma*. This had piqued Jerry's interest, so he attended the show, earlier this evening, without telling Hank that he would.

Jerry had previously wondered how Hank ever managed to fund his productions. Now he understood that there was very little money involved. There were no real costumes, and the cast was small. Each actor played more than one character, except for one, whose hair was blond like Jerry's, whose limbs were long like Jerry's, whose character's name was a lot like Jerry's. Obediah.

Obediah was a dolt, and his life amongst the Mennonites was idyllic. Much more idyllic than the real thing had been for Jerry, when he was actually living it rather than watching a poor simulacrum unfold on a stage. In the first scene, Obediah's mother smashed apples with her

fists upon learning that he'd decided to leave for the city. Yes, that had happened in Jerry's real life, but she hadn't been such a gorilla about it. Her wrinkles, too, were heavier-set, not mere mascara scratched across the face of a crotchety ingenue.

In the next scene, Obediah rolled his shirt up, showing the scar on his stomach from the stoma. He pontificated on trauma—the venom in his system, the night he'd almost died, how torturous it was to have a faulty body there is no escape from, to wake up and find that your colostomy bag has ripped and filled the bed with your own shit.

When had Jerry told Hank that story? He would not have done so easily. Hank, with his soft voice and well-timed coos of encouragement, had drawn so many stories out of Jerry. Now those words were here, on stage—but multiplied by ten. His life was only suffering, sticks and stones, in the eyes of the author.

After curtains, he brought Hank the flowers he had purchased beforehand.

“Oh, Jeremiah. You saw it.”

“Yes.”

“What did you think?”

“A little familiar.”

“Yes, I suppose,” replied Hank. *Everything of you belongs to me*, was the sentence that could have followed. The *you* here not denoting people in general, but Jerry in particular.

Following the production, Hank was off to the Village with some of the cast, and that was when Jerry decided to go along. Most of Hank's pals were strangers to him, so quickly did the people in Hank's social circle seem to arrive and depart. Tonight, they were, for the most part, chilly but aloof. They liked Jerry when they learned he was a smoker; conversations on the heated patio were boozy and buoyant and manageable. But back at the bar, they started helping themselves to the cigarettes he kept in his backpack, and they did not invite him to come outside with them.

He drank while Hank danced, though he spent more time watching the Obediah actor, who moved to the music as though it were an extension of himself. Jerry approached him from the bar, leaving his chaser behind, and grabbed Obediah as though he was his. He kept hold of him, closing in, pressing back against chest, mouth against neck. He wanted the air between them gone. He wanted them as one.

Obediah pried himself away. Jerry fought deeper through the crowd

and found Hank's mouth, over which he put his own.

Then he said, "We're going home," and here they are now, home safe and sound and undressed, post-coital, pre-cleanup, four arms and four legs in a mess of a braid.

Here's what will happen tomorrow. To get rid of their hangovers, they will walk to St. Lawrence Market, as they often do if it isn't raining. It being a Saturday, there will be trinkets for sale instead of perishable goods, which are there on Sundays. So, rather than buying muffins and cups of four-dollar coffee, they will meander through the aisles of paperbacks, antiques, doilies in plastic sheets, and ceramic mugs with charming imperfections and asymmetries. Hank will keep his sunglasses on, even in the market hall, in order to give the impression of suffering, of dehydration, of a Friday night spent with the cool kids.

They will come upon a typewriter. Hank will show an interest, and type a few keys on the page that has been placed there. Amongst the curse words and the rows of same letters over and over—*aaaaaaa, zzzzzzzz*—Hank will type promotional information about his play, which runs for another two weeks. He will type the time, the place, the price. He will long for a typewriter like this, all loud and clunky. He will express interest in becoming a typewriter person, keeping the neighbours awake all night by making art. But he will not buy the typewriter.

Jerry will go to the bathroom to defecate, as he does every hour or so after a night of drinking. He will return to the typewriter, and see that Hank is now further down the aisle, poking through books. Jerry will purchase the typewriter and bring it to Hank as a gift. Hank will do a double take.

"Where will we keep it?" Hank will ask, for the bachelor apartment they share is tiny.

"Don't sweat it," Jerry will reply, a thing he never says without meaning it.

Hank will then kiss him on the side of the lip, even though public displays of affection make Hank's palms sweaty for a reason he has never disclosed to Jerry.

As they walk out of the market, Hank will deduce the reason Jerry told him not to worry about space. The reason is that there will soon be plenty of space in the apartment, for Jerry is not long for this apartment, this city, this life. Jerry will have brought Hank to such an understanding without having to find the words. The words were elusive, they weren't

words yet, and they never would be, they were phonemes, methane, theories. Words are not Jerry's thing. It always takes too much out of him, forming them.

The conversation will be unexpectedly quiet. Hank will cry behind his sunglasses and maintain his composure. He will not plead or scream, but, feeling newly free of the emotional obligations of a lover, he will tell Jerry many, many hurtful things. He will, in his anger, reach for all the most devastating criticisms of Jerry's life and personality, uttering carnages that Jerry will remember verbatim for decades. As he does this, he will demand cigarette after cigarette from Jerry, lighting each with the tip of the last.

With the typewriter, he will write another play about Jerry, who will not attend the production. Jerry will be living and working in Fort McMurray by the time it is staged. He will come upon a trailer for the play while browsing Hank's Facebook page, a habit of his, Fort Mac being a lonely and heterosexual space. He won't be out of the closet there; nobody will suspect it, and it'll never come up.

He'll watch that trailer many times, on many nights. It will be, at once, sad and pleasant, moving through those months again, but this time from a distance, as part of the audience.

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poem "Postmodern Mutt" is part of a travelling migration project from Vancouver-based artist Lois Klassen. See *ReadingtheMigrationLibrary.com*.

Mi-Kyung Shin grew up in South Korea, Switzerland, and the US. She has worked as an editor and a translator. Currently, she lives in New York City. She has an MFA in Writing from Columbia University.

Minami Smith is a Hawaii-based designer and artist who has documented her life through photography from an early age and continues to use personal moments of her life as inspiration for her work. "Mirage" was taken in the Mojave Desert in California as part of a mirror series.

Bryce Warnes has writing published or forthcoming in *Joyland* and *Poetry is Dead*. He lives and works within the traditional, unceded territory of the x^wməθkwəyəm, Skwxwú7mesh, and Səl'ílwəta? Nations.

A. Light Zachary is a writer and editor in Toronto. Their first novel, *The End, by Anna*, was published last year by Metatron Press.

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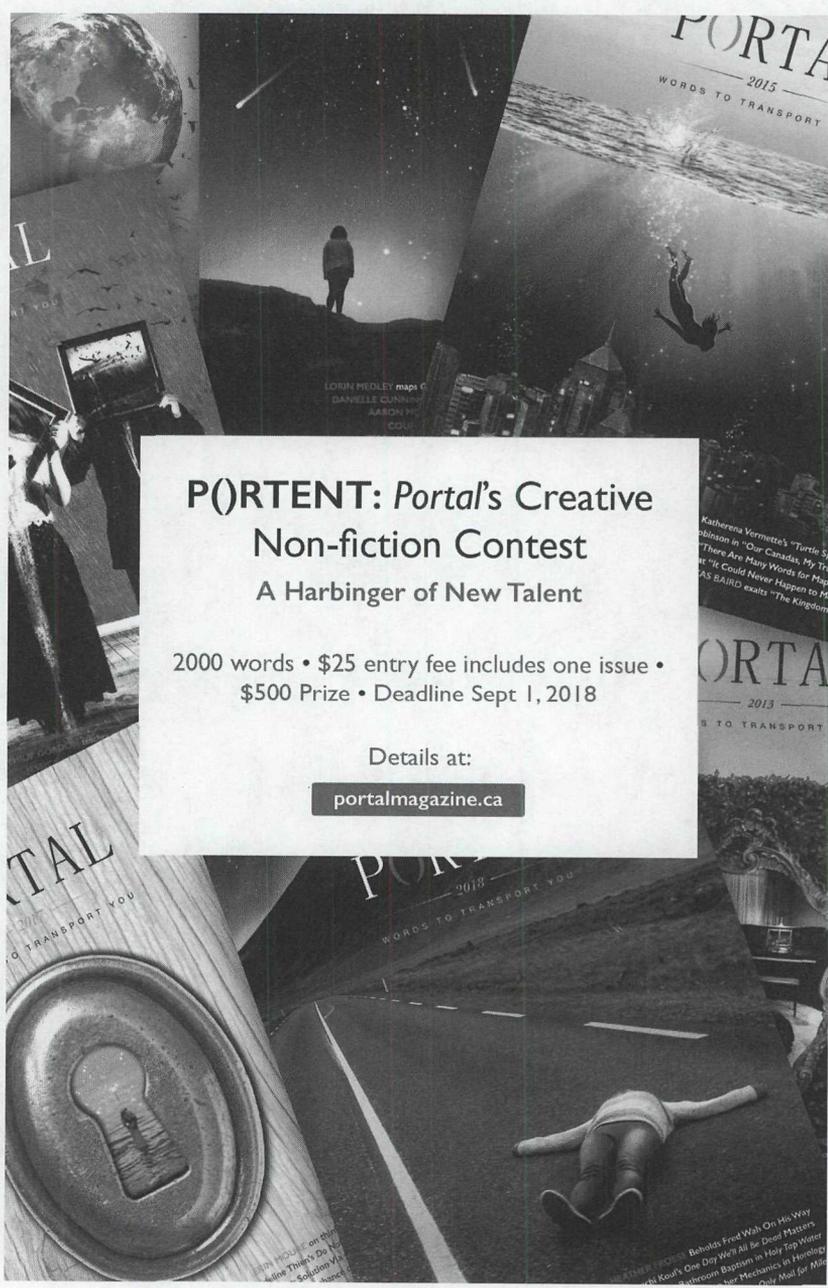
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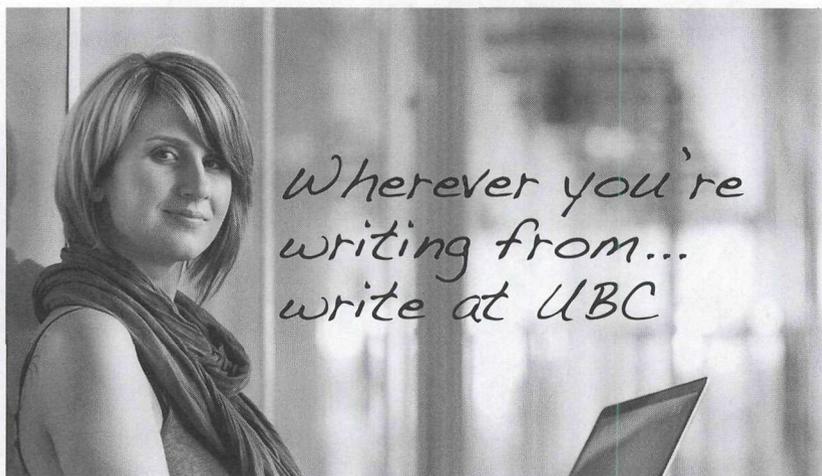


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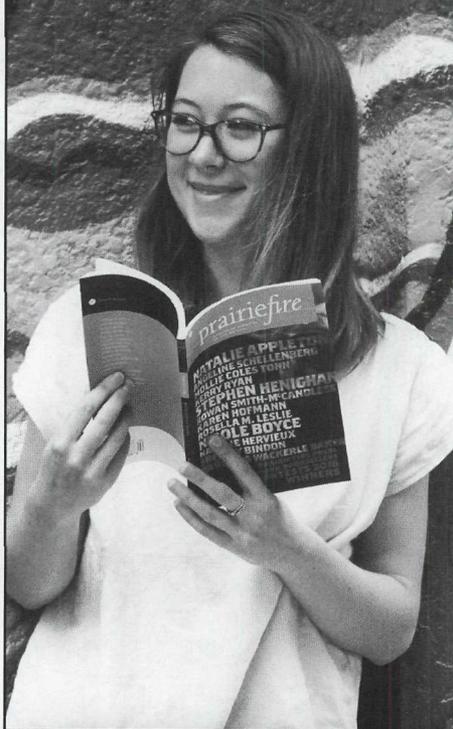
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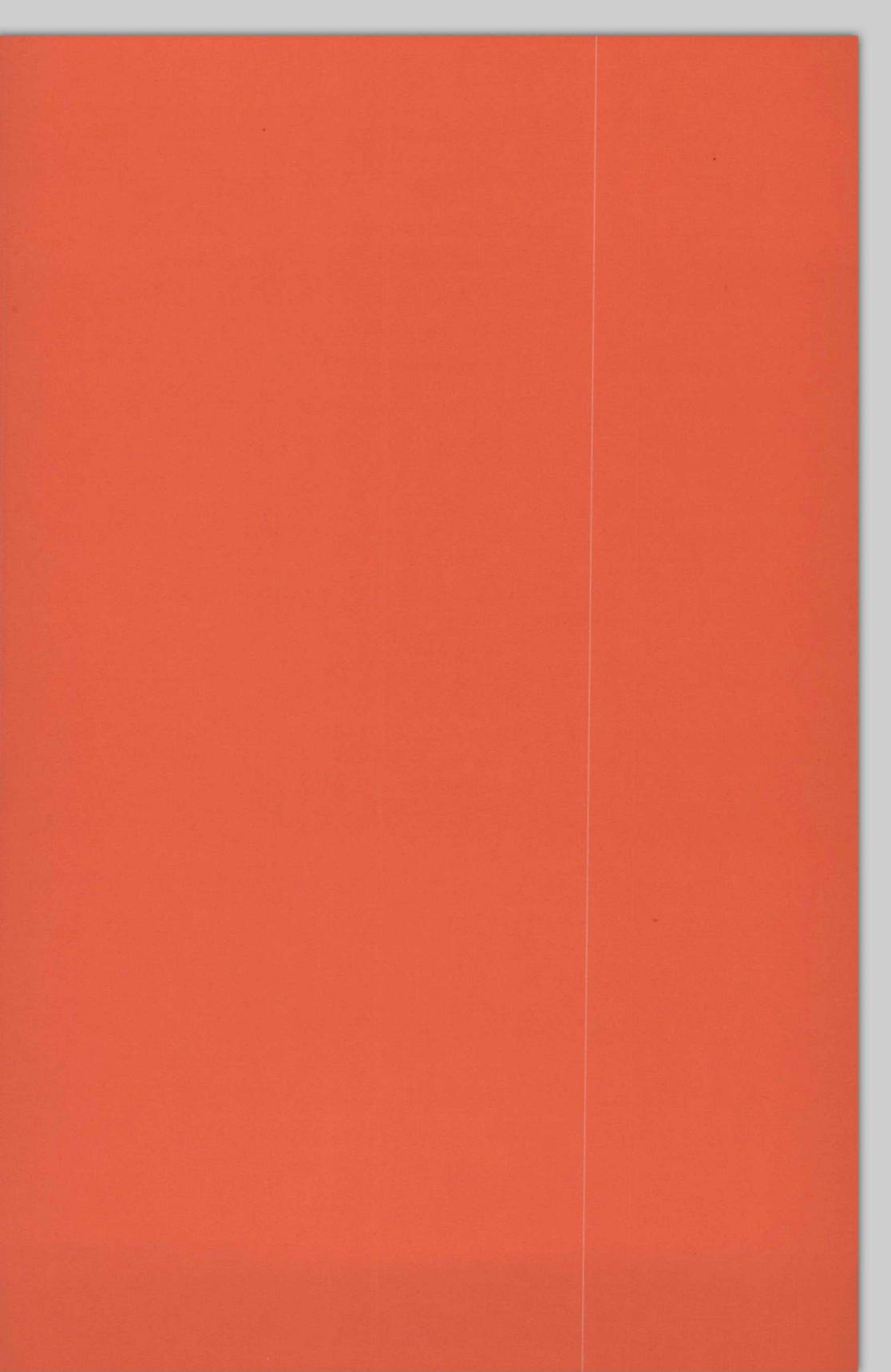
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Mi-Kyung Shin

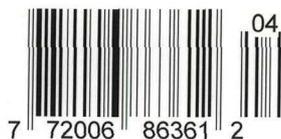
Cathy Van Berkem

Bryce Warnes

A. Light Zachary

“They come to him as if in dreams, ancestors who feel the wind in their hair, haul fish up from the river, same river out the window, same water that wetted the ancestors’ tongues, upon which they travelled.”

—*Angélique Lalonde, “Pooka”*



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