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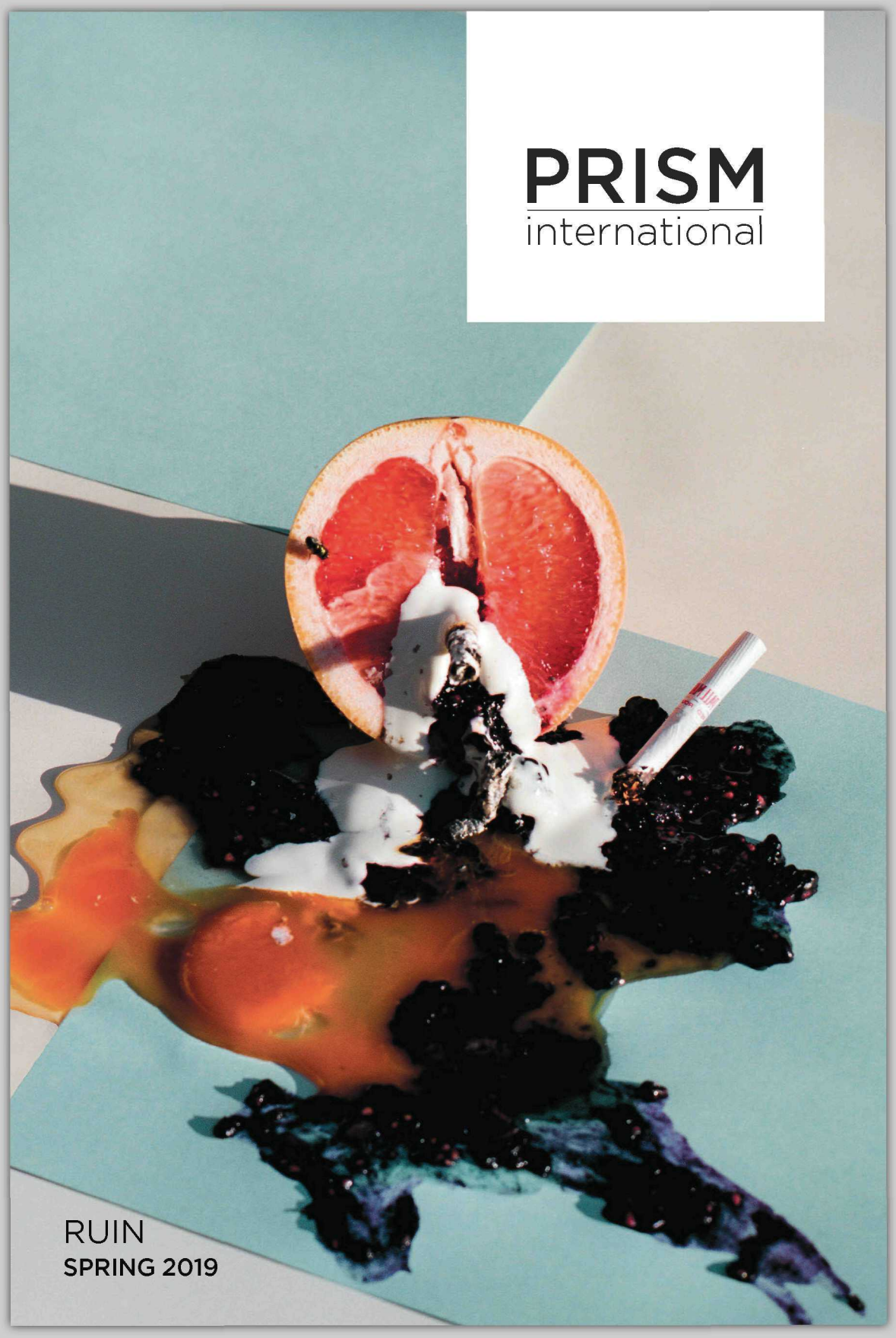

RUIN
SPRING 2019

PRISM international

THE PACIFIC SPIRIT POETRY PRIZE

GRAND PRIZE

"CROSS-SECTIONS OF SEQUOIA SEMPERVIRENS & SHELLS, 2013" by Moira J.

FIRST RUNNER-UP

"a simple instruction" by Tara McGowan-Ross

SECOND RUNNER-UP

"pahpowin" by Samantha Nock

JUDGE

Billy-Ray Belcourt

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

Website: prismmagazine.ca

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Cover image © Joon Lee, "Birth Defects"

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

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

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

April 2019. ISSN 0032.8790

a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

UBC CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM

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

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Billy-Ray Belcourt

THE NOT-YET AND THE WHAT-IS-TO-COME

Here are three poets for whom the not-yet and the what-is-to-come are incitements to invention and intervention. For them, something like the sublime resides not solely in the visible or picturesque, but also in an unknown that is always dodging aesthetic capture. The subjects of these poems are thus held in an ambivalent state, and it is in the throes of ambivalence that the poets go about the work of meditation and theorization. In "CROSS-SECTIONS OF SEQUOIA SEMPERVIRENS & SHELLS, 2013," Moira ruminates on a form of love that is brimming with possibility. The economy of image-making here is so muscular and expansive it exceeds the frequencies of ordinary symbolisation and is thus tough to keep up with, which to me is an indicator of poetic accomplishment. I was particularly struck by the likening of lovers to an ouroboros wrapping itself around a tree to devour itself (we might call this entanglement). The closing scene of a newly engaged couple towering away from the ocean, which in the poem is unsentimental and engulfing, and to higher ground reminds me that a condition of possibility for decolonial love is escape. In "a simple instruction," Tara skillfully experiments with form to illuminate the beauty and mystery in a single declarative: "cut towards the darkness in the forest." One gets the sense that whatever "the darkness in the forest" is (Tara stretches out the command, makes room for identifications of all kinds), it is something bound up in the narrator's livability and, by extension, ours. "[G]o now…. run" feels as close to prayer or benediction a poem can get. Let it move you. Lastly, Samantha's "pahpowin" melds humour, critique, confession, and speculation to refuse the present in the name of a future that takes as its core the kitchen tables of NDN aunties everywhere. In so doing, Samantha remaps the coordinates of the centre and the periphery, which is to say that the ambiguity lives not in the future but in the interstitial space—we are asked to consider what it might take to "laugh futures into existence." "Pahpowin," then, is a radical call to arms; let us listen to and for this laughter!

Moira J.

CROSS-SECTIONS OF SEQUOIA SEMPERVIRENS & SHELLS, 2013

I am wearing rain boots in the ocean & no one is around
to question it. The tide rushes in & our legs become
alerted hounds, dashing away from the salted foam that
still stains our shirts. We have just come from the woods,
hours after I pissed in a creek & you were on the lookout for
white people hiking in the area. Just two queer ndns laughing
as you helped drag me up moss-covered rocks back onto
the bridge where you kissed me & whispered some sweet shit
that I didn't hear because I was distracted by the slow magic
of your mouth moving. We took pictures: one of you
standing in the opened cavity of a tree, half-shadow, half-boy
laughing in split light. Then there was me, all-teeth, leaning
against a verdant king, who knew we were an impossible
ouroboros trying to reach around him to swallow each other.
What if we are just what happens when love becomes
gratitude with a happy debt? You propose to me & put
three shells in my pocket. I gift you with redwood bark
& the promise that I would rather bruise my knees
finding higher ground than let the waves sweep us out again.

Tara McGowan-Ross

A SIMPLE INSTRUCTION

"cut towards the darkness in the forest"

—Crooked Nose, Mountain Man
(foreman, [redacted] Contracting, spring 208)

cut towards the darkness in the forest, there:
see where the land gives out? where the old-field pines
encroach?[1] cut towards the end , high
flag (in blue) so we know where to follow if we lose
you . plant left, which is right
swing back over the middle ground you crossed
& allow yourself to be persuaded to where your ancestors
stood, then further, looking
ending up at [ ]. I've cut you
a red line there by the second-highest tree
on the last line the beetles got. you'll know the tree
by the way the tree know you cut up from [ ]
towards the snowy peak that looks the proudest
most sorrowful

it's three hundred trees up & then you'll have to cut
back towards the darkness
you left behind. if you get to what [ ] did to
[ ], you've gone too far don't worry
about crossing your neighbour's line, name it *forgiveness*
[or *tomorrow*]. you'll never reach it[2]
then, run back, as quickly as you can on uneven ground
move with *urgency* it'll all be worth it. hear your real

1 Robert Penn Warren, All the King's Men (New York: Time Incorporated, 1946).
2 Ocean Vuong, "Someday I'll Love Ocean Vuong," New York Times, May 4, 2015.

name on my tongue after all these years sorry it took me
so long. I'll never forget again, until
I do. anyway there's a radio
under the tarp and a straight shot if you need to run
remember what you aren't supposed to run from
remember the radio is broken and always has been

you know what to do, and I trust you. the darkness
In the forest: go now run.

Samantha Nock

PAHPOWIN

i wonder if it's disrespectful
to be depressed
on someone else's territory

cree cackles
are the melody
to halfbreed sadness
can this land
hold us
wholly

i keep writing
to create a different world
but i don't know
if you can create worlds
using this language
that is punctuated
with its history
of forced syntax
how many more
moniyawak
are going to tell me
i'm so well spoken

growing up we learned
from kokum
to tell a dirty joke
and follow it with
your saddest confession

i'm not so well-spoken
on the phone
with my mom
when the northern crawls out
and i slip back into
the belonging
i tried not to belong to

when i went to university
because the rich white boy down the hall
made jokes that i grew up in a trailer park
not that there's anything wrong with a trailer park
but i didn't want to tell him that
even his white boy imaginations of poverty
were so far off
i laugh well
i laugh futures into existence
i laugh loud
and energetic
because this existence is funny
deeply ironic
and unexpected
in highschool social studies
we had to write a paper on if
louis was sane or insane

looking at pictures of your kin
listening to your teacher
who smells like dust
and colonialism
tell you that louis was:
a murderer
a crazy murderer
a crazy treasonous murderer

i grew up with louis' picture next to jesus'
and i say that he was the leader of us
i get a C-
i didn't know what a heretic was
the future is
aunties sitting at
a kitchen table
laughing
and drinking tea
and swearing
because we survived
and got to make a joke of it.

RUIN

Steven Heighton

NOTES TOWARD A NEW THEORY OF TEARS

Seeking Lethe

A satellite view of Cyprus, the island olive-green and cracked copper, its outline the shape of Aladdin's lamp. The Mediterranean is turquoise as absinthe. From this remove, no sign of the island's divisions, though from lower down—the cruising altitude of a Turkish F-16—segments of the Green Line are visible.

Day by day, nuance by nuance, the colours of the seas around Cyprus change as they cool with autumn, although for now—early November—the shallows still look and feel tropical. On the beach beside the abandoned city of Varosha they feel warmest after dark. This evening as usual the beach is empty except for the latest sea turtle hatchlings, a few laggards or adventurers not yet in the water. A few days' perilous swim to the southeast, along the channel of light the rising moon will soon cast, lie the coasts of Israel and Gaza.

By the standards of the region it's early for sleep, but some on the island, mainly the very young and the very old, are already unconscious. Across the island, in a Paphos hotel suite, a trauma therapist with the Canadian Forces is in a sort of chemical coma, having self-administered Apo-Lunaquil (29 x 7.5 mg) washed down with a triple shot of Finnish vodka. A few days ago this doctor—who tends to the needs of traumatized soldiers airlifted back from Afghanistan for "decompression" on Cyprus before their return to Canada—was suspended for erratic conduct. Should he die, the suspension will look like the deciding factor in his suicide. In fact, he simply could not face another night of re-dreaming one of his patient's PTSD visions—one that seems to have driven the patient to drown himself off that empty beach at Varosha. At any rate, the patient is missing and Dr. Simon Boudreau is in a dreamless stupor from which, by his own pre-estimate, he is unlikely to surface. (He'd have taken fifty pills, to make certain, if he'd had them on hand.)

If sleep is not just designed for rest but also as a restorative break from pain—a sanctuary from suffering—it's pitifully ineffective. The doctor's theme, the subject of the book now hibernating in his hard drive, is

that human history can be viewed as one long, ever-evolving quest for anaesthesia. *Ultimately all of our activities, from falling in love, to praying in church, to going to war, are actuated by personal suffering and our wish to avoid or transcend it.* Civilization, then, is not the epic story of our striving toward higher consciousness but of our efforts to *escape* it—into sedation, oblivion, the waters of Lethe. Herbs, mushrooms, wormwood, alcohol, hashish, opiates natural and synthetic, ketamine, ayahuasca and mescaline, barbiturates, benzodiazepines, SSRIs, the endorphins of exercise, the oxytocin of sex, ad hoc agents such as Lysol, Listerine, Sterno, glue, lighter-fluid, rubbing alcohol and aftershave… *Humanity has never stopped seeking quick chemical escapes from sadness, from stress, from insecurity and from pain, which is to say from* HISTORY*, our own personal history or the larger one around us.*

Tears for Marshall Ney

The doctor assumed he would lose consciousness too quickly and irreversibly to re-dream his patient's dream, or flashback, which—put briefly and mercifully—involves the killing of villagers in an olive grove in Kandahar. (Army sappers were chainsawing the trees to eliminate an alleged Al-Qaeda hideout.) As usual, alas, he seems to wake up in the very midst of the grove, except now abruptly it's an *orchard*—apples, pears, his grandparents' cider orchard in the Richelieu Valley where he spent summers as a boy. He wanders the long corridors of the orchard amid graphic carnage, yearning for the quietus of a single headshot, like the vanquished Marshall Ney after Waterloo, spurring his horse around the field in search of death: *Is there not a single bullet anywhere for me?* A series of explosions like mortar rounds and the doctor is awake, his mouth parched, his head sawed open, the sheets sodden and cold at his groin. The explosions go on: a violent rapping at a door.

He looks at the wristwatch on the nightstand, precisely propped up and angled in his own ritual manner, like a tiny alarm clock. Four in the afternoon. The date is nonsensical. Then it comes to him, who he is, where he is. His eyes are full of tears, his face drenched, as if he has been crying for the last forty hours here in bed. Tears for Grand-papa and Grand-maman and the cider orchard—nowadays a trailer park on the outskirts of St.-Valentin—tears for his drowned young patient, tears even for Marshall Ney, whom he briefly *became* in his search for a single euthanizing bullet, tears for the adolescent children and the wife he deserted years ago, tears at his recent suspension and disgrace. *Tears*

are the clear blood that flows after a breaching of the heart. He mistrusts that phrase, his own, as too metaphorical, too *lyrical*, although in essence he believes it. It's from a later chapter in *A la recherche du Léthé,* his abandoned study of the human quest for oblivion. *Science does not yet fully understand human tears.* In his view, science spends far too much time analyzing the chemical makeup of the actual secretion, trying to grasp how so many different, seemingly unrelated triggers can produce the same chemical phenomenon. Science would like to explain the evolutionary advantage of tears, all those different sorts of tears...

The doctor believes tears of sorrow are roughly equivalent to the blood that flows from damaged tissue—blood that then clots and closes the wound. As for the wound itself: in aging we build around ourselves a protective hull, but even the hardest of these can be breached. A sharp word, a jilting or rejection, pierces the shell from the *outside*; at other times, an impulse flies from within oneself toward another, in sympathy, or pity, or profound admiration, piercing the shell from *inside*. Either way, the protective field is compromised and tears are the blood that ensues, first marking the hole's presence, then cleansing it, clotting it, sealing it. Children cry constantly because they have not yet grown a shell; a man grieving his mother weeps often because his adult carapace has been so shattered that for now he is little more than a child. And now the doctor himself, emerging from chemical coma, defenceless, hauled back onto life's stony shores—he is his own body of evidence.

So many sleepers

Among the fifty-eight messages flickering in his inbox when he comes to, Dr. Boudreau—now an afterimage of himself, shuffling in flip-flops and a coffee-stained amber kimono—finds one from a Montréal colleague to whom he has confided his nocturnal difficulties. Boudreau skims the message and clicks on a link: an article published in 2003 in a learned journal focusing on the history of the Middle East.

Boudreau notices a sidebar link, "Settlers in Occupied Territories Cut Down Olive Grove," and clicks on it, a *Guardian Weekly* report on a similar event in 2010—hardline settlers, allegedly in retaliation for something, eradicating a Palestinian olive grove—and along with this item a link to a story about a stand of oil palms in the Congo, hacked down by torchlight to deprive the locals of food, palm wine, and oil to sell, and *this* article was accompanied by no fewer than half a dozen links

to "related items," including one from Vietnam and another concerning frontier hero Kit Carson and his US troops clear-cutting three thousand peach trees in Canyon de Chelly in 1864, to shatter the will and the hearts of the Navajo, and Boudreau, now exhausted, can only assume that his colleague hoped this chain of links, this tour of atrocities, might dilute the power of the one atrocity rerunning nightly in his dreams. *You see, Simon…there was nothing unique about it…At least they were mostly trees, not people!* (In fact, three civilians were also killed.)

In early December the doctor—re-installed in his two-and-a-half in Montréal, pensioned for disability by the DND, and still having access to a couple of scrip-writing colleagues—begins to stockpile tablets for a second attempt. He is practically insane with insomnia, beleaguered by dreams, an internet eidolon who in the deeps of the night might be glimpsed from down on frozen Rue Octave, up in his dark kitchen, face ghoul-lit by the glow of his laptop screen. Except nobody walks past.

In mid-February he tries again to subtract himself from the world, and fails.

Doctor-assisted euthanasia, he reflects, has just been legalized. How can it be so hard for a doctor to figure out how to assist himself?

Reading oneself to oneself

It seems Boudreau has eradicated all ability to sleep in the wake of his latest self-induced siege of hypnotics. Once again he's conscious and pondering in the small hours, listening to Strauss's *Last Songs* and rereading aloud a passage from *A la recherche du Léthé.*

No study of our quest for oblivion would be complete without a discussion of the lies we tell ourselves, which, like drugs, allow us not to know what we wish not to know. Every person has a staple lie, so has each nation. The lie is the face, the interface that we pose between ourselves and a world that we fear to face naked. As for nations, are not most of their wars fought to uphold the flattering lies they tell about themselves? An anthem is a lie we sing together, about ourselves, and to ourselves, like a lullaby.

A small, soft dog in booties and a Montréal Canadiens sweater trots past on the icy street below, and what in God's name is it *doing* out there alone? God, so lonely, these nights, but Dr. Boudreau seems to be unkillable, and not just by Big Pharma; he has considered defenestrating himself, but the early March snowdrifts, three storeys down, are colossal and would buffer any fall.

Somehow he can still derive faint pleasure from the sonic splendour of this music, even as it playlists his pain. *Was* the doctor a little in love with his patient? Perhaps—and had he been born just a decade later, after the collapse of church power in Québec, who knows how different his life might have been? *The lie is the face, the interface, we fight to maintain.* (The Church's lies; his own lies.) Oh, probably, yes, he did love Corporal Trifannis, but not in that sense—more like a son, the son he once had and more or less deserted. And perhaps he first began dreaming Trif's dream not so much to understand it better, and not just out of professional curiosity, but *to take it fully upon himself*, yes, just so, to relieve his young patient of its unbearable weight. He can see that that's probably the case but is too depressed, hence self-despising, to acknowledge what a profoundly kind act that was—an act whose very existence confirms that this is a world worth living in and for.

Boudreau, unsleeping conscience of the comatic city.

Unsigned valentine

Spring! The screen before him glows with a *Le Devoir* follow-up on Elias Trifannis, "Soldat Canadien de Montréal Disparu en Chypre." Trif is still assumed drowned, and now the Canadian authorities—no doubt much to their relief—are closing the case. The article re-quotes Boudreau himself. After his medical discharge and return from Cyprus last year, he was asked whether his former patient really might have murdered civilians and then committed suicide. To the first part of the question he replied, "Not a chance." To the second, "Why not? We know other personnel are doing so, plenty of them." Beside the text is an army ID photo of a young man, hairline receding, the haunted softness of his large, brown eyes countered by an athlete's neck and a heavy jaw showing cocktail-hour shadow.

The doctor opens a new file, meaning to compose a suicide note, but then—agonizing as always over the minutiae of diction and grammar—he gives up, deletes, and passes out with his brow on the keyboard. A spate of lower-case gibberish appears on the screen like an electroencephalographic print-out of his garbled last thoughts.

He wakes in a hospital bed, body bristling with tubes and wires. A double room but he is alone. The life-signs monitor shows medically acceptable numbers. To deduce by the date and time displays on his watch—set on the bedside table, though not in the ritually precise manner he himself would use—some seventy-five hours have passed

since he washed down the pills with the apple brandy. His thoughts now leap to his youngest child. His son, a toddler, barely two years old, is back in the locked apartment, alone and forgotten—somehow the paramedics missed him when they came for Boudreau! But wait—how did anyone even know about Boudreau himself? The child could not have called for help! The doctor's mind now unclouds just enough for him to recall that René—the least estranged of his children—is in fact a grown man, married and living in Paris, who has never set foot in the apartment. But *now* it becomes urgently clear that a dog, of all creatures, is locked in there instead! Extraordinary—Boudreau has forgotten that he owns a dog! He dislikes dogs, after all, prefers cats, although come to think of it he doesn't care much for cats either, the stink of their litter, their tails exclamatorily raised above their anuses…All the same, with schizophrenic certainty Boudreau now *knows* he does in fact own and adore a small dog and that this terrier, in its goose-down booties and Canadiens sweater, is waiting pathetically by his desk, *has been awaiting him for over seventy-five hours*! Its name returns to him—Trif. Its kibble dish is long empty, licked to a mirror shine. The water bowl is empty too and there can be no recourse to the toilet: not only does Boudreau lower the seat (as if this lonesome little courtesy might magically lure another woman, or even a man, into his life) but also closes the lid.

The doctor *must* save the dog if he can. What a fate, to be locked up, alone, forgotten, terrified! Pity and love swell through him. He knows he must act now but he's unspeakably weary. He's slipping under again. Footsteps in the corridor jolt him back. Somebody enters. He keeps his eyes closed and breathes audibly. There's a scratching of pen on paper, then footsteps receding. His eyes shoot open. He sits up, morbidly sore, faint, queasy—yet for the first time in months he is not dwelling on his own pain. Squeamishly but efficiently he detaches tubes and wires and the catheter, then teeters to his feet and gimps around, searching for his effects. He finds nothing. He'll have to flee in this invalid's smock, flapping open behind, but here, look, a pair of institutional slippers, a bathrobe hooked on the back of the door—the robe he was wearing when he collapsed at his desk.

He gets past the nurses' station, 4:20 a.m., nobody there. He's keeling like a drunk. On his tongue a bitter, bituminous paste. His guts feel stricken as if he has been retching violently, of course, yes, they will have pumped him out. He shuffles on, as if trying to mop the floors with his too-big slippers. His little feet, how his ex-wife detested his dainty little

feet! He nods to two orderlies, one sallow and unshaven, one pink and pimpled, who wheel a gurney on which a sheeted body lies. Onward he goes through the sliding main doors, in his ghostly robe, while the Haitian woman at the desk calls, *Arretez, monsieur! Monsieur, arretez-vous!* He calls back to her, *Do not trouble yourself, Madam, I am a doctor!*

His apartment is a few blocks from the hospital. A warm night for early May. He would run if he were able. In the tiny park off Rue Octave, the blooms of the crab-apple trees are starting to open. A detail returns to him from deep in the past and the kitchen of his doting grandmother, how you can make a delicious jelly from those apples…

His body has reached the building, his brain forgets the entry code. He shuts his eyes and his fingers find the pattern. In the elevator, rocketing up, he grows dizzy and his knees buckle. When the thing stops and opens, he crawls out into the hallway, then onward to his door, barefoot, the slippers somehow lost. *I am coming, little one, ne t'inquietes pas! I will save you.* He has forgotten his door key code. Again his fingers cogitate for him. But wait—how did the paramedics get in without smashing the lock? The concierge, of course—she let them in. The real question is, who called 9-1-1 in the first place?

The doctor is baffled and will remain so in the weeks to come. Seeking an object for his growing gratitude, he will investigate the question, but in vain. The paramedics refer him to the hospital, the hospital to the police, the police back to the paramedics. Was it the concierge, who has never once met his gaze? "No, monsieur," she will tell him nervously. (Still not meeting his gaze—especially not now!) "I knew nothing until the men arrived." Was it someone who called him repeatedly that night and could not get through? René, or Boudreau's happily-remarried ex? And what about the doctor himself? Out of the chasm of a drugged coma is it possible that he remembered his Hippocratic oath, or simply realized he was worth saving in the end? Quantum odds, at best. In due course, Dr. Boudreau will stop seeking an answer and do what he has never once done in his life: accept a mystery on its own terms. An unsigned valentine from the void. Somebody rescued him somehow, and he, when he wakened, thought only of saving somebody else.

He opens the door and enters. As if crossing a threshold in the mind, he is once more fully rational. Naturally there is no pet, either to rescue or to find dead. He breaks down and sobs, first with joyous relief, then with a renewed and crushing loneliness.

Within a week of his third and last failed suicide attempt, the doctor visits the local animal shelter and adopts a balding, cadaverous Persian cat. This animal, subjected to his obsessive attentions, soon fattens up and re-furs. She curls at his feet in a collegial if somewhat entitled silence while he returns to work on the final section of *Seeking Lethe.* Quite often he writes through tears. But sad as he is—seemingly at a molecular, mitochondrial level—he is no longer suicidal. The Void has issued its verdict. Unlike his young patient, the doctor must live.

His armed forces disability pension lends him a certain modest freedom. His conscience heckles him in this regard. The government is not taking such good care of the several thousand maimed or traumatized soldiers who by now have all returned from the war, or mission, or whatever it was.

The aftermath of war is like the hangover of a failed love affair, on a national scale. We look back and recall an initial fever of certainty, then the thrilled, giddy plunge, and then, when it's over—as we survey the ruins and see through the lies—we can't imagine what we were thinking.

Where, in the end, are all the adults?

Boudreau has been reading up on orchards. At night now he dreams not of that olive grove in Kandahar but of his long-dead grandparents' orchard in the Richelieu—sun-steeped, photographic dreams of those phantom fruit trees, row on row. Which means that those trees are not lost after all, because whatever exists in the neurons *still exists on the level of raw matter*, molecular, mitochondrial, an orchard in the mind and heart.

In June the doctor, gaining strength, begins to venture out for lengthening strolls. He notices just how many flowering, fruiting trees—not to mention sprouting greens—flourish wild here in the metropolis, just blocks from his building. He conducts a little research. Turns out that there *are* people who collect urban apples for the local homeless shelters. But who collects all the other wild food? By July, he is busily harvesting and delivering to the shelters scads of the touchingly outcast edibles thriving in the parks, in schoolyards, on domestic lawns, on the flanks and double summit of Mont Royal. Volunteers at the shelters—mostly women his own age or pierced and tattooed kids—humour this sunburnt, bespectacled eccentric as he lugs in bags of Saskatoon and service berries, mulberries, thimbleberries, high-bush cranberries, currants, rosehips, a

few pears and plums—yes, firm succulent plums, falling on the lawn of an apartment complex and left to rot!—and certain kinds of rowanberry (beautiful and edible, folks eat them in Estonia—though to the doctor's annoyance the older volunteers warily decline them). The dandelions, mint, wood sorrel, garlic mustard, lamb's quarters, purslane, and wild chives he presents as a fait accompli: a large plastic bowl of salad dressed with a simple vinaigrette.

Purslane, he pedantically informs the Anarchist helpers at an Anglophone shelter, was Gandhi's favourite green. ("For real?" says one of them, while another, with a bullring in his nose, holds the door open for the doctor like a dutiful son.)

In September he's collecting ornamental crabapples—he intends to make jelly, so as to offer the fruit in disguise—when the news breaks. His young patient has been found alive, having survived all this time in the ruins of Varosha, that sprawling necropolis on the east coast of Cyprus. An hour later—after reading every online version of this report he can find, in English, French, and Greek—the doctor writes to his son René for the first time in over a year and asks him, among other things, to put him in touch with his younger son and his daughter, who are both living in Canada somewhere, last time the doctor heard.

Remarkably, the world seems to be refilling with children, his children.

A few days later he receives a terse email from his younger son asking him not to contact him ever again, and also—a mere ten days after submission!—his first rejection for *A la recherche du Léthé*. You have to hand it to the gods. Their timing is as infallible as that of Hollywood filmmakers, who ensure (so the doctor has read somewhere) that precisely 65% of the way through a film, just when the hero is transcending his or her trials, some fresh misfortune hurls the outcome into doubt. Of course, in a film this setback is merely a set up for the hero's eventual, climactic triumph. Real life follows a more random script, if you can call it a script at all.

Dr. Boudreau pours himself an ouzo with two ice cubes and sits staring at the screen while the liquor louches like absinthe. After a while he clicks over to the file containing his jilted book and starts reading. A little to his surprise (and even while peering through the bifocals of fresh rejection) he finds himself not wholly horrified. So he continues to dip into the book and read with increasing relief, even pleasure, as if perusing the fine and honest work of a stranger—yes, dense with cruel truths but not devoid of all hope. *To conclude, any person's quest for oblivion is of*

course doomed to succeed: in death. How much better is the utter failure *of the quest that occurs when one actually wakes from the coma of quotidian life!* Etcetera. He knows the final lines by heart.

He opens a new document. With painful slowness, he begins another letter to his lost son. There is no reason why he should think just now of the baby sea-turtles who, every year at this time on Cyprus, begin hatching and scuttling down the beaches to the sea, a curious and affecting spectacle the doctor witnessed last autumn near Paphos. In fact he's not thinking of the turtles at all. Still, as he labouriously keys in words, a lone laggard—the final of many thousands—is flopping into moonlit shallows that instantly transform its awkward crawl into watery flight. It soars outward, the bottom shearing away beneath it, as if in a dream where you've been lumbering over the ground working your arms, trying to lift off, then suddenly you're weightless, airborne, the earth falling away… This last swimmer must be enjoying its own wordless versions of relief, elation, even a sense of nascent mastery, as he finds himself in his element for the first time.

Justin Ducharme

A BOY WITH HANDS LIKE MINE

there's a boy with hands like mine
who i can let inside me without fear
of him drowning in the deep sea of my insides
he doesn't need to swim like the other boys
he stands tall on the pedestal i've built
a pedestal of broken promises and unresolved traumas
in my mind i write down everything he did that made me cry
then forget them because i remember the way he bit my lip
cursed to the ceiling "*i am your decolonial love*"
and in the end it was worth it because
after all the ruin settles

is there anything else to learn about suffering

Autumn Koe-Schnell

LEARNING TO BE LOST

It's been a long day. A long, typical day. I wake up, eat breakfast. Put on clothes. I floss my teeth. I grab my umbrella and sprint out into the rain. All I can smell is the frigid rain. I get on the bus. I sit on the bus. I get off the bus. Everything feels still, but just for a moment. Then I walk. I'm listening to good music. I'm still walking. I'm never going to not be walking. I am still walking. I blink. No longer or shorter than any other blink. When I reopen my eyes, I'm in water. Deep, cold water. Tumultuous waters. Water hitting my face. Burning my eyes. Salty water. The sky darkens. I blink again. It's dark. So dark, I can't see. There isn't a lighthouse, or even a light in sight. It's dark and I am here. All I can hear is the splashing of water around me. Splish-splash. Splish-splash. Splish-splash. My skin is numb. I can't move. All I can hear is splish-splash, splish-splash, splish-splash. I blink. Splish-splash. I am still here. Splish-splash. I am still here. Splish-splash. It's not any lighter. Splish-splash. I can only be here. Splish-Splash. I can only be here. Splish-Splash. At least I am here.

Carrie Snyder

EARLY ONSET

On a good day, I was like a gleaner, coming into the fields after harvest to pick over what had been left for the birds and small animals: the leavings. I walked the rows, stumbling over clumps of frozen dirt, pulling from crushed stalks a handful of corn to drop into my bucket, red-brown kernels, cold with November frost.

This was how I found the small discoveries you might call insights, though insight suggests a flash and sparkle of riches, and what I'm describing was something much smaller, smaller in its humility of purpose: a broken cob with a few rows standing like teeth, which I loosened with my gloved hand. I listened to the kernels rattle as they dropped into the empty plastic honey bucket. This was how thoughts came to me. I had to break them down to see them, tooth-like in the palm of my hand. How could such a small thing contain such density of colour, how could such a small thing look so original, how could it please me so enormously?

I considered what I was looking at, what I'd lifted from the leavings to pinch between my fingertips, briefly. Red with streaks of yellow. I tested it between my teeth and it was unyielding. I recognized it, then.

It was a seed.

On a bad day, I was like a sleep-walker, drifting sideways into dream, crashing into thoughts that troubled me for seeming so very close to sensible. These thoughts appeared devoid of context, floating like motes across the sun-soaked air. My brain struggled to understand what was real and what was invention, as if I were manufacturing false memories or trying to sew into a single quilt many unmatched patches. I couldn't make the edges fit.

It was like getting lost in a familiar neighbourhood. The effect was deeply unsettling.

I didn't like that fresh crossing over the dream threshold, those confused steps as I passed through a foggy no-man's land between countries. My head would jerk on the stem of my neck, waking me, frightened. Then I would think: I know what this means, what was in my genes where it had always been, lurking.

I did not want anyone to guess how near in character I was to my mother. We were serious women who did not know how to be taken seriously. In our prime, we were women unafraid to shriek and tantrum, to play, to get down on our hands and knees in the dirt, to be jealous and keen and silly, to sing raucously, to demand attention.

I found myself in the kitchen.

The kitchen was changed. I couldn't recognize it. I had of course come into the kitchen thinking about something else, shadows that framed my thoughts so that thinking had become something else too, a substance poured out on the floor—the wood floor. This was not the right floor. It should not look like this. I said so right out loud. "This is all wrong!" I said. I bent and touched my finger to the spill on the floor, which wasn't even wood, I saw from up-close, but an artificial substance made to look like wood. That was not right either. "This is all wrong," I said, and without thinking, I lifted my finger and tasted the spilled liquid and a word clanged inside my mind, whole, not shadowed: *coffee*. A clue. What did *coffee* mean, clanging so clearly in my mind?

I saw the table that should have been here, set for breakfast, and the children who should have been sitting at their places with their bowls of

porridge, the raisins and brown sugar spilled on the red tablecloth, and between my hands, cupped, I saw a ceramic mug filled with liquid gone cold, like this, and I heard myself saying, "I haven't even sat down once this morning," and the children were saying, "Sit, Mom, just sit with us." But even as I sat, they hopped up and vanished in their beautiful bright hurry, scattering like seeds.

My cheeks were wet, and I didn't know why, and my knees hurt, and the palms of my hands, too, but this was all wrong. This vanishing, this scattering, these pieces that cut like broken glass.

This was not the right room.

Is this me?

If it is, if I am this woman kneeling on the floor, I hope you will be very careful to introduce yourself. I can't bear to think about not knowing who you are, even for a moment. That scares me, more than anything. I hope you will give me your name to hold onto, and your gentle face, immediately, without hesitation; we'll have so little in the present that remains between us. I hope you will be careful not to confuse me. I learned that with my own mother. How certain questions frightened her because they were empty of clues, or because they implied that she was doing or should have been doing something she could no longer grasp, a task impossible for her to complete. How the imperative frightened her. I hope you will not say, for example: *Take care of yourself.* Or even: *Take care.*

My inability to do so will shame me.

I hope you won't mention the word *memory*, won't name what I am losing, or have already lost. Is it my memory, or my memories? These are not exactly the same, you know, and I hope you know, too, that I've kept some things, some small whole frightening truth-telling things, even through the losing. Some things stay like kernels, seeds in dirt, no matter how frozen. Seeds in my mouth.

The past is never past. We will tread all over it. Spoil it. Won't we? I am so afraid of that.

I am so afraid of spoiling who I am for you and what we've shared: this precious crazy house with its filth and fur and the serious childlike woman at its heart—me, is that me?—looking up at you to ask, "Who are you? What are you doing here?

Are you hungry? Are you cold? You beautiful thing—

Isn't this life just terrible good, terrible good?"

Elee Kraljii Gardiner

EXORCISE

Deep in the cedars I bring ocean out onto my skin.
Splatters from the crown let everything wet,
puddling in the crotch of trees. Saturated
nurse logs spruce up with plump pads of moss.
The buds bleating pop music slide out of my ears
while mist settles amidst root systems.

On the trail I do not smile at men. Women have dogs,
we *hey* each other but the men, no:
they run importantly, tight-elbowed

in New Balance and shorts flaunting core
heat despite dipping degrees. They hate
waiting. I do not owe them a thing.

The radio in the car states a killer has been charged
with violating a thirteen-year-old girl's body and throwing it
in the bushes of a park. I don't owe men anything.
I pour rainwater out of my backpack,
the skies of Russia pool in the footwell.

On the bridge across the inlet truckspray
greys my vision. I drive blind, tires reading in Braille.
My thighs are plastered cold and my neck
sloughs its dried grit: the pinch dish
of Himalayan salt he keeps by the stove.

Bark filings sneak through my socks.
Bathwater raises my blood—particulates
of Baden Powell's colonialism—to the surface.

My salt sighs. I slide soap down my stomach as chainsaws eat
the trees next door, choking the air with splinters.

Marie Baléo

PHANTOM PAIN

Nothing in the slow, languid afternoon of July 12, 2006, a beautiful summer day in Beirut, could have suggested it would be the last of its kind. Our apartment, on the last floor of a high-rise, all beige concrete and curved balconies, was located in Ashrafieh, a wealthy Christian neighbourhood in east Beirut. Our living room window looked out onto the hills. Beside the window was a Telenor landline phone, which my family had bought when we still lived in Norway, one of few Norwegian items enjoying a new, unlikely life with us in the Levant. It is this phone that must have rung and let me know the war had begun.

My parents had been out on a dinner date, celebrating my father's fortieth birthday. I picture them on a restaurant terrace on Sassine Square, oddly alike in sunglasses and starched white shirts, sipping wine in parallel motions. Then, a slight vibration in the invisible fabric of life. Minutes later, only two hundred yards away, the phone rang; I can picture my father speaking to me, but I can't hear his words.

Maybe I watched CNN, but maybe I didn't, not yet. I didn't talk to my friends—those conversations would come later, worried, earnest

MSN messages and emails: where are you now, are you okay, what are you going to do, when are you leaving—the preternatural maturity all my friends suddenly exhibited, the kindness with which they enquired after me, after the others.

I remember hearing about the bombing of the airport from my father. We had been scheduled to fly to Paris a few days later, and it struck me that our pricey plane tickets were now worthless. As I watched television footage of a cloud of smoke rising from behind the control tower, it became evident that our chances of escape had drastically decreased. A secret part of me rejoiced, because I had not wanted to leave Lebanon. I thought the damage to the landing strips did not look so severe that they ought to fix it, this ridiculous little cloud of smoke, this very localized problem.

I remained glued to the television set in our sun-drenched, marble-floored living room. It was where I first heard of the bombing of infrastructure—a technical, adult word featured in TV news reports which meant little to me, only that the electricity had gone out for many, and would not return.

I don't remember the casualties, only that the TV mentioned bombing in the South, near the Israeli border, but also, closer to home in the southern suburbs of Beirut, a Hezbollah stronghold. My primarily Christian neighbourhood was spared, and the war felt like it would cease to exist the moment I turned off the TV and retreated to my room, drawing the curtains and watching *Smallville* DVDs for the twentieth time.

This feeling wouldn't last. I recall the cloudless afternoon when I first saw Israeli fighter jets fly over Beirut. They came from behind the mountains. I stood alone before the living room window as they made straight for our home; then, I ran to the other end of the room to watch them fly on.

Through the years, I would always believe—though I would never trust this memory, not fully—that for a half-second I had seen the pilot.

Hundreds of times over, I have told strangers in college, at parties, at work, the story of a war I know oddly little about. The war is systematically the second or third fact I recount after I first mention Lebanon. Perhaps I figure it will help people understand why I am different from them, why I don't know France, my own country, as well as I should; why I love a small country, where I spent so little time, so much more than I've ever loved anything else, and so desperately.

I begin with "I lived there when I was a teenager," or "I lived there all through high school." Then, I pause to add, "and I was supposed to live there for four years"—important, this number, because it indicates that my life, as scheduled, was cut off. Stating that I was going to stay longer, four years instead of the three I actually lived in Beirut, legitimizes my story, makes my pain more acceptable to my audience. And I know my audience requires rationality; it has no patience for exaggeration. Or perhaps I'm the one who tires of hearing of the war, who wants to shrink its retelling down to the bare facts, to a few words only. "But then there was a war with Israel," or "and then I had to leave," or "I had to be brought back to France," or "I came here."

I have fashioned my memories into small facts, devoid of emotion, and handed them out so freely that they have whittled down to almost nothing. I can no longer tether this disincarnate story, which I have recited so often, to the reality of my own life. An astounding part of those three days of war is absent from my memory.

I find that I cannot remember the clothes I wore on the day of my exile. I cannot remember showering in the dark, with a candle, which I must have, and had done before on the handful of occasions when the power had gone out. Most of all, I hardly remember the last two nights my family and I ever spent at home, between July 12 and July 14, the day we left it for good.

On the second night, the planes returned and bombed distant districts of Beirut. This, I saw from my bedroom window. The noise must have woken me, around four or five in the morning, and I pulled up the mechanical curtains, moved by a voyeuristic urge to see, an eagerness to claim my first-class ticket to the show from the safety of my Christian, un-bomb-able neighbourhood. This is my most intact memory of all. Even now, I know precisely in which direction I looked, between which buildings I saw the lights, and then, almost but not quite simultaneously, heard the sound, saw the quick, automatic flashes of the Lebanese response. Five a.m., July 14—in a different year or a parallel world, we would have gone to the ambassador's residence on this date, Bastille Day. There would have been fireworks—like these, but with colour, and without this strange static inside of me.

I remember my father's thought process: if I was going to get to France in time to take the university admissions test I was supposed to take, if I was to ace said test, as had been the sole objective of the previous two

years of my life, then I was to leave the country immediately. We could not afford to wait to see how the situation would evolve; whether the war would end or worsen, and perhaps, come to endanger our neighborhood.

I remember my best friend's last visit, how she stood in my room, would not sit down. She too was about to leave, but on a different bus, one chartered by the Brazilian embassy, and there had been attempts to get both of us on the same bus. "Come with us," she pleaded, or so I think I recall. But I was accounted for already, part of an operation put together overnight, a bus full of Frenchmen that would leave Beirut later that day.

After I had made my bag, and just before my father closed the apartment door behind us for the last time (my mother would never see our home again or return to Lebanon, and in a year they'd be divorced), I took a second to do the last useless thing I would do in days: I grabbed a Sharpie and wrote, on the white plastic tarp I used as a curtain, the words "Goodbye Lebanon." Below, my childhood nickname: "Mary."

I would never feel legitimate in my pain, though it would live inside me, vivid, for years, all through the remainder of my teens, all through college—this great sadness I could not, would not feel. Six years later, on a hot July afternoon when I was hard at work on some sort of menial inventory task in the library of the small law firm I interned with in Paris, I fell to the floor with my hands over my ears as French military aircrafts flew over in preparation for the Bastille Day military parade. I stared at the civil procedure and criminal codes in front of me, felt the sensation of the rug under my legs, and thought: you ought to have gotten over this already. Look at you, nothing happened to you and here you are, cowering on the ground like a wilted leaf. And while the normal people in the next room also listened to the sound of the aircraft flying over our heads, they did not hear what I heard: the echo of those other planes from long ago. It's been twelve years now since the war, and I still resent myself for calling it that: "the" war, as though it is the only one, as though it cost me anything, anyone. As though it is mine. I scold myself for thinking this war was "a bad one," as if there is a scale of wars. I have seen the pictures from Syria, of dead children, coated in dust, who seem asleep in the arms of wide-eyed, screaming men. There are no good wars.

On the afternoon of July 14, we climbed down the stairs of our building in the dark and piled into my father's green SUV and, a few minutes later, parked in front of the embassy in the afternoon sun. There, we left the

car and boarded a bus parked in front of the gates, along with two dozen French citizens, mostly families, one girl I knew from school.

I cried on the bus. I did not cry too loudly, I knew better, but I cried too much still, with my mother by my side in the back of the bus, while my father was somewhere at the front where people, somehow, were kept apprised of the latest news. My mother asked me to stop crying, or maybe just asked why I kept sobbing—even this I cannot remember well. I cannot recall driving through Beirut, can only remember, but maybe this is also a fabrication, being somewhere on the highway by the sea, and thinking: this is the last time I will see this. And all the while, all through the crying that could not be justified, I wondered why others were not sobbing too. Didn't they know that we were careening out of our own lives, living our last moments as ourselves? Couldn't they see that the world around us had proven to be no heavier, no sturdier than theatre decor? That everything had become two-dimensional, large cardboard cutouts of home and safety and familiarity falling to the ground, not making nearly enough noise?

When my father made his way to the back of the bus to see us, it was to explain that other buses trying to leave the country were in danger, though this, too, is a memory so fleeting I sometimes catch myself doubting it.

We drove from Beirut to Tripoli, a city in the north of Lebanon. Our bus pulled into the parking lot of a small station in the early hours of the humid summer evening, and we waited in a bright hall for a second bus to take us to the Syrian border. We waited for what seemed like hours. There was nothing to do but sit around, talk to my mother, and watch TV. Here, my second clearest memory: televised images of Beirut, where orange, billowing clouds of heavy smoke obscured familiar buildings. No, not familiar buildings, but familiar urban fabric, something that screamed home to me, as surely as years later I would be able to ascertain that a street I had never been to belonged in Paris, and nowhere else.

We left Tripoli late in the evening and made our way to the Syrian border. There, a river of families surrounded our bus, hauling their suitcases and their children. The driver must have been taken with a silent panic of his own, for he soon opened the door and joined the throngs of frightened crowds heading for the last exit. The key remained in the ignition, and I saw my father get behind the wheel, and felt the bus resume its course.

At the border were hundreds, perhaps thousands of people, who appeared to be mostly lower- and middle-class families. While many of my friends had retreated to their families' second homes in the primarily Christian and Druze mountains, away from all risk for now, many less fortunate families, lots of them Sunni and Shiite, were making their way to the border, hoping to leave the country. The people around us walked in all directions, calling out names, dragging wheeled suitcases, some of them disheveled, eyes widened, with small children in tow. I lost my parents in the crowd. A young man with a backpack and long strands of dirty-blonde hair had climbed onto a stone wall and lay on his back, chin on his collarbone, eyes closed, a half-smile on his face. I found my mother.

Shortly afterward, around three a.m., a large group of veiled women attempted to leave in what had just been presented to us as our bus. To this, our own group reacted by planting women, children, and luggage in front of the bus so as to block its passage. I remember several people cajoling these strangers out of driving away with our bus; then, the terrible sight of the women exiting the vehicle, heads bowed down like sunflowers, our dampened exultation as we climbed onboard.

It was five a.m. on July 15 by the time we left Lebanon, the longest I had ever stayed up. I slept for one hour and awoke to rays of sunshine on my face and the sight of the Syrian countryside, where all was quiet and perfect.

We drove for forty-eight hours, until we reached Istanbul. The winds were strong, and I prayed for a tornado, longed for the kind of catastrophe that I had decided would be more acceptable than our own disaster. I hated the Turkish toilets in the roadside dumps where we stopped periodically. Standing there with my legs apart, I hated our new situation with all the strength of combined Lebanese and French snobbery.

It was late afternoon when we first saw Istanbul. Leaning over their seats, foreheads to the windows, all marvelled at the Bosphorus. I was hit with a triple realization: I had lost my home, my childhood was over, and what lay ahead I had no knowledge of, no desire for. When the wheels of the bus reached Europe, everyone clapped.

(RE)VOLT

Brandi Bird

SELKIRK, MANITOBA

There is a storm of wild roses
over Selkirk, Manitoba. They grow
from all sides, stems crooked, blooms
thick over streets: Main, Eveline,
and Mercy. The flowers bleed
a soft light like a wound under
water, the Red River a current
growing darker as petals fall
from the sky. They float upstream
to the catfish grounds, to the Interlake,
to the floodway. A scour of petals
on the riverbank, clay pinking
in waves. The lift bridge opens
in the chip of thorns and unfolds
a trellis to drift through, cradling
rose hips on the rusted spokes. The old
water tower disappears from view,
unnames Selkirk; gone in a rush
of green. People turn into stamen
and pistil, merge, become
roses. They grow in the cracks
of the street planted where they stand
pointing at thorns that cut
through the roofs of low-income
housing. Red round berries fall
to the ground, ferment, and the prairie
swallows them drunk and whole. The body
of the town a rose bush, a dry thicket,
a target for lightning strikes,
waiting to catch fire and begin again.

Marissa Johnson-Valenzuela

SLOVENLY WILDERNESS

I

We joked about it long enough that it was real before it was real. Something we believed in. We'd hoped we had that kind of power. That we would win despite the fact that it had never been done before. But when Ringer emptied that jar—the jar that had held their love, that we'd been rooting for just as we always rooted for exceptions—we all wondered about our futures, knew things wouldn't be the same, started to worry that we couldn't live this life forever. But before, during those months when the jar was full, it was as if we'd created it too, and we took pride in the accomplishment. Holding the jar up to the light, we would inspect it, check its progress and wonder how nobody had ever thought of this before: maybe, just maybe, we could change creation.

If we clung to one idea more than any other, it was that life was worth living. Really living. If you're gonna do it, do it. We believed that by embarking on a new life, the perdition—of clocking in and out, of abusing your kids, of sleeping next to someone you hate for thirty years,

of buying the next new thing, of all of that—could be avoided. That we were addicted to the road and the rail didn't change anything. Only made our compulsion worse.

We needed the spaces we'd found, needed to keep travelling and have options, always at least two paths to take, and in the bigger yards, like the one in South Dakota, up to twenty. The moving picture framed by the open door of the boxcar. Natural markers of where we were: live oak, pine, and ash. Bloodroot, sage, and nettles. We travelled to cranberry, apple, cannabis, and seaweed harvests for seasonal bits of money. We learned about our environment and, most days, we understood what the sky was telling us about the coming weather. Even when the bulls pulled us out of the cars and locked us up in county jail, we felt unconfined. The landscape passed us as we passed it, swelling ground and cut edges, satin ribbon rivers and machine-made holes filled with water. From the well of the Forty-Eight we watched the trees, and imagined how, if we were still, it would be the landscape skating by. Nature and space and days of it.

Insistence of what life could be, that we could make it however we wanted.

We were not the first and we respected those who came before. When we ran into holdouts—elderly men, always men—we helped them in and out of the boxcars when we could. We took note of the few Freight Train Riders of America tattoos we saw—FTRA with a simple line of track. Though they were sketchy and almost never had all their marbles, we liked to witness these men, to exchange a few words and in doing so find a bit of approval from our something-like-elders. And just as they had watched us, we watched a new generation arrive. They were louder. Seemed more daring, less careful. Some of us had seen them lose limbs. We muttered about how this was not a joke, how there were ways to do things. Once in a while we realized this was a sign not so much of our experience, as we liked to believe, but of our age.

Because for most of us this was not a mere phase. It was not simply a subject for parental dismissal. No, it was something else, something marvellous. When we stood up in the doorway of the boxcar and looked out at small towns, highways skirted, and plains and mountains and valleys and hills, we thought about promised land and how maybe in owning none we could own it all—despite the fences and barbed wire.

Sure, it was a strategy of isolation and those don't work out so well historically. We recognized that it wasn't the answer, but what if we could make it be? For now. Despite. But sometimes in small-town diner

conversations with farmers' wives doubling as waitresses, we remembered that the world wasn't as bad as life before we caught our first train had added up to suggest. But we couldn't go back to those ways now we had created our own. Ultimately, once chosen, once addicted to this life, we weren't sure we wanted to recover.

We focused on the romantic because we could. Running with a train, hands on the rails of the ladder, catching a car on the fly. In our collective memory and framing: sun always shining and big blue skies. Eating wild blackberries in northwest train yards until we were full, because around there they grow anywhere where the ground is disturbed. Folks like Ginger could scamper up to the top of a Fifty-Two and reach down and pull you up so we could all be on top of that second stacked box, lying on our backs as the train slowed through towns and cities, wind through our hair, watching stars shoot and glow.

II

We wouldn't let Drawer wander off too. Already we'd misplaced Ringer and in doing so we'd come to understand the reality of the jar. The fallout. That it was empty. The way that Drawer kept the jar in his pack anyway, just as he always had, despite the fact that Ringer was gone, and there was nothing to keep.

Nowadays, Drawer refused to take his violin out, refused to play, and we couldn't remember when this had happened before. This was when we really started to feel sorry for him.

Even the least self-conscious among us—the ones who for weeks on end didn't look in mirrors, who routinely wouldn't notice stains and dirt on themselves or others—couldn't help but notice his increasingly botched skin, mysterious welts, marks and scabs. As if something inside of him was trying to get out.

Even worse was how, though we managed responsive noises, his jokes were no longer funny. The sounds we emitted failed to pass as laughter.

So for months we kept watch. Swore we wanted to go to St. Louis too. Then Baltimore, then Richmond. A few of us even followed him to Wyoming so he could again see the Wind River Mountains of his childhood. And though hitchhiking to such land without trains took exasperatingly long, those of us who went later boasted about the two days spent searching for morels in a section of forest that had burned the year prior. We tried to explain how the fire had drawn a ragged line; a

severe contrast between the green leafy patches of spring and the charred dark grey sections not yet capable of new growth.

Well into our vigil, a group of us nervously followed him to the outskirts of San Diego, where our swarthy old friend Ringer had grown up. It was a town with too many names, given and taken, where poor, mostly recent immigrants lived. Through dusty streets we followed, walked slightly behind Drawer for hours. We were less sure of ourselves than usual, in part because we were completely unsure of what he was telling himself he might find. For hours we shuffled like a mismatched shadow in his wake and tried to ignore the stares our pilgrimage drew.

Eventually Drawer sat down on the curb of the sidewalk, elbows on his knees, his hands clasped and pressed up against his mouth. He sat there silent but we knew. And it made us want to disappear but we couldn't.

We didn't say he was crazy then. We believed Drawer had to do that, to hold on, to cling, as people will do.

III

Usually though, Drawer tried to act as if nothing had happened. And, though we missed Ringer and we'd heard he was on an island we couldn't catch a train to, we too tried to pretend everything was as before. Because what choice did we have? Ringer didn't respond to the messages we left on walls in train yards, our paint-markered pleas tagged by etched hobo symbols.

We drank with Drawer, encouraged more drinking, cheap alcohol like Mad Dog became funny again and we remembered that malt liquor also served as a meal. He smoked more pot, ate mushrooms, and asked around for dope. The last one we assured him we couldn't find, but he just looked each of us in our eyes and didn't say anything else.

We instigated conversations about grand plans to keep running away. For winning. For staying young and wandering. For not having our knees go out when we tried to catch a moving train.

We told him about new boys, tried to find him entertainment, nudged that there was this one with gentle curls who stubbornly wore old cowboy boots despite the impracticality. We didn't mention that the hat the kid wore looked like one Ringer used to wear. We tried to get the kid to take it off.

We made Drawer laugh at our suggestions.

And silently, we studied his pain, the longing in his eyes. The way his hands shook. The way sometimes, wasted, he insisted his love was coming back, claimed there would still be a baby. We let him say it. But we couldn't look him in his eyes when he did. We looked away, stared out at the trees, or, when not in trains, down at the flames of the fire.

"Poor Drawer," we said.

On city streets we got creative in our renewed need to self-medicate, to obtain money to buy what is so rarely cast away—drugs, alcohol, cigarettes to fill the gaps. Spanging was usually lucrative enough, the signs we scrawled on ripped cardboard were suitably obnoxious, such as: *Need money for tampons* or *Momma didn't love me enough.* Sometimes more so: *You can afford it.*

Others resorted to busking, and played quaint instruments: harmonicas, banjos, the kind of mini-guitar long ago bought cheaply on the street in Mexico all scratched, battered, and peeling at the seams. Little Sam even managed a massive accordion she'd acquired. In and out she wrestled it, the worn belly of that beast of an instrument refusing to burst. Wheezing and moaning yet somehow beautiful. Supporting casts would dance and offer the hat to the passersby who paused in their passing, captured by the songs and the insolence of the singers.

But it was the non-musically inclined among us who pushed the boundaries of entertainment.

Bear deduced from a newspaper article detailing a welterweight champion fight that people always wanted blood, so she made a sign that read: *$5 and I hit him, $10 and I beat him up*, with an arrow pointing to the right, which meant when we traded sides we would have to trade seats on the sidewalk. But there wasn't much sitting to be done. The game we quickly named The Beat-Down was our most profitable ploy, and we indulged in it for weeks until we thought about it too much. But while the rage lasted there was less music heard on the streets as more of us started taking our turns hitting our friends, collecting wounds of our own and the crumpled dollar bills of the others. We were all palookas, stumblebums, about half of the time our jabs and uppercuts unintentionally missing the mark, but our lack of skill only encouraged the audience in their intoxication from mixed cocktails of laughter, appall and voyeurism.

The violence was only slightly choreographed because there were no camera angles to edit. There was no third man, no referee to mediate. This was up-close, personal with the paying customers most interested

in raw pain. A few of us would act as support staff and circulate through the gathering crowd, adding money to the base price by coyly reminding that, while this would be a good show, it was not free. Wishbone put his tattooed black hand out, cradled by his other biologically pink one, while ruddy brown Sweetener would smile her mysterious smile and hold out her pale yellow scarf to gather coins from men and women suddenly distracted from the fight, drawn to look at her, to register Sweetener's scattered tufts of knife-chopped hair and the string of small purple star tattoos lining her vulpine face.

We would delay the start, proclaiming the event each time, respecting the need for a building of tension.

The first punches were stunted, warm-ups, but quickly would come the crunch of fist into cartilage, the pound of eyes pushed into brains. Blood would gush, bits of flesh would hang. Deerdeer shuffling her tattered skate shoes in a bantam-weight dance, even as her jaw ached. Most of us were surprised by how much anger we had stored up, the bitterness of being the freak show. In a sort of coping, we joked of another sign we wanted to make—this time electric neon and flashing: *We aren't the fuck-ups. You are!* We were extra careful when Jacknife fought because he was prone to lose himself in wrath, start veering into the crowd, every limb swinging. It would take three of us to tackle him into submission. To hold him until it passed.

After the exchange of blows, while we sat there waiting to go again, the deep purple of the blood draining into the hollows of our eyes, we tried not to think about the complexity, the impudence of milking the same system we were trying so hard to escape. No, we weren't completely naïve to the cycle we were spinning. The dollars and dimes would be pooled for plastic handles of vodka or 40 ounces of Old English. Engaging in the dismissive sneers of strangers and even their scared, awed charity perpetuated our thirst to soften the edges of our lens, to blur the lines drawn between us and our pasts and the people walking past us in the present.

Still, with a quick shake of our heads we could reset the etch-a-sketch of thinking too much and retort, "Fuck you" to a snotty upper-class compelled to share their disgust. Unlike theirs, our days were missions. We ran around on rooftops, climbed trees and train trestles, skipped through orchards holding hands. Comfortable in our skins we danced, sang, made art that we left in alleyways for no one who was anyone to see, created delicious concoctions of food, sometimes taking days to prepare,

to be tasted in no restaurant. We marvelled at our escape. Adventures both planned and spontaneous but, either way, continuous.

IV

It had been real. It had been unyielding. Fated. All those nights ago when they'd first met during a crew change, as if the country wasn't the size of the country.

They would rumble for hours, rolling in the grass, splashing naked into streams. Cuddling in corners of empty warehouses, their desire would fill the whole of the space. Later they would reappear covered in dust, infectious.

They laughed, almost howled, and we'd never been able to not smile and take pride in what they had as if it was ours.

Their love was capable of causing damage.

So we worried Drawer would kill himself.

Having missed so many signs in others, we were wary. Noted his changes. Wanted to be better at offering help. Zines had been written about how to intervene and a few of us had been trained at drop-in centres in reviving people from an overdose. Drawer had never been a big user, but it only takes one bad shot. We kept him away from the harder ones, the drugs that were accident prone to the point that we wouldn't have been sure it was an accident.

But accidents do happen. We all knew what Ringer—despite his usual pleasant, right kind of wily, personality—could turn into when he drank too much whiskey. And though we'd encouraged vodka, we hadn't done it with vigor. He'd gotten a taste of the brown stuff and soon we couldn't pry the Old Crow out of his grip. Then, sometime into it, Ringer saw Drawer talking too much to a new girl still named Katie.

Admittedly, Drawer could be a bit of a tour guide, an ambassador for an unorganized state, and this had always annoyed Ringer because he was more critical, more unsure of the others than Drawer was. The whiskey clouded everything. We could feel a hot, sticky breeze blowing in. Their fight had begun simply and should've been unmemorable: a basic test of drunken wills. We still believe that we could not have anticipated the fervor; none of us had seen Ringer sneak the jar—their baby—from Drawer's pack.

Daily, we wish we had kept the jar from being emptied on that heated night of passion and New Orleans humidity.

When love can hurt it does. There were magnolias nearby and, instead of watching the growth flop to the ground, some of us looked at the large, soft, white petals. Those of us who could watch wondered later why we couldn't step in and stop him. We should've grabbed the jar, should've ripped it from Ringer's grasp and protected the child. Instead we stood there, our mouths gaping. Wondered how, when the glass jar was thrown down afterwards, it too didn't break.

And just a few days later, as word spread, those of us who had seen it firsthand got out of there. Trying to escape. We left and rode in a unit, the third back from the main locomotive, just to spoil ourselves with the conductor's seat and air conditioning. We rode over the bayous, over the swamp, past live oak trees knotted and old.

V

Drawer knew a lot about organisms that create life that most of us don't even realize are there. Given the opportunity, the needed set of circumstances, they will multiply, make colonies and invade territory. He taught us about them with informal lectures so delightfully animated that we cheered him on. Many types we already knew: beer, aged cheese, bread, cider, sauerkraut, soy sauce, wine, vinegar, yogurt, pickles. And some most of us didn't: kefir, kimchi, kombucha, miso, quorn, tempeh, umeboshi plums.

All things that tasted good when we weren't hung over, when we'd found enough in the dumpster, had begged enough coins, or had landed for a bit at one of the properties—squats, collectives and land trusts friends had settled onto. Friends who, like us, lived off the excess of the others: converted scrap into housing, constructed fashion from castaway clothes—Hyena in her layers of polyester slips, Compass' skirt made up entirely of patches imprinted with the names of Italian grindcore bands, Ember's black handkerchief wrapped tightly around his right wrist. We ate food that hadn't even expired yet, that had been thrown out because one container of juice in the box of twenty had been accidentally cut and spilled on the other nineteen. Some lived off the grid and some lived in the unclaimed houses of dead people who were still getting bills. Or in abandoned buildings some company was only vaguely aware it owned, the utilities reconnected by careful rigging.

But the jar changed everything. Like we said, it had been talked about enough. They were lovers and wanted children so it made sense to try. There had to be a way they could both be the parent. And we believed

because we knew weirder things had happened. We'd seen them. Maybe even were them.

They'd had only one volunteer. And we all knew what Drawer and Ringer knew, that Timepiece would not make the best surrogate mother. She'd been excited by the idea, went about jabbering about the parasite she might soon have growing inside of her, but her alcohol problem was fierce and had landed her in many a predicament. Drawer and Ringer understood, we all understood, that it would mean following her for months, holding her down when necessary, to keep her from jumping off moving train cars, to keep her from drowning in 40s, to somehow keep her from getting fucked too hard by some crusty punk from Gainesville. They thought about it though, kept looking Timepiece up and down, exchanging glances and subtle comments as they gawked, so much that she finally fronted, "What the fuck you looking at? Thinking about not being queer or something?"

Ringer, never one to admit his talent for offending, returned her smirk, shrugged and walked away.

Drawer stayed and intervened. He smiled, teased,"Maybe."

And, with only a quick look in the direction Ringer had gone, walked up to Timepiece and offered both his arm and an affected, theatrical, tone,"Come lady, let us see if there is any wine left in the cellar. We may have to drink it right away so these ruffians don't indulge when we aren't looking."

Pausing only briefly to figure out the game Drawer's tone implied, Timepiece accepted. She linked her arm in Drawer's, held an imaginary parasol, raised her chin high and smiled. She liked this impromptu play.

"Yes dear, I dare say I am rather parched."

The thought was that if they combined their semen and Timepiece put the blend up in her, there would be no way to determine the father and in that they would both be the father.

But ultimately they'd agreed: fuck a turkey baster. It is no way to start this kind of life—this kind of living. For, as Ringer said, "It can be more than nothing."

We saw his point and were amused by the idea of the jar. Drawer had explained the process:

- One glass jar (with a plastic lid because metal inhibits fermentation).
- Two sets of sperm. Theirs.

- A sugar. In this case they decided honey would be the most natural, though Drawer wondered about the possibility of botulism.

They decided on hand jobs. It was the best way to make sure the ingredients ended up in the slightly dirty-like-we-were jar.

They were both scrawny, but even in the chill of the November evening, they could get warmed up. Their body heat compounded inside their zipped-together sleeping bags, laid out on the customary layer of cardboard—the first line of defense against the cold solid steel. Ringer was skinny enough that Drawer could wedge his fingertips in behind Ringer's clavicle, the other hand gripped hip bone. Like handles. Pressure of knee digging into thigh. Fingernails cutting through fabric, through back. All as they made out and embraced in a "Cadillac"—what we called the space on a grainer that has side walls to go with the flat and the overhang, and these four sides protect from wind and weather and other types of exposure. Such cars were rare, but, at a stop in Kansas City, this one had rolled up like a carriage in a fairytale.

It started growing. The layer on the surface grew from a quarter inch to an inch and then more. It was a cloudy off-white colour. Soon, they talked about transferring it to a bigger jar. They debated baby names. Fungus, fermented semen, or congealed cum? At first we weren't quite sure but then no, it was definitely alive, it was definitely growing.

Joshua Whitehead

NDN ANALITY

"Bumhole is a mortal sin in English. Father LaFleud told me in confession one time."

—Tomson Highway, *Kiss of the Fur Queen*

when the federal government
took peguis land on treaty 1
they put us in a concave
depression like a contact lens
pooled together in the fen
spongy mass of land
too heavy to hold the body
bottomheavy from the get-go

hudson fought for national help
to build a dyke along the fisher river
where catcalls & ious & slapping fins
crack a crest of water
still bronzing in the sun
they took our landbase
to build a military base
kapyong barracks in wpg
hudson even joked hed move
us all there if they gave it back
militaristic ghost town beyond the break
like a haunted house with an appetite,
morrisonian red-light, ndn polter[zeit]geist
keeps the young in kapyong;
"its prime real estate," all the katz said
"aint no type of land for an urban rez"
even though all that north end
is full of decimation & ndn decompo—
situation best left unattended

nicimosak all like to snag
me like a bottomfeeder, powerbottom
demand: “bleach and douche
your ass if you want me to fuck you”
dont want that shame of pulling out
to find a nugget on their dick
or ermine fur anality
i weasel out a wendigo
stoat a stool i lionize
& aint that its own type of excavation?

what kind of selfobliteration
does it take to ask an ndn that?
relocate my brownness from its marshlands
purge a wormhole & a starway
of the detriment hoard & saved?

i wonder if shit is a type of defense mechanism?
ive seen sikâk chase away a cock or two
from colonies on the rim
i wonder if excrement is a medicine too?
brings out all the virals in your eyes
i chastise bugs, not chase them
coat of bed-bug bites;

to douche on the weekly, if not the daily
is to disinfect the archive of my bowels
but whenever i hear infect, i hear invade
ive had lice a time or two before;

so what, even my asshole needs to be whitened now?
look like a powdered mini-donut
clamped in like algae in a fishing net?
“funny,” i said, “my mama says
i have a bannock ass
aint that some type of pastry too?”

peguis became a bog
natural slough for settler runoff
runaways from the cities
who had their guts beat in
for trusting them too much—
maybe its apt to say:
started from the bottom
only to end up in the bottom, looking up
water stained with mercury
shed for mineralization
well of carcass, well of cosmos
beach of resurgent rot;

if language is epidermal
is shit a type of theory
drug out through the can[y]on?
a spongy type of spiderweb
elasticity like a hairtie
or a continuum, a parallax
möbius strip
supersymmetric string theory
or a dimensional shift
a door, a gate, relativity
my anus is autochthonous

my pickup line these days has been a barthesian pun:
"to speak of love is to confront the muck of language"
wonder if sakihitin is a type of folding
duplicated between two cheeks—
love sometimes being a triumph
drug all through the mud
so, for the love of god, please do kiss my ass
before you make me bleed&bleed&bleed.

Kate Finegan

A MOSAIC IN THE MAKING

From way up here, the Mississippi sparkles—thousands of lights reflecting off the frigid water. We sing along to "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" being piped out of Riverside Park. We're well above the mosaics, so we don't have to debate what they mean. It's just the two of us and thin night air made festive by carols and the smell of distant chimneys.

Chartrie and I have been inseparable since our banding day, when our mothers met. We should've gotten our bracelets on our first birthday, like everyone else, but a freak April snowstorm gave us an extra day of freedom. Our moms like to remind us of this, to poke fun when we complain of rules and curfews. But they know us—they know we're cautious. That's why we're climbing Cass Street Bridge with no intention of jumping. We know it's too high, and we don't want to risk shattering on impact with the water, or blacking out. We don't want to wake up on the bottom of the river, our bones stitching themselves back together, our lungs aching from the pressure of so much water, especially not in the dead of winter.

The walk home is a showcase of mosaics. They cover the city—bridges, walls, underpasses, any public structure. Some are basic, random, like a child's arts and crafts project. The Third Street parking garage is mostly like that—bits of broken ceramic scattered like confetti. Other mosaics depict hearts or hands, people lined up arm-in-arm like chains, or the phases of the moon, circling this blue-green planet.

La Crosse is known for these mosaics, but so is every other city. Home goods are built to last and last, but plates can be had for a dollar a dozen. At the store, you'll see women buying cheap plates by the cartful. Sometimes, you'll hear the ear-grating, spine-chilling sound of metal against dry grout, the removal of a mosaic. We've never managed to follow the sound fast enough, to see the artwork before it's destroyed. We're always left to wonder what made the Fathers deem it unfit. We assume it's the Fathers. No one ever talks about the destroyed mosaics. There are so many, after all—new ones plastered over older—that no one misses those that are lost. But still, we can't help but wonder.

We're eating popcorn from a bowl that's too big, watching cartoons we're too old for, when Chartrie's little sister Mauve comes in. She's walking funny, stiff, and her eyes are red and puffy. Her hands shake when they're not clasped in front of her.

"What's your deal?" Chartrie asks. She throws a piece of popcorn in the air and catches it in her mouth.

Mauve sinks into the couch, takes a handful of popcorn, but doesn't eat it. She sits there in silence. The clock ticks. Her hand opens and kernels fall to the floor. She gets up and goes to the bathroom. The shower starts.

"What's up with her?" Chartrie asks.

"Must've been spooked, or hit with words," I say.

"By who?"

"Boys from school?"

We both press a small round button on our bracelets, illuminating the display. We push twice more.

"No terminations," Chartrie says, "so it's not like it was serious."

We fall asleep on the couch, my feet beside Chartrie's face, both of us wrapped in the same big blanket. Mauve hasn't finished her shower yet.

The next morning over pancakes, Mauve still isn't talking. She tells us she can't, physically can't.

"I've tried," she says, "but when I do—"

She cuts off, swatting at her buzzing bracelet.

"Shock?" I ask.

Mauve nods, rubbing her wrist.

Chartrie sits down and slumps her head onto the table. Her hair cascades into her maple syrup, and I pluck it off the plate for her. She rolls herself up slowly, takes the hair into her mouth, and sucks the sweetness from it.

"Mauve," she says, pulling the hair from her mouth. "Mauvie. I know what happened." She looks at the table and sucks at her hair again. "It happened to me, too."

We can hardly hear her with her mouth full of hair, but even still, her bracelet buzzes with a shock—not enough to scramble DNA, but enough to shut her up.

At school everyone's atwitter because the principal has been terminated.

"He do something?" a student asks.

"It was just his time," the teacher says.

It's not so sad, the principal's termination. Everyone liked him, but he got almost ninety-five years. So he wasn't old exactly, but it wasn't like last year, when the cheerleading captain was terminated in the middle of a game. It usually doesn't happen to kids, but everyone knows it's possible. It's always possible, from the first birthday onward. That's the price for what we have, and we know it. A small price, really—a quick termination, painless, administered at random to control the population. Or, if you register pain to another person, immediate punitive termination at the Fathers' command. Still, painless. That happens more than anyone cares to discuss, but it protects us from the cruelest reality of the early days of immortality—eternal pain with no way out. That happened to some people, before the Fathers found a way to fix it. Kids love to talk about those days, the torture people wrought against others, and how there was no way to make it stop, no way to die rather than face another minute.

There was no punitive termination last night. Still, Mauve walks around like a ghost. The first week, she's like a fuzzy outline in a steamed-up mirror. The second, it's as if someone has opened the window just a crack, to let some fog out. A week later, she's smiling through droplets. And after a month, she's better, a clear reflection of her former self. At least that's how it seems to me.

Then, one day on my way home from school, something happens. Something that steals the language from my lungs. Something I can't name and can't speak of. I can't stop it. There should be a word—some word to say this isn't what I want, but my tongue is heavy in my mouth. When I push him, he keeps going, pins my arms down when I whimper. I struggle to spit the lump from my throat. *Pain.* I wait for his bracelet to buzz, for the Fathers to end this, to please, please end this.

"Go on, hit me," the boy says, stroking my bracelet.

A slap would surely register, so I keep quiet, make fists with my hands. I keep waiting for his termination, but it doesn't come. When he's done he walks away unharmed. *A glitch in the system,* I tell myself as I stand in broken pieces. *A fluke.*

I walk home past the mosaics. Right away, my mom knows something is wrong. I'm sagging into myself, feeling tiny in my puffy coat. I sit down, and Mom is at my side. She touches my shoulder to encourage me to speak, but I flinch away. So she kneels down, to look up into my eyes.

I take a deep breath in. "Something happened, a boy—" I start, but my bracelet buzzes; my body is a lightning rod.

Mom nods, bites her lip. She looks down. I study the part in her hair, the little flakes of dandruff, and feel an immense love for this mother of mine.

"Why can't I—" I start, but this time, it's not a shock that stops me. A lump forms in my throat.

"Don't try to say it," Mom says, placing her hand on my foot, and the thick fabric feels like armor, keeps me safe from her loving touch, a touch I crave but cannot bear. I think she knows how I feel because she resists squeezing the outline of my toes. She stands when I sniffle, and goes to the cupboard.

"Come here," she says, and I wipe my nose, gather my strength, and stand on shaky legs.

She opens the cupboard and pulls out a stack of plates. She sets them on the counter and pulls the top one off the stack. She holds it out to me, so I cross the kitchen and wrap my hands around the cool, smooth edges. I like how the plate feels in my hands, heavy. I like how fragile it is, yet solid. I feel the lump in my throat, and it makes me angry. My bracelet makes me angry. I want to cause pain. I look at my mother, who nods. I lift my hands above my head and hurl the plate against the floor.

It shatters around me, explodes like a firework—loud, unruly, a balm to my ears. I rub my hands together, laugh at this destruction.

"Good," Mom says. "We'll sweep up later." She hands me another, and another, and another. I think of Mauve. I realize what this is—a mosaic in the making—and I throw the plates down harder.

Cecilia Stuart

SPRING BREAK FOREVER

It didn't hurt when you plucked each hair from my head piece by piece. My scalp got tender pretty fast, but I gripped your hand and thought of the ocean. It is so vast, I said. Vast is just another word for big, but I wanted you to think I had many thoughts. You plucked out my eyebrows and eyelashes too, but I didn't mind since I knew you were mostly tender. We talked about your trip to Portland and my recent root canal until your hand cramped and you had to take a break. I was so *honour your pain*. I wanted to talk it out. I wanted to show up for you. The tweezers made an awful cold noise but I didn't want to cause a fuss. Hours felt like seconds with your eyes locked on me. So imagine my surprise when you left me hairless and trembling on the loveseat in your kitchen, my words lodged deep in my swollen throat. I got so dizzy but you told me to take cleansing breaths. You told me to borrow a sweater from the closet. You were always so generous. Thank you I said. I wanted to be calm. I hummed Pachelbel's Canon in D. At some point you slipped out the side door so I hummed louder for no one.

Natasha Ramoutar

WHERE WE KEEP THE BODIES

He's in bits and pieces inside the body bag, a jigsaw puzzle that we must put together. Teresa is helping the boys bring him in through the back door into the basement, heaving the stretcher from the front end. It's a small body bag today, smaller than usual. We've been expecting him.

The mortuary fridges are in the basement because having the customers see the bodies could send them running out the door or cause wailing in the lobby. No one wants to see corpses, even though death is inevitable, even though those people are all there to make funeral arrangements themselves. Bodies are too tangible.

Fritz, the owner, says that we're in the business of consoling people, even if they have some strange requests. Marlene Ryman's dying wish was to be buried in her car, which took up four regular casket-sized spaces. She had that car for over forty years, used it to trek across North America from Florida to Yukon City, Los Angeles to Halifax. It was a miracle that it still ran. Omar Khan came from a long line of jewellery makers. The rumour was that his ancestors made crowns for the Rajas of India. His

family plated everything in gold foil, right down to his underwear. Too much money to burn if you ask me.

I hold open the metal door, motioning with my hand to advance. "Keep it slow now. Almost there."

"Sophia, I have done this before," says Teresa, pursing her lips. "Back home."

I move aside to let them load the body off of the stretcher and into the fridge. Teresa's only been with us for two weeks but seems to know more than me about bodies. I've been in this business for five years. It's not a place you'd find most twenty-six year olds. It seems more suited to Teresa, with her small body and thin, sparse hair. Deep lines carve into her face and betray her age like tree rings on a stump.

I push the metal locker closed, sealing the industrial freezer. The boys leave through the back door, their day far from over. They travel across the city, stopping at every hospital and mortuary office. There are always more bodies to be collected. Death is relentless.

"You know which one this is, right?" I ask, pointing to the square metal drawer. The air in the morgue is stagnant now, and I feel a chill beneath my skin. While we would typically work on a body immediately, it's almost closing time and we can't fix this body in an hour. Teresa sighs. "This is going to be difficult." We won't revisit the compartment in the freezer until tomorrow.

Where we keep the bodies: stacked in an industrial freezer, three to a column. Whenever we open the door, the air makes the hairs on our arms rise. The stainless steel warps our reflections like a funhouse mirror—our eyes too wide, our cheekbones too sullen.

Across the table, atop a crisp white sheet, Teresa and I lay out the pieces of the boy. We've already bathed and disinfected each individual section. We work quietly and swiftly, suturing the child back together.

We haven't had a serial killer in Scarborough since Paul Bernardo. I was only a toddler then, so I don't remember much about the murders. I do remember what came after. Every parent felt compelled to keep their kids close, especially mine who were new to the country. There were no sleepovers when I was a kid, no after-school hangouts in the playground. We came straight home, locked our doors, and did our homework at silent kitchen tables.

It was bound to happen again with this murder. Three kids gone in two weeks, and this little boy was the only body to turn up.

"They found him in a basement," Teresa says. "Woodbine and Kingston."

"I heard," I reply. "That isn't even Scarborough though."

"Beaches?"

I nod, and Teresa grins at her newfound knowledge. She's been studying maps of Toronto since she arrived here, memorizing street after street on the grid. What she doesn't realize yet is that the Beaches is a place of Farmers' Markets, sailing, and art shows. It's a place where they have time to weed their gardens, to plant petunias and daisies and watch them sprout. A place where immigrant parents like this boy's, like mine, might aspire to live one day. A place where you aren't supposed to find the bodies of little boys in basements.

I try to sew the arm back into its shoulder socket but it keeps hanging loose, the skin gathering and folding in unnatural ways. Teresa waves me away to the legs and takes my place.

"You're really good at this," I say quietly.

Without looking up, she replies, "Some practice from clothes, some practice from other bodies."

"Other bodies?"

"I used to be a nurse." A few moments go by in silence before she adds, "And could've been a doctor too."

"Really?" I say. "What happened?"

"Life." She looks up this time, not at me, but to the boy's face. "Marriage. A child."

"Do you ever regret it?"

Her eyes are unwavering from the boy. "No. You'll learn one day."

I wonder if Teresa is the type to smother her children and keep them home, like my parents were. I think she must be, with the way she does everything so carefully, from her folds in the sheets to her precise stitches.

Once the boy is back together, we begin to make incisions to insert the tubes for the embalming process. We watch and wait, the room silent but for the soft hum of the embalming machine.

Where we keep the bodies: laid out on tables like vegetables at the grocery store, plumped and misted back to life. After we glue the eyelids and mouth shut, they almost look like they're sleeping.

We prepare the viewing room, pulling photographs from a brown envelope the family has sent us. The boy's name is written across the front in curly cursive: Aiden Singh. I wonder if this is his mother's handwriting.

In the first picture, he smiles in a white, collared shirt against a blue backdrop, Morningside Public School marked at the bottom right-hand corner of the photograph. His dark hair sticks to his forehead, his cheeks are flushed and his eyes shine, as though he was laughing right before the picture was taken.

"Morningside and Ellesmere?" asks Teresa, pointing to the school's name.

I nod. "That's near you, right?" I glance at another photograph. Aiden at a T-ball game, dressed in a white- and red-striped uniform. He holds the bat tightly in his hands, gaze fixed on the little ball.

"I'm around Morningside and Sheppard."

"Well," I say, "we're practically neighbours then."

It's not uncommon that we'd both find ourselves in Scarborough. The region is a gradient of melanin. Newcomers root themselves in pockets that resemble home.

Teresa lifts another out of the pile. In this he plays piano, his navy suit engulfing his small frame. His hands brush against the keys, his lips are tight in concentration. "So young."

I start carefully placing each photograph into a frame. "They found more of them. More bodies in the house. In the closets and garden."

She crinkles her nose and shakes her head. "Disgusting."

"I know." Our voices echo in this chamber, reverberate among the rows of pews and the raised platform.

"Does this ever bother you?" asks Teresa. "Working in a funeral home?"

I shrug. "Only when they're children."

"Only ones like Aiden?"

I look away, lifting the flap on the back of the frame so it can sit on the table. "What about you? Did it bother you to work as a nurse before?"

"Only with children. There was one time—it was a few years ago, during Haiyan. They called every surviving doctor and nurse to the camps. But we didn't have the supplies to treat everyone. We tore clothes apart to use as gauze, used the threads to sew up open wounds. People were packed so tightly that there was no way to stop infections. No anaesthesia, no antibiotics, just crying and groaning that never stopped.

Some people, like my husband, were lost when the typhoon hit. We couldn't even find his body."

I place a hand on her shoulder as if it's the right thing to do, but she turns away to look at the photograph of Aiden in the frame. "Then there were others, like my son Joseph, who were injured badly. He had two broken ribs and deep gashes everywhere. He couldn't even walk. We had to carry him the whole way. Foreigners came quickly to Cebu and Manila, the biggest cities—doctors, nurses, and soldiers with food and purified water. Joseph didn't survive the journey to Manila."

"I'm sorry to hear that," I say, although it sounds scripted, like something I would say to one of our clients. My stomach churns. I want to say something meaningful, but my breath catches in my throat and my mind can't conjure anything coherent.

"With no one else, I stuck around Manila. I cared for so many children in the city. Each time I wondered why they made it and he didn't." She laughs darkly. "Selfish, isn't it?"

We spend some time positioning the frames on the table, marking with tape the spots where the wreaths and arrangements will go.

"You'll learn one day," says Teresa. "Motherhood is fear. Love and fear."

Haiyan was a category five typhoon, with a World Health Organization disaster classification of three, one of the worst according to the website. I skim the statistics.

People affected: Over 16 million

Death toll: Over 6,000

People injured: Over 27,000

People displaced: 4.1 million

My stomach hasn't settled since our conversation. I raise a clammy hand and rub the skin, pressing lightly into my abdomen. The doctors told me to expect this, that my body would take time to adjust to the absence within me. But it's been years and it still doesn't feel right. I wonder if it ever will.

The night I woke up in my own blood, I thought I was just having regular cramps. I didn't even know I was pregnant. I was twenty-one, and likely wouldn't have kept it had I known. Still, my body's purge left me feeling cheated. Like the choice hadn't even been mine.

I wonder if there's a list in some government office of the names of all who died in Haiyan. I imagine little Joseph's name, filed away neatly, one

of more than six thousand. At the funeral home we keep a log of every body, all stored on a hard drive. Aiden Singh's file is there, typed up in the spreadsheet with all the others.

My baby never had a name. There's no record he ever existed.

Teresa and I applied moisturizer and makeup to Aiden Singh. He almost looks like a real boy again. The family insisted on an open casket so we had to be creative.

Teresa applied layers upon layers of foundation and rouge, found clothes that covered any stitches and incisions we made. I watched her work: carefully, deliberately, with the patience of a saint.

Aiden lies in a solid mahogany casket at the front of the room on elevated steps, surrounded by wreaths of white, blooming flowers.

The room is over capacity, the guests spilling into the hallway, into the nooks and crannies of every corner where walls meet. It buzzes with soft sobs and murmured regrets: should've kept a closer eye; should've never let him out of sight. I watch a mother envelop her toddler, his tiny arms clinging to her leg. Another one lifts her son, too old to be carried, her face buried in his hair.

The Singh family is interspersed through the room with teachers, students, and other families. There are sombre strangers too, who hang in the shadows, plastered at the back like wallflowers. These are the community members, the Scarborough onlookers who have come to pay their respects, who were moved to leave their homes. Most of them are immigrants, a microcosm of the world here for this boy who looks like them. They must have thought that they left their grief behind in their homelands, but this is a reminder that it travelled across tumultuous oceans, that it still clings to them like sediment.

When the service starts, the children cry in unison. Their parents stroke their heads as if saying that could've been you.

Where we keep the bodies: in caskets plummeted towards the centre of the earth, in urns above the fireplace, scattered across both land and sea where the wind ferries them away.

I clean the room after the service, but there are always things that are left behind. Grief makes people forgetful.

"He's still on the run you know," says Teresa, as we sort through the stray items. "The guy who did this."

"I saw." I had seen his picture on the television that morning. He had the same eyes as Bernardo, a piercing blue-green like misty waters at the Bluffs on a stormy day.

Packing the photos into an envelope, I stop at the school photo. Aiden Singh in his white, collared shirt, cheeks flushed, frozen in a smile. I run my finger over the glass of the frame. "How many were there?"

Teresa leans over, places a spotted hand on mine. "Six in total." Her eyes fixate on the photograph as she blinks away tears. "Six so far."

Where we keep the bodies: somewhere deep inside—little ornate coffins buried in the depths of us.

(RE)VERSE

Emily Riddle

NAPEW REDUX

I.
I stopped talking to you because you called me Pocahontas
Even though you stole me a lot of Oilers gear, that was still fucked
You sent me a bunch of ANGRY TEXTS IN CAPS LOCK ON MY FIRST EVER CELL PHONE
I laughed in my high school bathroom that had floor-to-ceiling green tiles and pressed delete
I played saxophone in school band and you were a football player
It was never going to work

II.
We sat across from each other at a ramen restaurant in Vancouver
It had been six years since I found out over Instagram that you got back together with (or actually never left?) your white girlfriend
We were trying to be acquaintances, despite having grown apart
You told me you do not date Indigenous women (anymore) because you do not want to interrupt their ascendance to greatness—to becoming professors, lawyers, to advocating for our people
You said white women were able to dedicate more time to you and that's still true
Not sure what Frantz Fanon would say about that, but he ended up with a white girl too

III.
You were my boss, a pitboss at the rez casino and it was the summer before I moved away
The thing about being a dealer is men call you a halfbreed cunt and you stay up until noon
There isn't much to do in Edmonton in the winter at 4 a.m., other than eat Denny's or fuck
Once, I showed up to your place in red lingerie and you had fallen asleep and didn't answer

In a classic Cree move, I sent you a message telling you what you had missed
In another classic Cree move, you posted a sad public facebook status about your fuck up
When I moved to Vancouver, you sent me a care package full of kraft dinner

IV.
You were just like my mom (similar traumas) in a handsome Cree man package
I knew I was in trouble
You had a swanky apartment overlooking the river and hair longer than mine
Both seemed like significant accomplishments
You were also my boss at the rez casino the summer before I moved to Vancouver
After I left town, you dated my little sister's best friend
There isn't much to do in Edmonton in the winter at 4 a.m., other than eat Denny's or fuck

Christine Lai

CAMERA OBSCURA

In the late hours of the evening, Martin dreamed of fragmented images. The fragments were drawn from a real photograph he had taken of Mei wearing a tutu and tying the ribbons of her pointe shoes. In the dream, her hands, feet, and head were broken into disconnected pieces that floated freely in the air, like untethered helium balloons, bumping into each other occasionally but never coming together to form one whole.

Martin woke up from the dream and found himself on the floor of his makeshift darkroom. He rummaged in his folders for the actual photo. It was taken on one of the rare visits he made to Mei's rehearsal studio in northern Taipei, a dreary forty-minute ride from the city centre. In the dream, also, was a mannequin—the type used by the dance company's tailor to make costumes for the performances. But in the actual photograph, there was only the still figure of the dancer.

As he held the photo in his hands, Martin carefully examined Mei's slender fingers and the straight lines formed by her torso and legs as she leaned forward to wrap the ribbon around her ankles. Martin made a note to do a close-up version of her hands and ankles. She was not

looking at her shoes, but at some distant object, though Martin did not recall anything in the direction of her gaze except for a brick wall. Perhaps there was a little sadness in her eyes, but Martin could never tell.

He started pacing. The smallness of the average Taipei apartment meant that the darkroom was not much larger than a walk-in closet. Martin continued to fixate on the hands and ankles in the photograph, and accidentally knocked over a cup of coffee sitting on the edge of the desk. The clatter woke up Mei, who had been sleeping on the sofa outside.

When Martin finished cleaning up the mess, he looked up to see her standing in the doorway, her complexion made ghostly by the light of the darkroom. He looked past her to the shadowy windows. Outside, the reposing city would be recovering from the heat of day.

"Where were you? When did you get home? I did not hear you come in." She leaned against the cabinet and draped her bare arm over the metallic surface.

"I wanted to take some photos at night. Why?"

"Can't I know where my own boyfriend has gone?"

"I suppose." Martin cleared away the mess, and reached for the photo he had been looking at a minute before.

Mei saw the photo before he could put it away. "That's me," she said, as she picked up the photo to examine it more closely.

"Yeah, it is." Martin cleared his throat. "It's from a while ago."

"I remember."

"Do you remember what you were thinking about at that moment?"

She touched the photograph. "Hmm…no, I cannot remember what I was thinking about. But I remember that performance."

"Can I have it back?" Martin stretched out his hand to take the photo. He began clearing his workstation. "I need to finish up some work," he said, without looking up.

She took a step forward and placed a hand on his arm. "Can I watch?"

"I'd prefer to do this alone. I'm not a performer, after all."

"No. And I would not want you to be."

As soon as she shut the door, Martin set about organizing the portfolio that he planned to put together for an upcoming solo show. He considered calling the exhibition *A Dance to the Music of Time*—it was a bit trite, but he liked the sound of it.

The sound of dishes came from the kitchen. Martin put on his headphones—Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, to which Mei had once danced. At the very top of the pile was the first picture he had ever taken

of her, back when they were both in England. As part of his graduation portfolio for the Slade School of Art, Martin photographed the ways in which the public used exhibition spaces. It was at the Serpentine Pavilion in London where he saw Mei for the first time. It was a Monday morning in June, and the park was relatively empty. Martin watched the sylph-like, dark-haired girl dance between the slender columns of the Pavilion. A few passers-by stopped and photographed her, assuming that the dance was part of the installation. The ceiling of the Pavilion was composed of a reflective surface, and Mei stood on demi-pointe, one leg lifted in an arabesque, and arched her back to gaze up at her own reflection. At that moment when she arched backward, her image mirrored on the gleaming surface of the Pavilion, Martin pressed the shutter button. He continued looking through the viewfinder even after Mei had paused her dancing, because at that moment, he became convinced that nothing else mattered except the vision of the world seen through the viewfinder. He removed the camera only when he realized that Mei had already left the Pavilion.

Thinking back on that day now, Martin felt perhaps he should not have caught up with Mei and chatted with her in the Serpentine Gallery. Perhaps he should not have paid so close attention when she spoke of her homeland, Taiwan, with its patchwork meadows of varying greens separated by silver blocks of water, and its cities filled with concrete-and-glass blocks aged by the rain. He should not have formed the images of those places in his mind as he followed her around the cold white spaces of the gallery. But the images surfaced, almost unbidden, superimposed on the image of the dancer who leaned in a bit closer to him each time they paused in front of the same artwork.

Recalling the details of that day, Martin felt weary and filed the Serpentine photo in the "Yes" folder.

After that first encounter, Martin exchanged emails with Mei for a while, but they lost touch within a few months. He had forgotten to reply to her last email, in the midst of submitting his graduation portfolio, for which he received mediocre results. That winter, he decided to clear out his flat, discarding most of his work, except for the photograph from the Serpentine. Martin could not stop looking at that picture of Mei. The Taiwan she had described to him did not resemble anything he had seen online. In the spring of the following year, he moved to Taipei.

The next few photos in the pile were from a series Martin had completed when he first arrived. In Taipei, he found what he could not find in London or elsewhere. There were the familiar images: the

glass towers, the luxury boutiques, the cafes, the meticulously designed interiors. But there was also a different kind of beauty, something not yet captured, and therefore wholly his. Martin was drawn to the Taipei cityscape with its grey and stained concrete blocks. The old apartment buildings, with their collections of potted plants, laundry hanging on the balconies, and brown marks left by the weather—these were his first subjects. He also photographed the dusty surfaces in his apartment, crawling with miniscule insects, and Taipei's streets, stained with the blood-red remnants of betel nuts. Martin gained some commercial success with his pictures of Taipei, and his work appeared in an online magazine and had a few thousand "likes" on Instagram.

Martin wished he could capture the smells of the city. In the dampness of spring, a faint fetid smell filled the air, like leftover food. On hotter days, there was the smell of the burning tarmac, mixed with the pungent fumes of scooters. He frequented the traditional markets, where stalls of produce were set up next to piles of garbage; children in oversized clothes sat on bright plastic stools scrawling misshapen characters in the neat squares of their exercise books, completely oblivious to the smell. At a famous temple in central Taipei, old men gathered to play Chinese chess and drink tea, and some of them sold fragrant orchids strung on thin wires. Martin once bought a strand of these orchids, and discovered that they died quickly; the scent of decay filled his apartment.

The photos Martin took during those first few months brought him back to the image of Mei dancing at the Serpentine Pavilion. He decided to get back in touch with her. He recalled, from her last email, that she had moved back to Taipei a month after they met, and had joined a prominent dance company. Within an hour of his having sent an email informing Mei he had moved to Taipei, she sent him an invitation to attend a performance at the National Theatre.

Mei opened one of the principal sequences. She leapt across the stage in a cream linen dress, spinning a wooden stick with which she carved helices and broken shapes in the dusty air. Golden sand was scattered across a barren stage, lit by a warm, yellow light. The other dancers followed her, their fluid movements sending grains of sand spiralling into the air. The twirling of their bodies heightened, in the excesses of movement, the stillness of the moments that followed. Each leap would be succeeded by a motionless pause, so that the leaping and the freezing created the sense of progression through time. A sort of humming drummed out from beneath

the stage, and the undulating lines of dancers progressed across the stage to the rhythm.

After the performance, Martin waited for Mei in the reception hall of the theatre. He played over and over in his head the gestures and movements he could recall, all the while frustrated by the fact he could not use his camera. He found a blank space at the back of the performance pamphlet and tried to draw: the line of Mei's arms extending high into the air, and the way her legs stretched forward as she strode across the stage. But the drawings did not suffice. He tore up the sheets.

That night, after the performance, Martin and Mei walked out of the theatre holding hands. The winds swept through the vast plaza outside the National Theatre, and from the vantage point atop the steps of the theatre, Martin took in the cityscape. Mei did not let go of his hand, even as they arrived at the metro station and had to get on separate lines. Instead, she led him on to her train, going in the opposite direction from his flat. That was how he ended up accompanying her home that night.

"What made you want to become a dancer?" He asked her later, as they clung together in the dark.

"I am not sure. I had ballet lessons as a child, and I enjoyed them. Have you ever seen tall grass on a very windy day? I wanted to be like that. One minute swaying, and the next minute not. What is that quote, 'In the stillness, there the dance is'?"

"I don't know that one."

Her cheeks reddened. "I cannot remember exactly. Anyways, I liked how stillness and movement seem to go together."

Mei traced her fingers across his face as she said this, and lightly touched his eyelashes, a gesture that she would repeat often. "I've always wanted to fall in love with beautiful blue eyes," she said.

Mei inched closer toward Martin, taking his hand in hers. As he gazed at the girl lying next to him, Martin thought of the image of her leaping across the stage. He looked down and turned his palm upward so that her hand nestled in his. That, too, was an image he would have liked to capture.

A month after that first night, Martin moved his suitcase into her apartment. The intimacy of the small space appealed to them both. Mei enjoyed slipping on her blue négligée and showing him the latest repertoire from rehearsal. She would turn off the lights and leave the blinds slightly open, so that the neon lights of the city lit the corner of the bedroom where she danced. There was no music, she moved to

an imaginary rhythm, her limbs reaching outward and upward to the fullest extent that the space allowed. At certain moments, she would be overcome by intensity, and her body seemed to disappear in swathes of silken garment and moving spirals of darkened blue.

From those nocturnal dances, Martin produced a series of grainy photographs: a slender arm curving against the light; the edges of a dress lifted by a mid-air leap; and a leg stretched taut in an arabesque. These he held in his hands now, and placed them in the "Yes" folder. These photographs were first exhibited in a neighbourhood café. Throughout that first winter of their relationship, Mei helped him with the exhibitions. They put together packages of photographs tied with string. She displayed the packages neatly, and hand-wrote thank-you notes to the customers. On the back of each package and exhibition pamphlet was a blurry photograph of Martin himself, taken with her phone.

Looking at all the photos now, Martin still felt something was amiss. Opportunities to hold solo exhibitions were hard to come by, and Martin knew he had a modicum of success in Taiwan. It was because of his blue eyes, Mei once joked. But he was still unsatisfied with the portfolio. He was preoccupied with the possibility of one image that somehow transcended the others, though he could not say where he might find this image. Too much eluded the camera, and he felt he had not yet captured the indeterminate moment between one state of being and the next, between movement and repose, between ideality and reality.

Martin paused *The Rite of Spring* and removed his headphones. He stood uneasily in the doorway to detect any sounds in the apartment. There was silence, aside from the humming of the fridge. He spread out the photographs. Among them was a close-up portrait of Mei. The photo was taken in the darkroom about half a year ago. It was one of those nights when he had fallen asleep on the floor, and woke up to find a blanket wrapped around him. Mei lay beside him, with one leg draped over his body. When he turned to face her, she traced the outline of his eyes and said, "Stay."

"On the floor?"

"No, in Taiwan, with me."

He shuffled and cleared his throat. "We've talked about this before."

"You are steadily gaining recognition," she said. "Your Chinese has improved. Plus you have me."

"Like I've said many times already, I don't know," he said. "I never planned on staying forever. The heat's a problem, and the food. Besides, my family's not here. Some things were unexpected." Earlier that day, Martin remembered distinctly, he had received an email from an arts institute in Japan, informing him that his application for a photojournalist position in a disaster zone had been unsuccessful. The email had already made his day difficult.

"Things change." She touched his hand.

"Maybe. But I'm still trying to figure things out." Martin turned away and peered at the edges of the rejection email, which he had printed out and pressed under a pile of books on the floor.

"But I do not think you have tried." She drew away from him and sat up against the wall.

"You don't think I've tried?" Martin got up from the floor and began to clear his workstation.

"You have not met my family yet, even though I have asked you several times already. They ask about you. Everyone wants to meet you."

"That'll come in time. I don't understand why you keep going back to this. You know I'm not used to the way things work here. We've been over this so many times. I don't know what else to say." Martin had thrown a coffee cup into the sink then, and chipped the rim of the cup.

"My friends do not seem to have such trouble in their relationships."

"Well, your friends aren't us, are they?" he said, as he inspected the chipped cup. "Besides, they're probably not telling you the truth. Everyone acts so damn happy all the time. If you wanted what they have, maybe you should have chosen someone else."

She stood closer to him. "I do not want anyone else. I will never want anyone else."

"Don't say that," Martin tossed the cup back into the sink, chipping off another piece. "Don't say that."

"Why are you being like this?"

Martin picked up a camera and took a close-up shot of Mei's face.

"Why did you do that?"

"It seemed like a good shot," he said as he examined the image on the LCD screen. "Don't you have to get ready for rehearsals?"

"Yes."

"Well, don't be late." Martin walked out of the darkroom and looked back at Mei, still frozen by the desk. "By the way, when can I come to photograph the rehearsals?"

She had paused for a minute, then tied her hair into a tight bun and smiled. "Soon."

Martin looked at that photograph now, the portrait of Mei flushing with anger or sadness, or whatever it was that he could not understand, her eyes brimming with tears. He entitled the image *Aftershocks*. He added it to the "Yes" pile.

The photographs that came next in the pile were part of a series depicting the city at night. After that conversation with Mei, Martin started spending more nights outside. He took long nocturnal walks, when empty streets offered unobstructed views of the neon signs and the buildings reflected in the puddles. That was also the time when he had the opportunity to produce a few more works that he now planned to include in the upcoming exhibition. These were photos of another Taiwanese girl he had started sleeping with. She wore contact lenses of deep, unearthly blue, which nearly flooded out the white parts of her eyes. One photo showed the marble-like flesh of her thighs indented by his grip. Another showed her lying naked on the bed, her platinum blonde hair draping over her face, concealing one eye, the other eye gazing at him from its pool of uncanny blue, rimmed with watery mascara and lit by the light of the computer screen.

Martin removed two of these photos from the pile, and clipped them on the drying line that stretched across the darkroom, standing back to look at them. Satisfied with the selections he had made for the exhibition, he went into the living room and fell asleep on the sofa, only to wake with a start and find the city unusually still. He had no idea how much time had passed. The neon lights seen through the thin curtain cut like brightly-coloured wounds into the dark fabric of the sky.

Something shifted in the unlit space behind the living room. Martin went into the darkroom to find Mei standing in front of the photos he had clipped on the line. She was wearing a black cocktail dress and full makeup, as if ready to go out. She stood barefoot on the tiled floor, her toes unpainted and disfigured by years of contortion.

Mei turned to Martin and for a while they faced each other in silence, the features of each inscrutable to the other.

"So I see," she finally said.

"Yeah."

"How long?"

"I dunno. Not long. It doesn't matter."

Mei made a sudden move towards him, and he backed away. "Why?" she asked.

"No reason." Martin sighed. He thought about his exhibition. Maybe *Et in Arcadia Ego* would be a more fitting title.

They stood in the darkroom, and for a while, Martin felt as if the whole episode were not happening in the present, as if he could see it from afar, a portrait in grey. Then, slowly and almost imperceptibly, Mei's eyes glistened, and a single tear travelled down her left cheek, drawing a streak of black mascara that seemed to bisect her face.

Martin reached for his camera. At that moment he thought of how Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, one of modernism's most iconic houses, fell into complete disrepair at one point in its history. The concrete-and-glass spaces stank of urine, the walls covered in graffiti and excrement, the grounds overrun with weeds. The Villa was never more affecting. In photographs Martin had once seen in a book, the stains on the walls of Villa Savoye resembled the ones he had often noticed on the exterior of concrete buildings in Taipei.

Martin aligned his eye with the viewfinder. He pressed the shutter just as the blackened tear reached her chin.

Tin Lorica

ALT BOY

this bottle blonde bitch
is not like the other boys:
he paints his nails
& makes out with other girls
in front of you.

he'll take a punch, gladly.
you don't even have to ask. he knows
he has the face of someone you want
to hit.

he's '90s music video hot: hair with the middle part
that you are meant to run your fingers through.
instead, you poke fun and ask
if the safety pin pierced in his earlobe is ironic.

he's not over the greatest love of his life
and he likes it that way. whatever.

is he a dream boy or something?
he is not. from this point on in the poem
you will refrain from mythologizing him
& his sad, evil dick any further.

the truth is, he was willing to die on many hills
but mostly he just wanted to die.

you found nothing romantic about his pain
but you fetishize yours. so you fuck
on the table with the great force
of your early-20s teen angst!

both desperate
to feel something tragic,
the musical stylings
of charles manson
playing over a muted
black and white movie.

Tenille K Campbell

MEDICINE SONGS

sex sex sex
one trick pony she is
baby
I got tricks
for generations
the biggest trick
is still being here
surviving thriving organizing

we still here

we echo and ripple descendants pouring
down concrete over pavement
babies cradled on hips snug within headboards
wrapped in starblankets under protest signs
#JusticeForColten
#TinaFontaine
#IndigenousResistance

we don't have the luxury
of not explaining to our babies
why we can't wear black hoodies
why we don't take cabs alone
and why we don't trust cops

but

we still here
hands holding mukluk wearing
tears spilling laughter flowing
medicine in our very bones
ancestors in our eyes
as we gaze and catch feelings
across city wide marches

seeing us in them and them in us
just tricks
surviving thriving organizing
yeah
we got tricks for days

Rebecca Hirsch Garcia

COMMON ANIMALS

The first time he turned into a wolf it was chill and it was February and we were fighting about something. I can't remember what it was exactly we were fighting about, but it seemed important at the time, the way things do before they're completely and utterly dwarfed by your significant other metamorphosing from human to beast. One minute he was there, his face distorted, jaw unhinged, and then he was simply not, replaced instead with this angry, hairy, violent *thing*.

It's your fault, had been the last thing he said before he turned, veins bulging from his forehead. It's your fault. Flecks of his spittle had landed delicately on my wrist. The echoes of that missive ran round and round my head as I stared at its snout, its snapping jaws. Well, I thought blankly to myself, now you've done it.

Its teeth were large and jagged and its thick pink tongue kept rolling obscenely over them, sending off thick white flecks of foam. I could feel this new kind of wet leaking hungrily onto my arms and it sent licks of revulsion over my body. I kept my eyes trained on its mouth, its big sharp teeth. As if by staring I could reverse the process and make it go

from beast to man again. And then it lunged at me and a wave of terror plunged me down so that my legs sank under me and I poured onto the ground.

I'm going to die, I thought. I closed my eyes so I wouldn't have to watch it happen and I felt a kind of calming gladness. Soon it would all be over and I wouldn't have to try to rationalize or understand the absurdity. I would die and there would be a clean end to it.

But, of course, I didn't and there wasn't.

When I opened my eyes I was screaming and there was a warm choking mass on top of me, but I was still alive and unharmed. There was a small space inside of me, an inch by an inch thick maybe, a little box inside my brain, and from that tiny space I felt I was watching all of this unfold with a calm and tired certainty. Stop screaming, I told my body from inside this box. Stop making a fuss.

What had happened, I could see now, was that I had slid down when the wolf jumped forward, allowing the brunt of its force to hit the wall. There was a soft depression there now. It didn't seem like the force that caused that dent would be force enough to stop the wolf, but it had and the wolf was now unconscious and on top of me, the furry density of it crushing the breath out of me. I took both hands and pressed them against the warm breathing side of the thing and felt its ribs push back under the skin. Another push and then another and finally it rolled off my body and I was free to stand on legs as unsteady as those of a newborn calf.

I don't know how I got out of the apartment or even managed to work the locks to make the door open. I must have though, because I did get out. The last thing I remember before stepping out into the hallway was looking back, just the once. The wolf was crumpled up like a collection of ratty fur coats heaped carelessly on the floor. And then there was a flicker. Those heavy lids struggling to wake. That was the moment I turned and ran. Even in my panic, all I could think about was how, in that moment when its eyes opened, it—he—seemed not at all wolf-like but very much like a human wearing a wolf-suit.

It wasn't till I made my way down to the lobby that I realized I had no shoes on and it was deep winter—one of those rare, pretty Ottawa evenings when the snow is flying flake thick as if someone had shaken up a snow globe. I didn't know what to do. I didn't have any friends in the building even though we had lived there together for nearly two years. He had always said that the people there were not worth knowing, that

they were ignorant or arrogant or not quite right in some undefinable way, though I never quite understood what he meant. The other tenants seemed fine to me, polite and friendly in the indifferent way of strangers. Now and again, one or the other of them caught my eye and I felt a faint yearning for friendship. Still, I had not thought it worthwhile to pursue anything further. I would have never been able to invite any of them into our home; he sulked through any social occasion he did not initiate, refusing to say a word. He rebuffed each effort to engage him, only prolonging the discomfort. It would have been embarrassing both for me and for the friend I longed to acquire. I knew all this and so I hadn't tried, not for a long time.

I knew a few people in the city, co-workers and a couple of acquaintances, but I couldn't imagine how I could reach them or, having done so, how to explain what had happened. The event was too fantastical to be believed.

So I spent the night crouched in the stairwell, shivering and hoping no one would find me and force me to explain myself. As I counted down the hours I thought of the day we had moved in together, of the solidness of unpacking boxes and commingling our books. In the kitchen we had found that we had two sets of everything. I thought it was a sign when I discovered we had twin blenders, purchased on the cheap from the same grocery store before we even knew each other. In the months that followed we slowly combed through everything together, optimistically purging all of our doubles. He kissed my hand each time I finally let go of one of our redundancies. It occured to me now that almost all the somethings we discarded were things that had previously been mine.

I woke up sometime in the morning, my body uncurling painfully as if covered by a giant bruise. I could hear the mechanical whir of the elevator at work and realized that it was morning and I wasn't dead after all, and if I wasn't dead then I should probably get ready for work. So I let my feet guide me to my apartment door, which was closed but mercifully unlocked, and went in. It was not worth thinking about what I was doing and why I was doing it. It was enough that I was home.

He was there, him, not the wolf, making breakfast, preparing to go to work. I sat down and watched him make it, watched him eat it, watched him scrape the excess into the garbage without asking me if I wanted any, without talking to me, without looking at me at all. Bye, I said as I watched him walk out the door. If he heard me he did not acknowledge it.

I got ready for work and as I brushed my teeth I searched myself in the mirror for signs of what had happened. But as I examined first one cheek and then the other, as I inspected my arms and legs, I found there were no bruises, no scratches, no evidence at all that I had tangled with a wolf and lived. I could almost allow myself to believe that nothing had happened at all. Almost. Before I left, I touched the dent in the wall.

I don't remember the second time he turned into a wolf.

I don't remember the third.

What I do remember are the worst times, the times when I fought back. He began to turn more and more often, clawing at my clothes, stalking me like prey around the apartment, one attack bleeding into the next. I dodged them as best I could, spent many sleepless hours cowering in the stairwell or walking around the block, hoping that by the time I came back it would be gone and he would be back. But when I fought back things devolved. Sometimes, to keep the bites at bay, I would hit him with whatever was at hand. A broom. A cup. One time an ashtray. I hurled it so near his head that the shattered glass shards embedded themselves in his skin and made the blood run through the fur. I watched him whimper, saw the hurt in his eyes. I felt the resistance die inside of me even as he rallied and came back again, twice as hard.

Our home became full of broken things. Our bedroom door splintered, a safety deposit I'd never get back. The lock on the bathroom door smashed. Our double French doors missing panes for reasons I don't care to remember. And then of course all the dents along the walls. The one from the first time and then the others. Ones that he made. Ones that I made.

For a long, long time I thought it was as bad as it was ever going to get. I kept my head down and tried to avoid the bites. I even believed I had a small measure of control. That I could provoke the wolf out of him, aggravate him if I needed to and rid myself of the tension of wondering when the next time would be. I thought that if nothing else I was good at this one thing. Then, one day, it was my time to grow angry.

There was a lamp I owned with a green glass base, a gift from my mother. This one day, when I failed to pay adequate attention to him as he was talking, he knocked it from my bedside table. If it had fallen any

other way it might have rolled away unscathed or simply cracked into manageable pieces. But somehow it fell wrong, exploded magnificently. He looked a little apologetic afterwards as if he couldn't quite believe what had happened, hadn't meant to push things so far. It was that look of remorse that ate me up from the inside out, till I was more rage than anything else. He had broken so many things of mine by this time, I wouldn't have thought one more would matter. But it did. He hadn't even been the wolf when he had done it.

This time, when he came at me, I went back at him without pity. We fought and he bit at my wrist, his teeth cutting jagged into my flesh. I bit at him just as wild, tufts of fur choking my mouth. He clawed at me and I dodged his attack with an animal quickness, before turning back so I could retaliate. When I swiped back at him, my talons raked through fur to the soft flesh underneath. Blood beaded to the surface like rubies. I was surprised that I could do that. That I could hurt like that. When he whimpered I backed off, dropping to the ground on all fours, and limped to a corner to lick my wounds. When I lifted my wrists to assess the damage I saw that it was worse than I realized. There were no bruises, or scratches, or scars. Just a thick wall of fur where my own smooth skin should have been. Where my hands had once been there were now two furry paws.

Do you see, he said, laughing when it was over, when I was back to my woman-shape once again. Now it's both of us.

If I ever thought of leaving that thought is long gone. How could I ever leave knowing of the slow-acting poison that lives inside me? How could I ever risk doing this to someone else? No, we will stay together. We will be like other people, buy a house we can't afford and work jobs we are indifferent to and give up our dreams and pretend that it isn't killing us inside. When the time is right we will have little children, a boy and a girl maybe, that turn into furry were-pups when the moon is full. They will nip and bite and fight. And they will know no different.

Timiro Mohamed

ORCHESTRA

I have often marvelled at the second string in an orchestra
how they seem to come after and
still fill everything.
how they still play in unison.

And this language, like this country with a habit of forgetting,
is the one that came after.
But my people
who are too expressive all of the time
cannot be contained by English.
So we speak with our hands,
utilize every muscle to compensate
for all the ways that this language fails.
As if we are directing entire orchestras with every sentence.

But now I only speak my mother tongue
in flavourless poems,
or over the phone with some relative
whose name I do not know,
or when kneeling in prayer and
the Arabic
of my holy book
cannot hold my deepest fears
the way a mother does.

Nights when I am left searching for all the words
that can't seem to fit between the war in my mouth,
I ask myself which language knows the words that are hurting,
is familiar with
the inside
of a ribcage,
can recognize the borders and pick out the flagpoles.

Which language remembers this body was once a country?
Knows this body now
spilling
at the seams with stories
has split itself and
has been broken.

I come from accents
heavy
that carry the weight of many languages.
I come from English that is not broken, but is rhythmic.
Don't you see the way our bodies sway?
Filling the spaces in syllables,
finding beauty in the pauses.

Reminding me that home is with me still.
It is in the way I move,
the way I talk with my hands,
directing an invisible orchestra with every sentence.
Reminding me that I am
too much woman,
too much sway with the music,
too much love,
too much loud to go anywhere anytime soon.

I come from brightly coloured garments
and words you can take
a bite
out of.
Words that command attention and demand to be heard.
I come from hospitality and crowded living rooms.

So stay, drink tea
swimming
with
qarfo

and we will speak
in second string metaphors
with words that
come
and
go
like ghosts.

And I will tell you about a place that split itself,
tell you about a generation of hybrids,
and the way
my parents' English breaks itself
every time they speak.

How an immigrant speaking a stolen tongue
taught me to love with all
my being,
be the velvet that
holds the moon,
be full leaf
and blooming flower.

I will tell you what my parents' English taught me about the sky.
About the way
it
breaks
itself
with
every
rainfall
in hopes something good
will come after.

Özten Elaine Paul

OCTOBER, 2018

You wake up.

You must have dozed off.

There is an ache in your back; you have been lying on something hard. You reach for it, and feel the smooth glass sandwiched between you and the bed. It's your phone.

You open it up and find the usual suspects in your newsfeed: baby pictures, missing persons, your aunty's neoliberal stance on the meth crisis.

You scroll and scroll, and…wait. Go back.

The headline sears into your eyeballs: SMALLPOX EPIDEMIC LEFT MASSIVE INDIGENOUS BURIAL GROUND UNDER DOWNTOWN WINNIPEG.[3]

You plop your phone back down and look up at the ceiling of your downtown apartment.

3 Niigaan Sinclair, "Smallpox Epidemic Left Massive Indigenous Burial Ground under Winnipeg's Downtown," Winnipeg Free Press, October 2, 2018.

As you begin to space out, you reminisce about that time you had to conduct research on the relationship between Thanksgiving and the health of Indigenous peoples. The historian you interviewed said that many Indigenous cultures consider turkeys as sacred. You used to think this was ironic…

You forgot where you were going with this.

The smallpox article is still open on the screen. You decide to tap on it, and read like your eyes are chained to the words. You learn about the "Indian mound," the twelve hundred bodies, and the several hundred yards of land it took up, from "Portage and Main to Broadway." You zoom in on a blurry photo of a burial ground taken in 1866. It looks like a scab.

A number of travellers recorded their encounters with the burial sites. It was impossible not to notice them, as there were so many. You read about excavations, graverobbers looking for "antiques," and a man named Sam Steele—a soldier who came here for the Red River Expedition but arrived too late—picking up a decayed skull as he walked towards the water.

The article ends with a message: how the dead are memorialized is our responsibility now. You scroll to the author's bio and see that he has an Anishinaabe name, Niigaan, which translates to *ahead*, or *in the future*.

Time must have crept up on you, because you are about to be late for class. You slip on your jacket and skedaddle.

You try your hardest not to look down at the street as you walk on Broadway, avoiding thoughts of what may lie beneath the concrete. At least it has begun to snow. The slush sticks to everything, blanketing the streets. You are surrounded by whiteness. Snowflakes collect in your eyelashes, and you see a street devoid of secrets—a blank slate.

You brush the snow off your jacket and head into the art gallery. The class tour is a distraction. You drift from piece to piece. At the end of the tour, you are directed towards a painting called *To the End of Time* by Bob Boyer. It's a diptych of Cree and Sioux geometric symbols painted on white blankets.

Your white tour guide unpacks the piece. The blankets resemble the diseased ones the government used to decimate Indigenous populations and steal their land. Through a stiff smile, the guide admits that she just learned of these events. You raise your hand and mention the article about the BURIAL GROUND. You want them to know what you know, make it real somehow, and feel the relief wash over you. But it never comes.

You walk home through the slush. Patches of snow melt into the pavement.

You watch the film *Memento*. It's about a guy who got whacked on the head so hard that he lost his short-term memory. The last thing he can recall is watching his wife die. A scene comes where he whispers a monologue in bed. He asks: "How am I supposed to heal if I can't…feel time?"[4]

Meanwhile, the article stays with you. It's the first thing to come up when you click on the search bar. You read it until you've memorized the names of the streets where possible graves lie. An index card with a sketching of the map from the article sits on your desk.

You go back to the art gallery, revisit *To the End of Time,* and learn that Bob Boyer died while dancing at a powwow. You feel that his painting radiates a different energy this time. The stench of death is washed away, and all you see is blood memory.

The bus ride to your therapist's office takes you through the Forks, the area of the graves. You pay no attention to the automated voice announcing the stops, until she begins to name the streets on your flashcard map. You know exactly where you are in relation to the graves, though you keep your eyes away from the windows. A stiffness lingers in your shoulders long after you pass the bridge.

Your therapist's office always feels smaller when you are hiding something. You wonder out loud how it is possible for someone to finish grieving when they are surrounded by death.

"I want you to print a picture of him when he was healthy," she says. "And when you feel that way, take the picture out and stare at it for as long as you need." The breath you were holding leaks out through your nose, and you let yourself sink back into the plushness of the chair. You understand, now, that the warmth of a memory has always been up to you.

You pull the cord as the bus crosses the bridge, and get off near South Point Park—where the Assiniboine and Red Rivers meet. This is an area where a potentially large burial site has been marked.

You look out across the water where more bodies are buried. Cold air bites your cheeks. The buzz of downtown and the rush of the rivers hum through you.

You remember what the historian said.

---

4 *Memento, directed by Christopher Nolan (Los Angeles, CA: Newmarket, 2000).*

He introduced you to the term "collective trauma," described as *a crisis of meaning.*[5] It is the ability to stretch your hand through time, only to touch the cold side of the bed.

Did they trust that you would find meaning in the calling of a chickadee, or the whistle of the branches blowing in the wind?

You stay standing in this spot until you can acknowledge that time heals all wounds but ours. I want you to bleed on their blank slates. Make sure they remember your healthy face to the end of time.

5 Gilad Hirschberger, "Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning," Frontiers in Psychology 9, no. 1441 (August 2018), doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01441.

CONTRIBUTORS

Marie Baléo is a French writer born in 1990. Her work has been nominated for a Best of the Net award, Best Microfiction, and Best Small Fictions, and has appeared in *Passages North*, *Yemassee*, *Litro*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, and elsewhere. Marie lives in Paris, France.

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Joon Lee started with photography at the age of thirteen, bewildered by the process of film. As his studies of still-life photographers Irving Penn and Paul Outerbridge expanded, Lee took "Birth Defects" in 2017, the first work that pushed him into the world of composing food and ordinary commodities. "Birth Defects" was created to stir up conversation around the issue of cigarette pollution. Its vivid triadic colour scheme represents the nonchalant values corporations use to distract from their harsh realities.

Tin Lorica is an emerging queer Filipinx poet and comedian in unceded Coast Salish territories (aka Vancouver). Their poetry has been featured by The Real Vancouver Writers Series. They co-produce a poetry and comedy show called Millennial Line.

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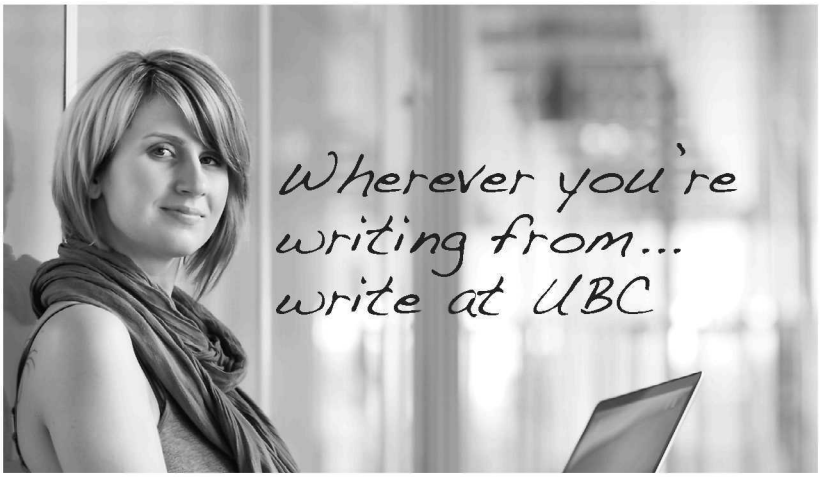

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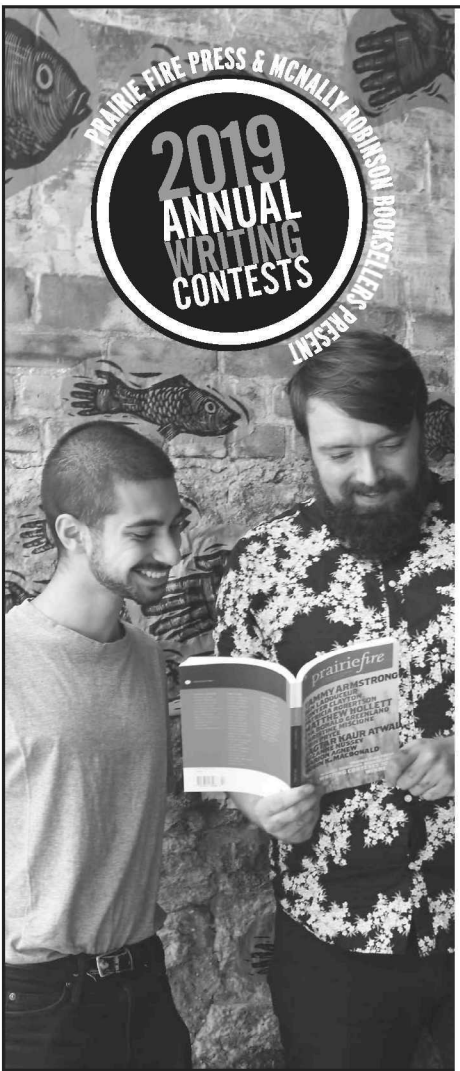

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"Red round berries fall
to the ground, ferment, and the prairie
swallows them drunk and whole. The body
of the town a rose bush, a dry thicket,
a target for lightning strikes,
waiting to catch fire and begin again."

— *Brandi Bird, "Selkirk, Manitoba"*

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