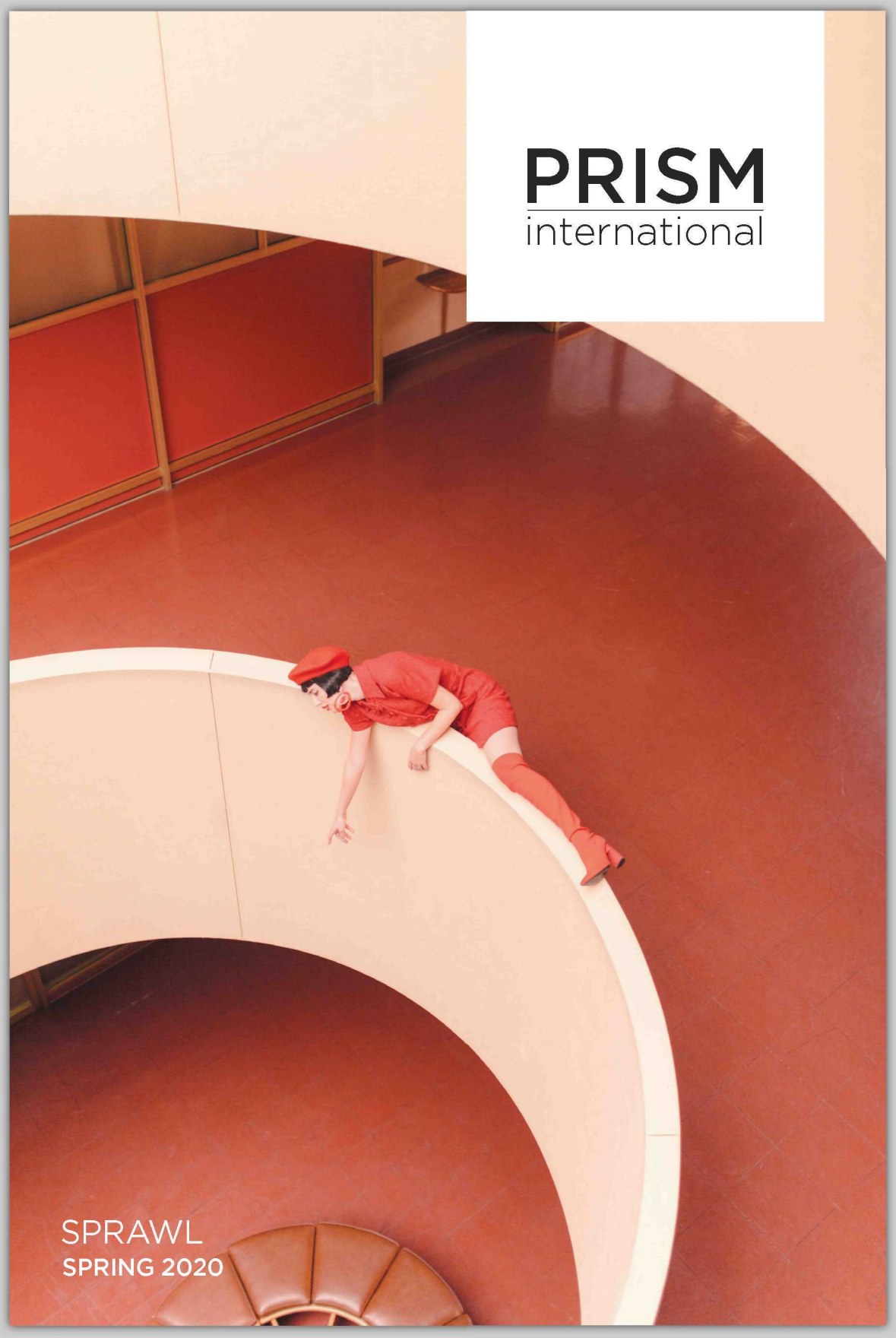
PRISM international



SPRAWL

SPRING 2020

PRISM international

THE PACIFIC SPIRIT POETRY PRIZE

GRAND PRIZE

"The Spring of Grade Nine" by Colleen Baran

FIRST RUNNER-UP

"why the sex addict is a porkchop preteNDN" by Cody Caetano

SECOND RUNNER-UP

"what's your bodypolitik?" by Lou Garcia-Dolnik

JUDGE

Katherena Vermette

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Tony Bae, Esmeralda Cabral, Julia Escano, Bruce Geddes
Kathryn Hall, Adriana Jones, Erin Kirsh, Tonya Lailey
Elana Mabrito, Sara Mang, Jaz Papadopoulos, Loghan Paylor
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a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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PRISM INTERNATIONAL

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Katherena Vermette

SO MANY INDIVIDUAL UNITS OF LOVE AND MEANING, OR JUDGING POETRY CONTESTS IS F*CKING HARD

When I was reading and "judging," I didn't know who these poems belonged to. I love that. I love getting to know the poem all by itself, before I know the poet. Too often it's the other way around, especially for me, who is fascinated by writers and their journeys and always looks up bios first.

I wrote the wee summaries below before I knew these belonged to Lou, Colleen, and Cody. I wrote these as short thank-you cards to the poems themselves. I want to now also thank the poets, for their voices and for sharing these poems. Congrats to all!

Spring of Grade Nine: you gave me all sorts of fourteen-year-old feelings, memories—pungent visuals that stayed with me long after your last word. You are the sort of poem that can work its columns as three poems, a choose-your-own-adventure kind of poem. I read it several different ways, each brimming with image, story, something so visceral I think I remember it, even though I know it's not my experience. But, I can see the kid on the couches, in the Skytrain stations. I can feel their distress, hope, longing in those other kinds of places too—the places we should never have to be, but sometimes end up in anyway.

Porkchop preteNDN: I hear you screaming, I hear you chanting this spoken word like heartbeat, like a train, a call to arms, a raging that builds up to your beautiful crescendo. This is what I call a rant controlled, an anger that is streamlined into poetry. I can feel your pulse vibrating so much I can almost smell the cigarettes, taste wine on my tongue, smell the café aside the stage.

Bodypolitik: you are something new, something kinetic, fresh, exciting. I love your texts and your new way of being poetry. I can hear your voice in my head. I can see your words in blue and green bubbles. I can feel your harkening and curiosity. I also think, definitively, that your poet has a book in them, in this, and think someone ought to give it to them, and soon.

I also have to add, in all honesty, this "judging" thing is f*cking hard. I wish I could make the longlist longer, or could somehow spread the "win" around. These are all poems and poets I want to hear aloud. I want to close my eyes to the voices and let them wash over me like medicine, like all good poems do. Each one of the longlisted beauties is their own individual unit of love and meaning, so worthy of being read and discovered, as are all their makers. Maarsii, all.

SPRAWL

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Reader,

When we were thinking of all we hoped *SPRAWL* could be, we were listening to a lot of Arcade Fire and being inspired by the maps of visual artist Dahlia Elsayed (Google her). Outside the *PRISM* office, a wind had blown the leaves from the trees so the paths were littered green, and the ocean was frothing and powerful. Many of the editors had recently moved from one place to another, and were thinking of the homes we'd left behind and ways to make new ones. As we read, we imagined unfolding prairies, the slouch of city streets, the smoky silhouette of mountains beyond mountains. We searched for works that eluded containment, broke the tether, and took us with them as they wandered across edgelands.

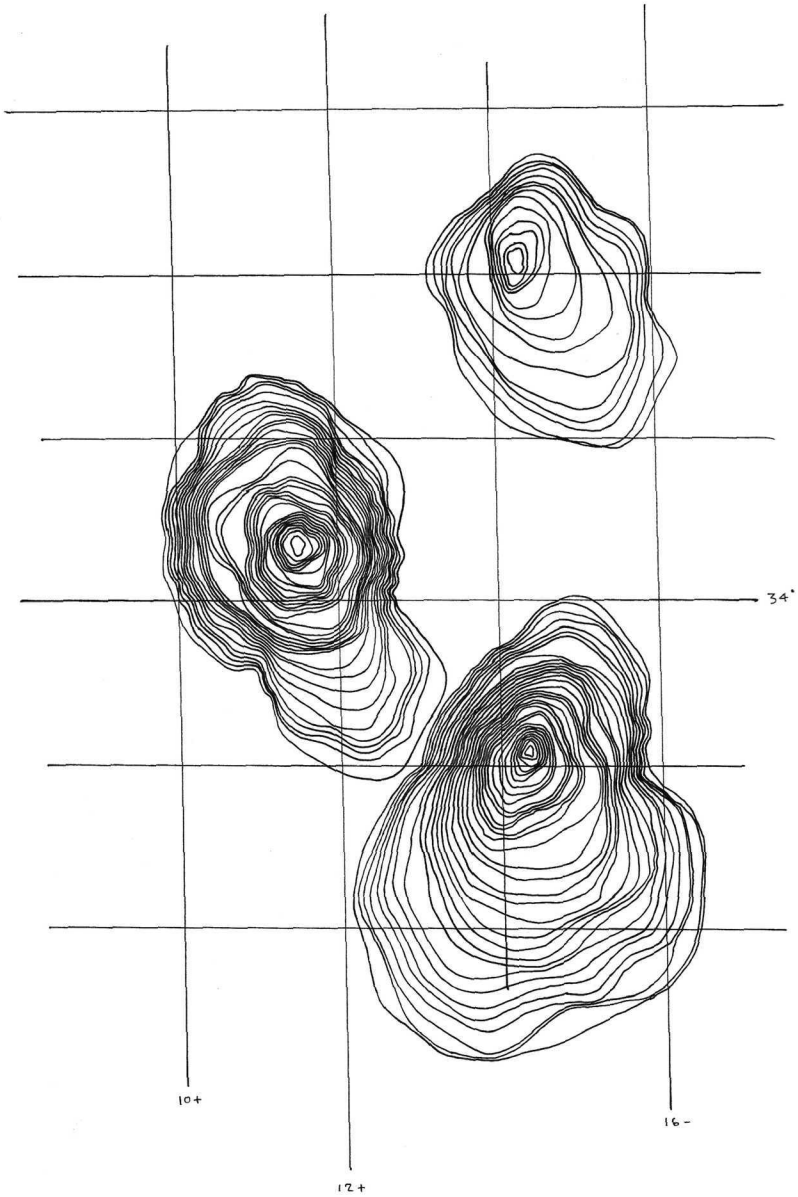
The poetry, stories, and creative non-fiction in this issue exceeded our expectations. They offer intimate geographies that reclaim, deborder, decolonize: our maps, our flesh, our languages, our futures. Dividing the issue into four chapters, the trailing lines of Mali Fischer's artwork speak to the shifting landscapes depicted between the covers—her languorous bodies, mushrooms, and icebergs capture this impulse to unravel, to drift.

The wayfinding pieces in MAPS encourage us to think deeply about where we are, whether tending a garden or in constant transit, and to consider who may be touched by our movements, traces, and desires. FLESH shows us transformations, scatterings, and betrayals, the beauty and pain in mending broken things, in what we dare to believe. In LANGUAGE, boundaries between realities are reconfigured through technologies of transmission and navigation, messages wild with questions and desperate with love. Finally, FUTURES looks for signs, listens for meaning—in the end of the world, and in its enduring. These works dream, wonder, and curse, reaching for something more than this.

Tear up the blueprint. We invite you to *SPRAWL*.

Emma Cleary and Molly Cross-Blanchard

MAPS



Angélique Lalonde

LADY WITH THE BIG HEAD CHRONICLE

1. LADY WITH THE BIG HEAD IN THE GARDEN

The lady with the big head is out there in the misty morning. Is she wearing a veil? What is she doing in my garden? The mist is sitting on the river, slightly spread over the land. I see the mountain beyond, and the lady with the big head stooped over my onions. Not like yesterday when the mist was so thick I wouldn't have seen her if she were there.

Was she out there yesterday, picking calendula seeds to save for next season? She didn't ask me if she could tend my garden while I am in the house doing other things. She's never talked to me at all. She avoids me if I try to approach her, floating off into the mist or the memory of mist, then reappearing later doing different things in different places. I saw her digging at an anthill with the bear that has been hanging around our yard. She used a stick and the bear used her big broad paws.

The lady with the big head was helping the bear, or the bear was helping the lady with the big head, I'm not sure which. Either way they

were digging up the anthill near the apple tree. I didn't mind that. I had noticed the ants were in the sickly tree crawling all around and that probably was not a good sign, so maybe the lady with the big head and the bear were helping the apple tree too?

She might be taking some onions, or weeding, or eating slugs. I can't tell exactly what she is doing because of the veil that hangs down from her big head over her body and drapes on the ground, hiding her movements. Also the light has not yet come, only a faint blueness and all that mist. I could offer her a hot tea but if I walk out there she'll float away from me.

Later I'll go look and see if she's taken onions or left any knick-knacks. Once I found a golden spool of thread so strong, fine and shiny, I knew it was magical. The kind of thread that could be used to build spider webs that are always visible no matter the light. Visible but still translucent, an ephemeral quality of there and not quite there, only gold instead of silver. It might be what she makes her veil out of, or at least what she uses to mend the veil, because now that I think of it the veil is not golden, it's more of a purple-grey shadow. Sometimes she has it pulled back and I can almost make out her features as she goes about doing things ladies with big heads do. She looks a little bit like me and a little bit like Rod Stewart, which is an odd mix for a lady. A couple of times I've glimpsed her looking like my dog, John Black, who died last winter. She might have taken her skull from the forest where we left the dog's body to use as a mask; it seems like something the lady with the big head would do.

2. LADY WITH THE BIG HEAD AND THE WEIGHT OF HER HEAD

The lady with the big head is having trouble holding her head up. It's dipping forward this week, jutting at the chin. A chiropractor would look at her and shudder, thinking of her unhappy spine, contorted and compressed by the heaviness of gravity. He would want to brace her somehow, crack her in all sorts of places, and have her do little exercises with devices of his own making to relieve the pressure on her neck.

Who can she consult for this, living as she does in the forest? Being only partway real? Who would book her in for an appointment with her lack of proper name and no address to speak of? No email or phone number to confirm a correct time? Who would make a call to the forest, following her trail to find where she is sleeping and wrench that crook from her neck? How would she pay them? Would a chiropractor accept

dried mushrooms in payment for his services? Would he treat without an X-ray showing the insides of the lady with the big head's troubled bones?

Instead we build her a device from which she can hang upside down, with a long flat back that inverts once she's strapped herself in. I hang there a lot when she's not using it, feeling the blood pool in my head, imagining my spine unkinking so more of my life can bubble up through that crazy central nerve cluster that sends messages all through my body, making it so I can know.

3. LADY WITH THE BIG HEAD HAS A DREAM

She had a quiet dream, the lady with the big head. It was quiet so she kept sleeping. If it had been a loud raucous dream she would have startled herself out of it. She does not want to dream raucous dreams. Still, she does. Sometimes she seeps in my window and makes me dream them too.

She dreams she is living in a musty apartment where the shower runs straight onto the carpet and there are old patio umbrellas stacked in the storeroom. Enough of them that there is no room to store her own things. There are also a few toilets side by side, some of them with equipment attached to them for various kinds of disabilities. The lady with the big head does not want to live in this apartment. She wipes up dust and pubic hair gathered around the toilets that was not cleaned away before she moved in. She wonders why she is paying rent here when it has not been cleaned of other people's pubic hair, and the landlord is storing things in her storeroom. There are two bathtubs side by side in another part of the apartment, one slightly lower than the other. The lower one has a rack in it like a water bath canner and is very dirty. The lady with the big head pours two baths and gets in the cleaner one. She is happy to have a bath in the dream. She is in the bath with a friend who is living down the hall and tells her not to get in the lower bath because it is filled with other people's filth.

Later the lady with the big head wakes up and goes around the forest. She doesn't live in a musty apartment. She doesn't have a bath and there is soil everywhere. It does not seem soiled. She goes down to the cold river and washes her face. Some of it washes right off. The lady with the big head is going around with only part of a face today, refreshed to be kept so clean by the world. A new face will grow back, it always does, who knows what it will look like? Part of her face will look like her old face and part of her face will be her new face. She follows the cycle of

the moon. As the moon wanes the rest of her old face will peel off in fragments. In the darkest night of the new moon she'll be wiped clean of that old face and her new face will be there, coming to fruition over the next few weeks toward some kind of whole. During full moon she glows with the fullness of her features, distinct for such a short window of time. If you didn't already know her by the size of her head, you'd know her then by the flicker and fullness of her face.

4. LADY WITH THE BIG HEAD KNITS

The lady with the big head has started a new knitting project. She has gathered mycelia from the underside of leaves, dried it, weaving in lichens hanging from pine trees, grasses dried before they harden too much to be malleable, licks of the thinnest birch and hazel branches. All strung together and rolled into balls. The lady with the big head is knitting a fine gown and a warm blanket. She is knitting a scarf and toque for the mangy squirrel that lost much of its coat to mites this summer. She gathers bits of feather and tufts of fur scattered in the forest from fresh coyote kills, along the roadside from smashed-up deer and grouse. These she loops in for warmth and softness amongst the brittle structures of plant and fungus parts.

5. LADY WITH THE BIG HEAD PILFERS GARLIC

The lady with the big head is digging a hole for the winter. Last year's burrow collapsed because of all of the rain. She has borrowed our shovel, which we had hoped to use to prepare the ground for garlic. The lady with the big head mostly leaves the garlic alone. We put out a few bundles in the barn so that she will not dig up our seed. One year we lost almost our whole harvest to her, but we learned that if we made an offering she would leave the stuff in the ground alone.

She wants us to have our garlic but if there is not enough to go around she will pilfer. She needs the garlic to keep her belly warm over the long winter. To spice up the plain roots she keeps stored in her caches and the cambium she munches in leaner times.

The lady with the big head knows how to make fires. Probably she knows how to start them from flints, but she also takes matches and lighters. Either it's her or our son William, who is trying to hide his

pyrotechnic activities. William assures us he's seen her smoking whatever brand of cigarettes she can get her hands on and tossing the butts under the pine tree where she thinks no one will see them. When we buy a 3-pack of strike-anywheres from the hardware we always leave a pack sealed in Ziploc out in the barn in the cubby set aside for offerings, to make things a little easier for her.

Sometimes she leaves things for us in return—bits of woven grass or the skeletons of small animals, any garbage William leaves out in the bush with his friends when they're out there being dickheads. Probably they think it's funny that the lady with the big head will pick up after them. But we warn them to be careful, as she's not a custodian. She has a streak of righteousness to her, and one way or another, we tell William, something bad will come of his carelessness if he keeps goading her.

6. LADY WITH THE BIG HEAD READS POETRY

Does the lady with the big head suffer from heartburn? It is hard to say because her body is such a mystery. Perhaps that big head weighs down on her organs, making acid rise up her esophagus to burn her throat? Or perhaps because of her healthful diet of herbs, roots, plants, and small animals, she is safe from such refluxes? One thing we know is that the lady with the big head is a big admirer of poetry. We leave volumes for her in the barn because she knows better than to accept gifts from us directly. In the beginning when we left books out she would take them and not bring them back. We lost several of our favourite poets that way and are still uncertain where they've gone. There would be no way for her to keep the books from rotting out there with all the dampness. Without insulated walls and ongoing fires or electric baseboards, things out there won't keep. They'll rot and rust and be taken over by mosses, their original words and functions becoming unreadable. So even if she has kept them, they are still lost to us, and will become lost to her also. Unless of course she is able to commit them to memory, which is highly possible with that big head of hers that must have so much room in it for stories about the world.

We have long discussions in our home about what volume to offer up next, how to pick poets for the lady with the big head's attunement to the literary world. William writes out pages of his favourite hip hop rhymes so that she'll be in the know about different kinds of verse, not just filled up with the tender shit his mothers are into. She leaves us the

spectres and voices of the nonhuman to learn as we leave her the leavings of those who play and build with the language the colonizers left us. Who knows how many misunderstandings pass between us? And truthfully we have no education in poetry. Only the internet and the suggestions put forth by the surveillance of our previous choices to offer us other things we might like based on the things we have chosen before. Also a pitiful section of poetry in our local library, which nonetheless we are grateful for. Sometimes our friends will send us things from the cities in which they live where human words sprawl over the landscape. Here many of those words are washed away or covered in brush as soon as they arrive, unable to convey the poets' observations about human-scaled landscapes and being. The land here eats everything. There are, after all, so many intact spirits roaming, and they are hungry for knowing. The lady with the big head is a little bit like a medium between us and this world. We fumble toward knowing one another with our gifts and intentions, undaunted by our failures to understand one another. Thrilled by the revelations that come.

7. LADY WITH THE BIG HEAD SHARES HER KILL

It is unclear whether or not the lady with the big head has children. Many creatures follow her around and participate in her doings. Two ravens perch in a poplar to watch her handiwork as she cuts across the grouse's neck and holds its feet to rip the skin off. She keeps the breasts and feathers and tosses the rest of it to the ravens. She's not greedy, makes sure to share what she is gifted from the world.

After ripping as much flesh as they can get, the ravens get wind of another kill, take off in the direction of death. The lady with the big head continues wandering, tomorrow she plans to spend all day at the river reading rocks, testing the words of lichen with her practiced tongue.

8. LADY WITH THE BIG HEAD'S SEXUALITY

The lady with the big head was not human before she became a partway ghost, which is why I chide Alma, calling her "my prudish wife," when she is disgusted by the lady with the big head's sexuality. This morning after licking dew from cabbage fronds, the lady with the big head fornicated with a giant raven in the yard, making us think maybe she consorts with

gods. Her screams had us rushing outside, thinking the cat had been attacked by coyotes. Our son William got out his smart phone, trying to make a video, but luckily we were on him before he could make it to the cell booster for a signal. We confiscated the phone and erased any traces of an encounter that was never meant to be made into media, then had a good talk about respecting people's boundaries. He argued that the lady with the big head and the raven are not really people and if they are they should be a little more discreet about where they decide to fuck.

We reminded William that despite legal title, we're encroaching on territory that has boundaries chronicled in stories that have never been told to us, and maybe the lady with the big head is part of that world. Or maybe she isn't. There is so much we cannot know because of the knowledge we have been born into, passed down through the direct or banal violence of our immigrant ancestors. It may be that she has been here so very long, as ancient as the land, or perhaps she came with us or with some other settlers from another part of the world and got marooned here and goes on living, even though the humans that once knew her are gone or dead and their children do not remember? We do not know how to ask, or who to ask, and the lady with the big head is not telling. But William is fourteen and immersed in dominant cultural values (despite our best efforts) so he doesn't get these discrepancies. He's all over what's mine and not mine, thinking you can really own things, that legal possession gives you alienable rights that exclude other truths from the land.

Alma isn't sure how the lady with the big head's sexual life will affect William's burgeoning sexuality. This morning it was the raven and last week we saw her sensually stroking a vixen's back, the purr from her throat unmistakable. Alma's been keeping William inside lately because of the birch bark etchings that have been popping up on the trails. The kind of images that make me shiver down there, making me so uncomfortably aroused that shame clamps me down before the pleasure can spread any further. The lady with the big head depicts the erotic life of forest creatures in ways that enliven our human erogenous zones. We find ourselves arguing in bed about whether she is being vulgar or artful out there in the forest all around.

9. LADY WITH THE BIG HEAD'S PERSPECTIVE ON IDENTITY

The lady with the big head does not really care about technologies of identity construction and the limited dialects of culture inherent in dominant practices of person-making. Meaning comes to her through languages of texture and heeding. Quick-sight-and-categorize is not the primary way she has learned to become among others like or unlike her. Therefore she categorizes differently.

There are so many ways of likeness.

The lady with the big head interrelates intimately with many beings and because of this the plain sufferings of humans fall in line with the plain sufferings of salmon, hummingbird, lichen, salamander, and snail.

Watching her out there limping I can see that the lady with the big head has become very angry that the plain sufferings of salmon have become so much less plain through the grasping patriarchy of capital and conquest, as we go on taking and taking and taking from this world in the drive to constantly remake ourselves.

The lady with the big head is listening for silenced voices. Sometimes I wish she would start yelling in a big ghost voice that causes terrible reverberations in order to frighten away surveyors who fly around in helicopters trying to decide how to pipe bitumen and gas under the land to put it in big leaky ships across oceans so that more cheap plastic goods can be manufactured to accumulate dangerously in the world. That her voice alone could change this.

But maybe that's just me, inventing motivations and capabilities for her? Maybe in my looking I am like others like me—an accident or designed outcome of the generations that came before? Left here with garbled stories because each generation tries to efface or correct the stories of the last in our attempts to settle ourselves. The stories that bind us to place, transformed with each displacement. Solid as we claim ourselves to be, we are deeply unsure what to do with the buried stories that froth forth into our fields of perception. Stories that link us uncomfortably to the violent displacements that have made this home. We writhe with our inability to make meaning as the lady with the big head voyages along the dendritic trails of her manifold histories.

10. LADY WITH THE BIG HEAD INTUITS ICE

The lady with the big head intuits ice as a long pause in the body of the world. She knows it's not really like that because ice is dynamic, changing itself constantly as the world around it fluctuates, loosening its bonds and flowing away or tightening toward itself and heaving into space. Marching to cover landmasses and bust open rock. Not really a self at all, able to exist as water or vapour. Becoming forceful and epic, becoming vastness, becoming the body of the world, breaking the body of the world into infinitesimal fragments which it devours or gestates. Always in flux with the stuff that makes land.

The lady with the big head tries to parse out the spirit bits. The enlivened elements. She sticks her hand into ice and has to pull back because it's just so cold! She sticks her hand into water and animalcules cling to her, blotching her skin, nibbling her cells. The water is so inviting she plops herself in, grateful for a big head that floats like a buoy. Her limbs fall below, but her breathing hole must be kept out or water will clog her and push out her spirit, turning her body to fodder. She cannot live in water, cannot live without water. So unlike salamander who doesn't need to keep constant temperature, like salamander too, rhythmically heaved by breath. She reaps the benefits of pulse. But because she is only somewhat alive she can pause herself like ice for eons, fragmented, covering up the cities we made that we thought would last forever, turning them into questions for future creatures that come after the ice.

11. LADY WITH THE BIG HEAD TELLS ME TO SHUT THE FUCK UP

I think I hear the lady with the big head whispering. Maybe she is telling me to shut the fuck up? Not for just one hot second, or three timed minutes registered in my meditation app and logged online to be compared with others like me that have become so aware of their mindfulness? Maybe she just keeps saying shhh, shhhh, shhhh, like we used to whisper to William when he was a baby and crying all the time, needing to be soothed by his mothers' warm soft breaths? Maybe she is saying that it is so hard to hear when we are always stating things, crashing about the multi-voiced world with our so-loud authoritative claims and combustion engine machinery?

then it goes that you get real quiet for a real long time, no one
knows how long, and there are a lot of things you hear, and then
maybe after a long time there is a sound that moves you. not like

moving in your limbs to get things done, but another kind of
moving, one that comes from inside the body. real deep in there,
maybe a little bit close inside between the lungs and heart where
there is all that breathing and blood pumping, and there you get
moved, still real quiet, because you're trying not to make it about
your words and your knowing, make place for another kind of
being, like moving *with* instead of moving *about.*

you're out there in her garden and she's making a hole with her
fingers in the soil. you've got to respect her veil but it's hard not to
want so much to peek inside. you tease apart the root bulb, hand her one
piece, then another. she is asking you only to break up the

bulb and hand her the parts one by one. she is not moving away
from you as long as you break up the bulb
and hand her the parts one by one.
(without pressing your narratives in,
assuming you might know
how to know her world).

Amy M. Alvarez

I COULD ALMOST MISTAKE THIS GOLD PENINSULA FOR GOSPEL

As morning's first fishermen nestle
their poles in sand searching for hungry

mouths, pelicans fly single file, wingtips stirring
surf. Plovers don't enjoy getting feet

wet. Black-headed gulls seem more polite
than their northern cousins—only

speaking when spoken to. Clouds tower
against dawn's pink innards. The white

family with white dogs ambles down shore.
The mother smiles hard and wide for the black

girlfriend her son has brought on family
vacation. Right now, I would rather write pelicans

than people. This among my many sins:
an inability to look at the thing itself, refusing surprise.

But I cannot ignore this fellow bespectacled
brown girl, resplendent in her box braids, how she holds

her boyfriend's hand, sliding her fingers
between his, over and over, one hand jetty, the other, water.

Caroline McDonald

LANCASHIRE NORTH WEST ENGLAND

I have not yet sent postcards feather paper deciphers rolling hills of English countryside braille or Rorschach stacked stone fences hacking out waves of fern land moss land sheep I catch in parallel train windows Plexiglas rectangles contain a basin town before walls of rain hit the Atlantic unfurling wind walk sideways black jacket tipped to my nose not yet experienced a hot English breakfast plump pearls of haricot beans slipping in pink tomato sauce

I wake up late in new timezone expecting
to glimpse solar eclipse it is overcast

SIX MONTHS IN PRESTON

I have learned sturdy backpack holds one week's groceries for one
person learned a hatred for cobblestone creases catch-all cigarette butts
bunched dirty eggs not refrigerated and vacuum-packed purple beets
at Aldi plastic bags cost five pence so tetris stack in the barrel of my
backpack make sure yogurt sloshing on frozen red currants breakfast
does not spill over walk back ten pounds heavier twenty pounds lighter
flatmate orders orange delivery crates from Sainsbury's pass only in the
kitchen she cooks two potatoes every night six months we've only said
hello once

2 p.m. drunk man on Friargate says
hey you're fit

Cassandra Blanchard

RUBBER

I'm on the couch disgusted as he begs me not to use a condom
his dick drips like a faucet

I know this man this man patrols the downtown eastside streets and alleys picks up many women many times a day I've seen him scout the block in a beat-up white van or an old truck with a droopy cigarette between his lips he refuses a rubber outright or offers extra cash plays the dangerous game of disease HIV it doesn't seem to bother him when he picks up hollowed women who dance with needles and share crack pipes it doesn't seem to bother him when he picks up and gives out STDs like Halloween candy he doesn't pay well he takes advantage of desperation only gives ten bucks or maybe fifteen which is just enough to buy a bag of heroin he knows about the endless struggle to not get down-sick so he dangles that carrot drives around ever looking

Cooper Skjeie

BACK ALLEY ROMANCE

here, the walls pulse with ancestral memory and generations of romantic happenstance. here, we leave the dumpsters open. there are secrets here and you can know them all. it's a thrill to possess something you know you shouldn't. here. have it.

back alleys like these blanket laps with urban purity and artistic catharsis. forget dinner tables. forget charcuterie boards and cheap chardonnay. forget swiss fondue and strawberry cheesecake. forget e-receipts. i am running with toothless dogs and my debt is a spiritual one.

when the rain came, i felt the knots in my chest untie and bits of tethered rope fell from my eyelash into the bow river. the thunder followed and i laughed so hard that rope came from my ear like a magician. i am still pulling the rope. there is no end in sight. when the mayor finally cut my rope like umbilical i ceremoniously placed it in a dumpster and lit the fray. the sky glowed with litter that night. there is litter everywhere in the streets and nobody is picking it up.

everybody is walking by. almost everybody. someone tries to pick up the litter and they are shot dead by police. yes, litter is everywhere. everywhere. a ghost haunts the yellowhead and they too are picking up litter. the pisces moon that lights the land beyond limits watches as systemic abandonment makes way for inconsequential clean up. a dog barks. the aspen grove takes notes.

when i was 18 the police locked me in an overcrowded cell and gave me a toilet tank for a pillow. at sunrise i walked the asphalt trail from lumsden to craven. i was barefoot. it was raining. i had a 360 in my pocket and there was litter everywhere. i screamed at god for the first time that day. she replied, can you see all that litter? and i kept walking. i bent litter into shoes and kept walking. cars and trucks and semis flashed their lights but no one stopped. four stickers on the grill of an ambulance read EREHWYREVE RETTIL SI EREHT. and i kept walking.

bloody footprints lay ahead of me and behind. i watched others carefully step into each print like tracks in deep snow. there was salt and blood and hair on the asphalt. the mixture had the prairie steaming. the prairie was steaming and everyone was waiting. nobody was looking but everyone was waiting. i kept walking. there was litter everywhere.

i arrived at the front gate and a man told me, sit. we do not open for another two hours. a wide-open field. how can you close a field? this field is hungover, vomiting chairs and couches and dirty diapers. i screamed at god again. she felt no obligation to reply. so i ran. i ran into the heart of the dump and took chase with valley security. they did not have guns but they had trucks and radios and generations of coloniality in their pockets.

do you remember that back alley? the one with all the dumpsters open, and there is love pouring out? i was thinking of that back alley as i ran through the valley. i was thinking, that back alley is more romantic than this. but i kept running. there was litter everywhere. and i was banned from the open prairie.

Carmella Gray-Cosgrove

THE DANCE OF THE CYGNETS

Ballet class starts at 8 a.m., so I get up early. In the bathroom while I shower I can hear my neighbour slam their bathroom door and puke into the toilet. I hear them puking every morning, a deep heave and then a splash. After my shower I bobby pin my hair into a bun and pull my tights and leotard on, then my clothes. I try to eat breakfast but it's too early and listening to the puking turns my stomach. Outside my apartment, the hallway smells like steamed broccoli. The smell starts as soon as you open the apartment door and it travels all through the building with a definitive crescendo on the third floor. It becomes faint as you walk from the elevator down the hall to the lobby but is only fully gone again when you step outside.

On the commute I've been listening to an audiobook about trees. Apparently, there is this white stringy fungus in the root systems of forests that connects all the trees into one sentient community. The fungus is in a symbiotic relationship with the forest—if the forest thrives, the fungus thrives—but it is also somehow part of the forest's brain. When a tree is about to die it releases all the nutrients stored in its trunk and branches

down to its roots; the network of fungus transmits all that sap to trees that need it. The fungus knows where there is less water in the forest and helps the trees transport the sap to that area. Like an egalitarian redistribution of wealth, or one unified body.

I call my sister, Sandy, on the walk from the bus to the SkyTrain. It's going to be a short call because there is no reception once I go down the escalator. Sandy tried to kill herself and is in the hospital, but we don't talk about that. On the phone, she asks about Rita, a dancer in my program I told Sandy about because I'm jealous of her. Everyone at the ballet school is much smaller than me. Tiny, beautiful girls from rich families with delicate arched feet and bony little legs. They have perfect little bulges of muscle for calves and quads and hamstrings, and their stomachs are concave. Rita is the most perfect of all of them. She's from Seattle and is very delicate, always smells like lavender oil, and basically only eats celery sticks and salads. I don't have anything to say about Rita today. I've already told Sandy how she washes her face with Cetaphil at lunchtime and reads romance novels in her sweatpants as she stretches before rehearsal. Rita is first-cast for Odette in the production of *Swan Lake* we're rehearsing for our year-end showcase. I am second-cast as one of the cygnets—the four swans who link arms and trot around really fast twitching their heads in circles, and I'm first-cast for a part in the corps. Everyone loves the Dance of the Cygnets but I would way rather do one of the slow solos that Odette does. We have to learn all the parts in our repertoire class though, so I still get to dance Odette, even if I don't ever get to do it on stage.

My sister is actually my twin. Not identical. She hates ballet and she looks nothing like me. She's into video games, snowboarding, self-harm, and hallucinogens. She fell off the roof of our school in grade twelve when she was high on mushrooms and tore the tip of her thumb off on the way down. Caught on a nail. She was otherwise unscathed. She's a ski bum in Whistler now, or she was until last week. She even calls herself that. She loves hearing about Rita, I think because she likes it when she knows I feel insecure. Like it reassures her that there are lots of people out there who are better than me and that she is on the better path in life. She's always been like that. Helping me tear myself down so she can rise up. Even though her up is always assisted by a little something. Coke most often, but speed too and crack in a pinch.

I haven't told her that I'm the only person in our class who can do Odette's double rond de jambe développés in the Odette solo. That's the

solo with the two rows of swans on either side of her where she is doing this amazing adage. Double rond de jambe and développé seconde, arms up, chassé, tendue arrière, double rond de jambe and développé seconde, arms up, chassé, tendue arrière, double rond de jambe and développé seconde, arms up and bourrée, bourrée, bourrée, piqué turn.

"I'm at the escalator," I say to Sandy, which cues the end of the conversation.

I turn the audiobook back on for the ride on the SkyTrain and listen as I walk up Granville to the studio with my toes pointed out. I am still thinking about the trees as I do my warm-up in the studio. Leg swings to loosen my hip joints, downward dog to stretch out my spine, ankle rolls to wake up my feet. Squeezing swollen, blistered feet into your pointe shoes at 7:45 a.m. is one of the most unpleasant sensations I can think of. Each little point of contact between raw toe joint and cold hard canvas prickles an objection. I think about the dying trees dropping all their sap, and then I just think about dying. I think about dying a lot. Not my own death, really, though sometimes that too. And not in a suicidal kind of way. More of a musing on nothingness and the state of being blank. Sometimes I wish I could be blank.

Sandy hasn't told our mom what happened. She lives in Norway—that's where she's from. She came to Vancouver when she was eighteen for university and to smoke pot, met our dad, then dropped out when she got pregnant. Sandy says she's had a taste for drugs since birth because Mom and Dad spent that first year together in an acid-fuelled stupor. Sandy's joking when she says that, but Mom feels guilty enough that there were never any consequences for Sandy getting high when we were teenagers. It always felt like Mom was just biding her time before she went home to Norway. Like she was waiting for us to be able to look after ourselves so she could remove herself from the messed-up equation that is our family. Then she met Andreas online and she was out of here a week after we graduated from high school.

Mom paid for our plane tickets to visit her last summer. On the last day of our trip we ended up at a mausoleum. It was amazing in there. This dark room with a low, heavy door you have to bow to get through and at first you can't see anything because there's not much light but as your eyes adjust you see all these dark paintings on the walls illuminated by dim spotlights. It's all painted in rusty browns and blacks, dark greys and reds, and the lights are amber, giving everything a warm glow. The ceiling is high and arched. It's just one room and the paintings go from

floor to ceiling to floor again. They're all of bodies. Bodies giving birth and having sex and dying. As your eyes adjust to the dark you see more and more bodies, some all knotted together in mosh pits of suffering, some in ecstatic orgies, and this one woman standing surrounded by hundreds of babies, with one clutched high on her shoulder out of their reach, her head pressed into its little body. Someone had brought their toddler and you're supposed to be completely quiet in the mausoleum because the acoustics are so intense in there, but the toddler kept making these cooing noises that bounced around the walls like little ping pong balls. It was majestic. Sandy and I were awed. It was one of the only times we've loved the same thing. When you walk out of the mausoleum, the artist has his ashes placed in an urn above the low door so that as you stoop to exit you're bowing to him. Sandy and I thought that was hilariously egotistical.

I often think about the mausoleum when I'm dancing. I like to imagine what it would look like if all the bodies in those paintings could move, pulsating together in their erotic life cycle. There's no room for that type of movement in *Swan Lake*, even though it's about all the same shit. Love and sex and death. I love *Swan Lake* in a different way. For all its rigidity and technique. And I love a white tutu.

On my way home from class I am caked in sweat. Today we worked on The Dying Swan. I stare at myself in the reflection of the glass on the SkyTrain and the bags under my eyes make me look like I have empty sockets. Pas de bourrée, bourrée, bourrée, piqué arabesque, piqué attitude, fouetté to attitude, turn, à terre, you're sad, front leg out and bend over slow, rond de jambe à terre to back bend, then up, relevé attitude, turn, piqué, bourrée, bourrée, bourrée, quick arms then melt, bourrée, dangle, bourrée, you're dying, bourrée, sink down, bourrée, bourrée.

I notice my lips moving in the reflection in the window and my arms are twitching, marking out the steps. Bourrées are the worst when you have blisters and your feet aren't warmed up yet. You're up on pointe and your feet are tight in fifth position and you take these tiny little steps keeping your feet sucked together and bending your knees just the littlest bit. Bourrée means stuffed, and you are, your feet are all stuffed up in your shoes and your legs are glued. It can also mean drunk. But I'd like to see a drunk try that in pointe shoes. And while your feet are taking those microscopic steps, grinding your toes over and over into the box of your pointe shoes with the weight of your whole body bearing down on

them, your arms and back are supposed to be weightless, moving smooth and serene like nothing is happening down there at all. Meanwhile the skin on your big toe is tearing and the liquid between your toe joints is being squished out so your bones are grinding against each other, almost guaranteeing that you'll have arthritis when you're old, and your bunions are being forced out sideways. The dying swan does a lot of bourrées. Like it's her penance to suffer in these, her last moments on earth.

When we were twelve, our dad died of a heroin overdose. At the reception I stood at the table with the sandwiches, tuna salad in one hand and egg salad in the other, looking at the incredible glossiness of my patent leather shoes. It wasn't like he was really involved in our lives or anything anyway. Before he moved out he would give us pony rides on his back—Sandy and I would be up there yelling "Yeehaw!" and whoever was sitting in the back would slap his butt to go faster. When I was in the back I would wrap my arms around Sandy, press my cheek against her spine, listen to her heart pound against her ribs, and hang on for dear life. That's how it has always felt with Sandy. Like I'm hanging on for dear life.

Before Dad died, we didn't see him for years. He died in a hotel you can rent by the hour with a woman who was passed out when the paramedics showed up. She lived. She didn't come to the funeral which was at a church Dad went to for meals and sometimes to get sleep. The reverend knew him and came to talk to me after the ceremony. He said my dad was a lost soul when he was living and that I could take comfort in knowing that now he was at peace. At that time I had mild acne on my forehead, not big pustules, but little pimples I would pick at when I was anxious. I had gone at them the night before and had an explosion of swollen dots at the funeral. At some point during the reception my aunt told me that when you pop a zit you get pus in all the surrounding pores and that was why I had so many. I felt guilty every time I popped a zit after that, like I was bringing the bane of pimples upon myself with my habit.

I don't remember my mom at the funeral, but she must have been there, and I don't remember crying. I remember Sandy though, silent like I had never seen her before. She stood next to me as everyone milled around the reception hall, slipped her hand into mine. There were lots of people we didn't know, lots of poor people who looked like they were just there for the sandwiches, but in retrospect, they were probably my dad's friends from that neighbourhood. Bourrée, dangle, bourrée, you're dying, bourrée, sink down, bourrée, bourrée.

When I open the door to my apartment building there is the smell of broccoli. Up the elevator, it's stronger, down the hall, it's fading, into the apartment, it's gone.

I get up extra early this morning so I can shower before my neighbour's puking starts. Today I am going to have an extra cup of coffee and be sharp in ballet class. I am going to have a perfect bun and, if we're doing Odette's solo in repertoire class, I am going to nail every single one of those double ronds de jambe. I am going to have the most controlled relevé anyone has ever seen. And my arms are gonna float like goddamn clouds during my bourrées. If we're doing the Dance of the Cygnets, my feet are gonna be a blur, perfectly pointed and sharp, and I will land every sauté on the beat.

On the bus I put my headphones in and I manage to get a seat. I am listening to the book about the trees to stop the steps from the Dance of the Cygnets from running through my head. The Dance of the Cygnets is supposed to emulate the way baby swans cluster and move as a little pecking unit. They're busy and tight together, moving where the others pull. In the dance they're supposed to be learning to fly and there is a slow build. It starts with these little steps, little trotting coupés from side to side, legs low, feet picking up in little scoops to the ankle. The music starts out really staccato and kind of quiet, mostly horns. Then it gets busier and the violins take over from the horns as the legs get a bit higher. The extra coffee has made me zippy. Coupé, coupé, coupé, coupé, coupé, coupé, coupé, coupé, jeté, pas de bourrée, relevé switch sides. As the music builds the steps get bolder too and the baby swans start to jump, legs lifting up to the knee. Entrechat quatre passé, entrechat quatre passé, échappé, échappé, échappé, échappé. I am willing the audiobook to drown out the swans.

The book is on this chapter about a forest in Utah called Pando. It's a forest of trembling aspens and they're all clones of one another and share one enormous root system that's eighty thousand years old. Pando is the oldest living organism on earth and it seems to be dying. No one is exactly sure why, but they think it's some combination of drought and fire suppression. Trembling aspens love fire. Fire makes it so other types of trees are wiped out from the underbrush and little baby Pando clones can sprout up from their ashes. Just as the book is telling me about the baby clones being born like phoenixes from fire, the narration stops abruptly and my phone starts ringing into my headphones. It's Sandy.

She is never the one to call, it's always me. But everything with Sandy is different since the accident last week. Though I'm not sure it can be called an accident. I mute the call and wait for the book to cut back in. Relevé arabesque, fondu, coupé, relevé arabesque, fondu, coupé, relevé arabesque fondu coupé. The phone starts ringing again and I answer.

"Are you screening my calls?" Sandy asks.

Coupé, coupé, coupé, coupé, jeté, coupé, relevé écarté.

"I need to talk," she says.

Sandy jumped off the Lions Gate Bridge last week in a psychotic break brought on by too much cocaine.

"They are feeding me the shittiest food and I am not allowed to have a cigarette."

She drove down from Whistler at 2 a.m., high as a kite, pulled over in the middle of the bridge and jumped over the side. Somehow, she did not die. Relevé arabesque, fondu, coupé.

"I want a grilled cheese," she says.

Jeté, coupé, relevé écarté.

"The nurses suck here. Are you even listening to me?"

The hardest part of the Dance of the Cygnets is the fifteen pas de chats starting from upstage right and travelling across all in perfect unison. Pas de chat means step of the cat and they are these jumps where you lift one foot, bent at the knee, up to your crotch and then the other so there is this moment where you're suspended with both legs tucked up under you and then you land your feet in quick succession.

"I keep waking up thinking I'm in the ocean," she says.

Fifteen pas de chats in a row with your arms linked with three other people is hard. Today we're probably going to practice this sequence over and over so it's smooth and our tutus bounce at the exact same time.

"They say I'm in withdrawal but they have me on such a cocktail of things that I can't feel it."

Pas de chat, pas de chat, pas de chat, pas de chat, pas de chat, pas de chat, pas de chat, pas de chat. Pando reminds me of the four cygnets. Tree clones and baby swans. Things that are the same as other things but somehow are still their own entities.

"I didn't realize what I was doing until I felt the water. It hurt so bad, like the worst belly flop and then like when you hold an ice cube for too long and the bones in your fingers ache."

The bus is at my stop. The fungus in the tree roots of a forest is hollow, they say. Like blood vessels. All a tree can do on its own is make

carbon dioxide from the air into sugar. I get off and walk to the SkyTrain with my phone held out in front of me.

"I regretted it as soon as I hit the water. And I kept thinking about you and how mad you would be."

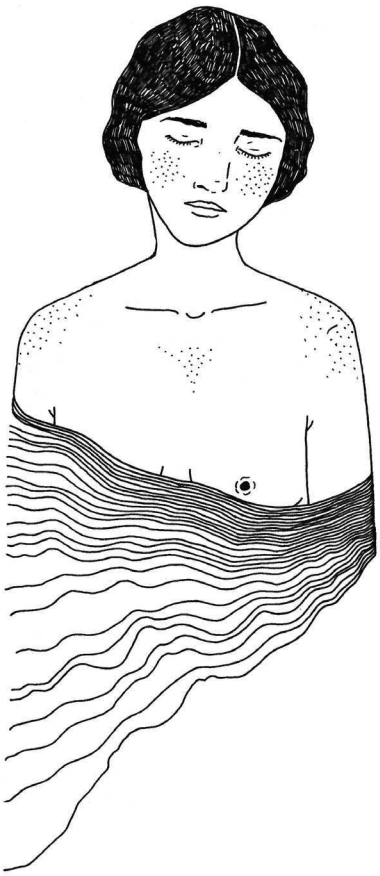
Seven more pas de chats. Pas de chat, pas de chat, pas de chat, pas de chat, pas de chat, pas de chat, pas de chat. Sandy is apologizing. The fungus needs the sugar that the trees make from carbon dioxide in order to exist and grow. In return, the fungus gets minerals from the earth and transmits it to the tree roots so the tree can keep living and keep making sugar for the fungus to keep growing.

"Do you think that's how Dad felt? Do you think he was thinking about us?" she asks.

The last sequence in the Dance of the Cygnets is beautiful. It's fifteen emboîtés which are these fast little kicks alternating left and right out to the front. Emboîté means boxed in. It's the cygnets' final confinement. You do the emboîtés over and over until your thighs burn and your palms are aching from clutching each other so tightly but then suddenly you break away and you're not holding hands anymore. You feel the air between your fingers as you piqué arabesque and you're free, no longer a cygnet. The sweat on your hands makes them cool as you sweep your arms up above your head.

"I'm at the escalator," I say.

FLESH



Becky Hagenston

A GREAT FALL

My husband fell off the roof two weeks ago, and I'm still finding pieces of him in the yard. It was easy to scoop up the big parts: the head in the driveway, an arm in the rose bushes, the blue-jeaned legs on the patio beside the lawn chairs, a Nike-d foot in the carport. I was inside when it happened, and I heard something like all the glasses in the cabinets shattering at once. I ran outside in my bathrobe—it was almost noon, a chilly Saturday. I'd been feeling annoyed and lazy and tired; the hot flashes were keeping me awake at night and I'd fallen behind in my paper grading. My husband had slammed out the door after I snapped at him about the clogged gutters. Did I have to do everything around here? He'd lost his job. Things were tense. He said he was feeling fragile.

The aluminum ladder was propped against the side of the house; soggy red leaves drooped from the maples. I saw his arm first, resting in the dead rose bush. I called an ambulance, but there was only so much they could do. This sort of thing was happening more and more, said an EMT, handing me a sack of my husband's parts. He smiled sadly. He said: You'll probably need a broom.

Neighbourhood children have started showing up, asking: Is this a piece? Is this? They'll hand me a sliver of shale or a stick or, once, a dead roach. They're trying to help, but they don't know what to look for. One child gave me what could have been a fingernail, but I couldn't tell if it was my husband's or not. This concerned me. If I didn't recognize his fingernail, what else was I unable to recognize?

By now, I have most of him laid out in the garage on a tarp, like he's a malfunctioning airplane with no black box to tell me where he lost control. The toes, the shiny heart, spleen, the penis, which had flown over the neighbour's fence. The woman returned it blushing, saying: I'm sorry for your loss.

I've been told that I can glue him back together, and when people ask how it's going I say good, good, it's quite a project but it's coming along. But the truth? The truth is that I don't know where to begin. I've never been good at puzzles or crafts. I've never been good at looking at mess and seeing order.

In the months before he fell, we had become strange and testy with each other. He was working long hours on a government project designing hot air balloons, some of which were large enough to hold a family as they escaped a war zone. It was important work, he said. Then the grant money ran out. He stayed home searching for jobs and playing video games, and I started sleeping on the sofa. The night before his fall, we drank too much and he slapped me and I slapped him back, hard. When I found his head in the driveway, his cheek was still red.

The air is turning cold, and when the grass dies it will be easier to find the pieces of my husband. The blogs say to shine a flashlight in the dark and see what glimmers: a tooth, an eye, a tongue. Today I went up on the roof to scan over the fence, the shrubbery, the dog house in the next yard, the blighted tomato garden. I felt dizzy up there, but I wished I could go higher; I wished I had one of those hot air balloons to fire-breathe me into the sky and float me to another life.

The thing with these kind of breaks, I've read, is that shards can travel hundreds of yards. Tiny pieces can even float through the air, can find their way into dog fur, birds' nests. Even if you get most of your loved one back, even if you put him together and he smiles and says where have I been? and you crawl into bed with him, and he holds you with the arms you've rescued from the shrubs and kisses you with the mouth you've glued on so carefully—even so, something will always be missing, and neither of you will ever know exactly what.

a.m. kozak

YOU SHOULD MESSAGE ME IF

the bong rips me & my body strums alert, like where the fuck am i! even though friendly faces surround me who've asked for my company. i see their vulnerabilities & feel my footgrips crumble to rubble when my stomach screams i am fed up with ghosting! it should be easy, there are other photos in a plotline, but buy-in shallows when options flood in the five km radius around my apartment. i can see why i wouldn't seem worth the investment & maybe i'm not & maybe you're not & maybe it's best not to see too deep into anyone in particular.

but i recognized you in the wall of text & the ampersands & the way you wanted to impress anyone who tosses compliments. the desire to be desired is heavy like meat used to be on my belly but now i'm free, now i'm free, kissing my teeth.

Cody Caetano

WHY THE SEX ADDICT IS A PORKCHOP PRETENDN

cuz he's broke. cuz he's stoned
on the toilet again, taking
strabismic selfies
in rows on his laptop. cuz his beauty
marks come in threes and every
zoomer in the coffee shop
gawks when he drops his silver and copper.
cuz he spelt meegwetch wrong in his chapbook
even though mindimooyenh said it's okay.
cuz anytime he calls the rez
he chugs two ipas and prays for ten minutes
they won't declare another state of emergency.
cuz his hands are pink as the plucked and skinned chicken
defrosting in the kitchen sink. cuz his feet are dirty
as the ringworm pigeon his neighbours
bagged and curbed roadside. cuz the pot
smoke is still caught in his throat. cuz all his tattoos are traditional.
cuz he shaves his head every week. cuz his ass is very hairy.
cuz his libido is too big. cuz he has the shame
but not the clarity these bigwig NDNs seemed to possess in the 2010s.
cuz he's the biggest liar in the club.
cuz he's on fetlife again, username cowboy_native,
has been since the tenth grade, way back when he played
halo 3 on xbox live. could call it a mainstay,
pacemaker, scapegoat, his navi. cuz listen!
cuz he's never rubbed bear grease between his fingertips.
cuz the academy swindled him
and he the academy.
cuz he's red-faced shameful watching this drum circle in christie pitts
with his mostly rich, mostly white lacanian
comrades, his dildo-ions, and he's too scared
to get up and go dance with them. cuz he's trapped
in his author bio and kink list.

cuz a white pass is all it takes
for the half of twitter
with over 10k to say so.
cuz he's not your average joe or tex boyden.
cuz his memoir sucked, too desperate
and his lil polemics? wimpy dead bug stretches.
cuz he was the cohort token. cuz the lcbo
only asks for his air mileage and if
it is debit. cuz he called it his rape
then circumcised that summer to sexual abuse, then
one of his domer friends
said it was just two kids fooling around
in the shadow land. cuz he doesn't think
you're all that intellectual, or tribal, more liable
to action items without a plan to ever execute them. cuz he can't stand
the word auntie, and doesn't believe
all grannies are sweet. cuz deep down, a good chunk of his
legacy is a blame game he plays to escape faux wokery. cuz he's too broke
to see NDN psychogeography. cuz him and his clit-cut frenulum
get fetishized, denied visibility, almost daily. cuz the sex addict
is entitled to visibility, too. cuz he sure is one lit
spiritual infant. cuz he refuses to submit
to the necropolis of your half-assed realisms. cuz of his hesitance
toward concepts like care webs, since arachnids only care
about webbing better food nests. cuz of nuance, or
supposed lack thereof.
cuz of imposter syndrome, but for
this trapped fly wriggling inside him.
cuz as much as he feels like
the tobacco drawer opening like
the revisionists who snatched nokomis like
the dried blood he dripped on the faucet last week, he continues
to make room for new memories.
cuz him and his two older sibs grew up boiling
water without an advisory. cuz they raised him
in a mason jar called happyland, just off
a cottage country freeway. cuz sex *really is*
"the only ceremony [he] has time for these days," shout out billy-ray.
cuz it's bim-ahdziwin, not

bima-dizziwin. cuz "you do
it then if you're so clever." cuz he only got called a brown skin
as a foster kid in the fifth grade, some steeze-less
mestizo, and by his own bro at that.
cuz "we don't say we're starving in this house, this
isn't africa, kay? tell me you're hungry instead."
cuz a lot of the time he gets so drunk
he forgets he is drinking and remembers
he is miserable. cuz the bloordale portuguese butchers
scan his groceries at piecemeal speed, and charge
him extra for peameal. cuz one of his dearest uncles drove him home
sotally tober and suggested he fictionalize his work. cuz doesn't he know
how dangerous vulnerability is? enough to rip open a libel case
so big that every ethical settler and legit NDN in the dominion
will march to his bachelor back house and hang
him from his backyard tree, by his frilled shibari rope, and wait
for the cold snap in late april to cut
him in half, remembering to snapchat the tragedy and tag ministers
primed in blackface to see what he did to their futurity.

cuz he woke. cuz he sees the pouch neglected and clawed
up by kitty and cannabis tremor. cuz he knows dry medicine
in a mouldy tub means he defied the industry of cynicism, signaling
his mucous membranes to breathe, and his lookers to make out
just how scratched the bottom of the first disk is.
cuz the sex addict refuses to approach his character
from four directions: action, appearance, dialogue,
and thoughts. cuz he'd rather keep busy
doing him: just taking a shit instead of giving one.

Paola Ferrante

A TRICK OF THE DARK

When he changes to a dragon, I pretend that I don't see it and it almost goes away, like the shadow from a story someone told you once around a campfire. The first time, it is too hot on an August afternoon and we are fighting about something I won't remember, like whether Escher's figures are really impossible, or who knocked down the photo of us, the one taken just after we got engaged. In that picture, he still looked like Prince Charming in a rental suit in front of the gold and blue centrepiece at his best friend's wedding while sweat pooled under my arms and everyone said *You both look so happy together. Don't ever change.* Whatever it is we are arguing about, it is big, the way things appear in a tiny apartment with hospital-yellow walls after spending the day without air conditioning, drinking too many beers on our balcony. It must be big. He is knocking over his beer for it; he is slamming his fist into the table so that the chair falls over to give whatever it is room. He is slamming the screen door shut when I say *I don't want this to get ugly*. I say *I'm leaving.* Just before he changes, I can feel the hot spit from his mouth as he screams *This isn't*

me. It's you. You make me get like this, the same way you can't not hear a siren, or a baby crying.

Then his tongue flicks, and it can't be him.

It is impossible. It is a giant lizard with scales, claws digging into my arm. It has an alligator jaw, a tail that knocks over the table, spilling our beer, the rest of the bagels he got up early to buy for breakfast this morning just because he said he knew how much I missed Montreal. I try not to look at it, as though not looking means it goes away, like when I was a kid and used to cover my eyes so whatever was underneath my bed couldn't see me in the dark when I came back from the bathroom at night. I can see myself, in the glass of the sliding door to our apartment, crouched down, hands covering my head like in pictures of old bomb drills. Whatever this is, I tell myself, it isn't real.

Then, it unhinges its jaw and I see its teeth. If it was a bear, I would know what to do. When a bear comes close, you lie down, play dead. Curl yourself up into a ball on your side or lie flat, facing downwards. Avoid all eye contact. But bears are real. This is not. Still, it lunges toward me and breathes fire so my arm is the colour of when my brother would grab my wrist in both hands and twist in different directions. A small space inside me becomes a glass window, where I can only watch what is happening as though someone is narrating on TV. *And now a dragon terrorizes the village. And now a dragon wrecks a home, our plastic patio chairs broken by its tail. And now I crawl away when I should be running, almost making it to the fire escape until its head turns in my direction.* The part of me still watching thinks *And now I die*, and I cover my face with my arms, as though not watching will change what is going to happen. I feel strangely calm even as it charges and my body hits the ground because this will all end the way a story with a dragon always ends and there won't be an after where I have to try and make sense of what I saw happen, why it burned the tomato plants, the ones we'd said we were going to try and grow together, even though there wasn't enough sun.

I close my eyes. My body doesn't know what else to do

When I open them again, I realize there is an after. It is darker outside, so everything is in shades of black or blue. I don't see a dragon, but I climb down the fire escape in case there is one, careful to be quiet. On the sidewalk, I realize I don't have my keys. For a moment, looking up at our apartment, I feel like I am five again, alone with my nightmares about *Jurassic Park* after my father yells that he's trying to sleep, and my mother tells me *None of it was real, go back to bed*, and closes my bedroom door.

It's just a story. I realize whoever I call—a friend, co-workers, police, my own mother—I would never expect anyone to believe what happened.

After an hour of walking, unsure of where I am supposed to go from here, I go back. *I thought you left,* he says, when I knock on our door, except I am not sure if it's him or the dragon who opens it and goes back to eating takeout pizza and watching TV on our couch. It's hard to tell with the lights off. *There's nothing to talk about,* he says, when I tell him that my head hurts, when I ask if we can talk. I watch the way his tongue moves, like a lizard's, smelling the air, but when I sit down beside him, he puts an arm around my shoulders, pulls me into him. He gets the Tylenol and water from the kitchen. We were drunk. I must have passed out. Remember, it was hot. Remember we'd been drinking all day; we must have had a two-four each. Remember, we talked about getting rid of those dead tomato plants anyways. My arm is scratched, slightly blistered, but I didn't put on sunscreen. I wouldn't have; I was the one who drank so much I fell. I tell myself his fingers feel warm-blooded when he spreads aloe on me; what I think I see as scales are just the rough skin on his elbows. I tell myself that dragons don't exist. If they did, most lizards are territorial, not social creatures. They don't know how to live in family groups. And he lets me take a slice of pizza from the half that looks like mine, the half that should have been without hot peppers, but they are buried underneath the cheese. He must have forgotten. The roof of my mouth burns but we eat dinner together. We go to bed together. On Monday, my co-workers will say it looks like I got too much sun and I will tell them we went to the beach. I will tell my neighbour the tomato plants had aphids; I will tell my mother when she visits that we decided to get new patio furniture. When I feel, rather than see, the deep and tender bruise on the back of my head in the shower I will tell myself I must have fallen. I just don't remember. There is nothing to remember. A week later, he will take me out to dinner after buying new tomato plants. I will bring back empties to The Beer Store all at once so I can count them, tell the woman behind the counter of course I had company. Of course, it looked like we had fun. We always looked so happy, together.

There's a story about a lizard man, one that lives on Thetis Lake, one you might believe the way you watched horror movies in the basement as a kid with the lights on, checked the closet before you went to bed. Sometimes he has webbed feet; sometimes he has sharp claws and spikes on his head, like the creature from the Black Lagoon. Sometimes he is

just a vague something swimming in the lake, all silvery and scaled, if you can believe it. Does it help if I say a boy told me the story, in a tent in his backyard, flashlight underneath his face? Does it help if the boy said *It doesn't end how you expect*? Sometimes, the boys who saw the lizard man are fishing in the lake and sometimes they are swimming in the dark. Sometimes they run to their car and the monster chases them. Sometimes the monster even bites. I'll tell you the boy put the flashlight underneath his face and made his eyes look like caves, or make-up from *The Addams Family*, so I screamed. He said *It's okay; don't be scared. There's no reason to be scared; I'm here*. Besides, there's always a reasonable explanation. Just before the first report, local TV aired *Monster from the Surf*. Next time, police said a man from the area told them his tegu lizard, which can grow up to four feet in length, escaped the week before. Much, much later, some of the boys even claimed they'd made up the entire thing. *I promise*, he said, *you're safe*. Does it help if the boy made me chocolate chip cookies? If he didn't know I was scared of dinosaurs, especially ones that can stand on their hind legs? *I promise*, he said, *I lied; he's not real*. I'll even tell you I believed him. Then he stuck his tongue in my mouth.

We get married in October, and everything goes the way it is supposed to. I say his name in our vows. He says he promises to take this woman. He kisses the bride, and the sign I bought on sale for the reception says *This Way To Our Ever After*. I don't see a dragon when we carefully remember the waltz, when he reads prepared thank yous through a shot glass, even when he sticks his head under my dress and pulls off the garter my mother also wore. In his toast he says, *To the woman who changed me, for the better*. When I see myself in the bridal suite mirror, tiara on my head, my childhood self who cut her own hair to look like Joan of Arc is startled by the change. But when we take photos, my own mother, who once wrote an article for *Ms. Magazine*, tells me *You look beautiful, together.* I don't see the bruises on my knees I get on our honeymoon, falling over rocks on the beach close to his parents' cottage in Maine. We drink and make out for a while, have sex and sleep in our car like we are still in our early twenties and everything is part of the one great story of us.

When we get home, it looks like we are still in love. He says he wants us to have a child. And it has been so long since there has been a dragon that I can see us, together with a daughter. She would come sit in our bed when she had nightmares about monsters and lizards and red eyes in the dark so that she wouldn't ever have to be alone. He says as long

as we're together, nothing else matters. We spend every night together, we drink at the bar together, we argue together about all the things I don't remember when he screams about them later: how I mess with the thermostat, how when I say I have no space of my own in our apartment I don't have space for him in my life, how I never kill the little red spiders in the bathroom, the ones that seem to be purely made of blood. We drink alone, together at the bar, argue about whether I grow by going back to school out of town and leaving him for a while.

You wanna go, go, he says, *but I don't like it.* He says humans are not designed to live alone; we evolved to live together as protection against all the things that can kill you. And so many things can kill you. *Even babies*, he says, but his eyes have narrowed to vertical slits and I don't know if they see me anymore, *even babies know to avoid a fucking snake when they see one.* We argue and when I can't tell where words like *stupid* and *bitch* are coming from, all smoke and fire and burn, I go, but only to the bathroom. I wonder if the woman behind the bar sees the red of the fire coming from the edges of his mouth, if that's why she asks, concerned, if I'm looking for Eve like it says to do if you need to, on the doors of the stalls.

I am ashamed. I tell her it's not what it looks like. I feel like I should know better by now than to see a dragon.

Depending on who you ask, if you go to Scape Ore Swamp in South Carolina, you'll see the famous lizard man. He looks to be about seven feet tall and damp, green with red eyes and three toes and all those things you won't believe, even if you see them. Would it help if you could touch the blood, the shattered windshields from when he terrorizes teenagers coming home on the highway after the night shift, jumps on the hoods of their cars? Would it help if I told you the county even sells t-shirts? You might say he could be just a wild dog, a fox, a black bear from the swamp. Maybe he's another coyote, like the one police found dead next to the car whose hood ornament was ripped off, maybe with teeth. Maybe he is just two red glowing eyes like the woman saw outside her window; he is just the story from a girl who's mostly drunk, mostly with her boyfriend at a party in university in someone's apartment where there are two coral snakes with black, yellow, and red stripes in a terrarium. When her boyfriend sits beside her, she shifts her weight slightly so their thighs aren't touching. She says you can't keep a snake in a cage with another animal, including a snake, that snakes are immune to their own

venom. The girl tells me her sister got killed by a coral snake that looked just like this one, even though she'd heard the old rhyme, *Red and yellow, kill a fellow*. She says she knew her reptiles.

She says a girl claimed that the lizard man grabbed her and tried to drag her into the river; would it help if you saw its three-toed tracks? *The lizard man's bullshit*, her boyfriend says. He says a military guy even admitted he made it up after he said he shot the creature. She says, *But a woman in Charleston just got a picture of him, outside her church*. But he says it was photoshopped, or footage from an old B-movie, or just a trick of the light. He says those three-toed tracks were from an ostrich, or an emu, maybe, and I thought back to my mother who, when I was a girl with nightmares, told me all the dinosaurs died out so long ago; if they hadn't there would no birds in the sky. Her boyfriend says the snakes are milk snakes, harmless; they only mimic the colour of their predator to avoid harm. The girl screams when he wraps a snake around her neck. He says, *You're making a big deal out of nothing*.

He says he wants a child; in this way he wants me to grow. I know they say with wolves to make yourself look bigger. I say *But do we even have the room?* He says the apartment will look bigger when the baby comes if we throw out things that we don't need: my childhood VHS collection, excluding *Jurassic Park*, including *Beauty and the Beast* with Belle in her golden dress on the cover. We throw out my copy of *The Second Sex*, keep his textbook from the intro to psychology class we took together that taught me sometimes a cigar is just a cigar, that primates don't do well alone, without touch. They will cuddle with a terry cloth dummy that is soft but cannot meet their needs, like food. At night, when I press my body against him for warmth, he is mostly soft, but colder than I remember. There is a hardness in the centre of his back, almost like ridges, what I mistake for just his spine.

One morning, in our bedroom after he has gone to work, I find what looks like the dragon lying on our bed. When it doesn't attack me, I get closer and I realize it is just the skin, like the shed of a snake. With snakes, depending on who you ask, they tell you just to walk away, or stay put and hug yourself so that when it wraps around you, it can't choke you. There is a lifeless opening around what would be its jaw when stretched over its body and I stick my head inside. I lift it, wrapping its scales around me, which are dry and stiff and let no moisture through, not even near where the eyes would have been; where I thought there would be

openings there is a film that makes everything cloudy, impossible to see through clearly. Now the dragon's skin seems so fragile, surprisingly thin like the vanes of a feather, parts of it breaking off in my hands. I wonder if this means that now the dragon will be bigger. I wonder when he talks about things being too much to handle because he is having trouble filling some big shoes at work, about how if we'd already created a baby when we got married that now it would be the size of a plum. I wonder if a reptile is ever able to grow so that it sheds its skin for the very last time.

I tell him I want to keep my physics textbook from the course I took just before we met. When it comes to the uncertainty principle, light becomes either particle or wave depending on who is doing the observing. The act of observation can change a thing completely, but I don't remember how. There's so much I don't remember. I try to explain this when we drink in the park with his friend who points out the tortoise beetle climbing on the bush right next to us. He sticks out his finger, forcing the beetle into the palm of his hand, and the friend says the beetle's shell isn't supposed to be red at all, but gold.

Just put it back on the leaf, the friend says, *I'm telling you, it only turns red under stress*.

He says that's bullshit. He's looking at it right now; the beetle is red.

The friend holds out his hand, letting the beetle climb onto his finger, then places it gently back on the bush. *See? It's not red anymore*. The friend turns to me, *Back me up. I mean, you married this guy so I don't know if I can trust your eyesight, but you see it's gold now he's left it alone, right?*

There's nothing wrong with her eyes, he interrupts, laughing while he takes my hand. *We were love at first sight*.

I laugh too, comfortable in that three-beers-deep feeling while we watch a few tiny birds peck at the ground. I feel him shift beside me. My father used to tell my mother to make the tiny birds outside our windows be quiet when his head hurt; when my mother told me to stop singing along to "Tale as Old as Time," she told me there was a time, after all the dinosaurs had died, when birds were so big, even the biggest mammals were afraid of what they could do. The advantage of birds is that they can fly, just like a golden tortoise beetle. And it has been so long since there has been a dragon that I say, *Yeah, it turned gold*.

I see him pause, and something behind him shifts. I want it to be a skipping rope. Or a garden snake. Or if not a thing that's real, then just a trick of the dark, like when monsters moved underneath your bed until you turned on the lights.

Guess love isn't blind, the friend says.

Maybe we should go. I can't look at his eyes. I am staring at the thing behind him, curving out into the dark.

Although that doesn't explain what she sees in you, the friend continues.

I'm going to go. When I stand up to leave whatever it is hits the ground.

Fuck you, he says, but it's to me, and not the friend, who looks away. I try to; if I look at it the other way, it is almost just a skipping rope, or a garden snake. Most people look the other way.

When we get home, its tail throws me against the kitchen table and I feel my ankle buckle under me as its claws dig into my scalp. If it was a lion, things would be better. With a lion, they even say not to run, you'll only die tired. It says I'm not going anywhere. With a lion, I would shout back, throw things, maybe his copy of *The Prince*, maybe the last picture that we framed, us at the beach on our honeymoon at sunset, nothing else but a dark blue lake under a red sky. But I know this is not a lion; in the morning a clump of my hair is missing. In the morning, it didn't happen. He makes quiche for both of us for breakfast; I cry in the bathroom with the hairdryer on when I pee on a stick. For months and months, he says that things will change.

The closest I can get is alligators. With an alligator, they say the only thing to do is run.

There are a bunch of stories about a lizard man, ones you can watch with your own eyes on film. Depending on how you look at it, the creature from the Black Lagoon didn't want to give up what he thought of as his home; he was a monster that slaughtered his way through scientists and crew, who abducted a woman and held her in his lair. He was a living fossil of a creature they thought stopped existing a long, long time ago. You've seen it before; it was even filmed in 3D. Of course, at first, no one believes there's a monster; the lizard man hides in the darkest places, he terrorizes so and so, only the woman sees him. I mean, it's the same story, even if the details change. If you look at him closely, the lizard man changes the way he swims so that he is a perfect mirror to the woman he is later going to attack. Doesn't matter how he changes, the music tells you this is a horror movie. He changes so that the strokes of his arms match hers, so they end up swimming together. Even on film, he changes. He always changes.

The last time I remember, we are together, in our apartment. It is January and we are cold, and fighting about something that is big. I am big, and so is the daughter we are going to have, he says, together. I tell him *I'm leaving. For real this time.*

And it says, *I don't see that happening.*

I end up lying on the ground, close enough to the sliding door so that I can almost see the fire escape, can see that it's just far enough away, but maybe not too far. I can see it now. It is not a lion, or a wolf, or a bear even. I can see the beer I knocked over seeping underneath the sliding door, into the smears from the tomato plants he crushed months ago when drunk. Against the black and blue outside I can see the red on my fingers from between my thighs. A breath of heat travels along my body, sets the hairs on my arms into warning; I can see the dull skin of the dragon scales camouflaged to match the sick, yellow walls. They are hard and dry and impossible to see through. They are not feathers; they will not break. It is a dragon, I think. He has always been a dragon, not breakfast that is over so quickly, or the promise of a shed, or a photo on the mantle of a thing you thought you remembered but smashes so easily and you have to throw it away. It doesn't matter how I look at it; no one tells you how to survive a dragon. When I tell my daughter this story, I'll say with dragons, you fly if you can manage it. Find the fire escape. Whatever other stories you hear, I'm telling you, be like the birds.

Kate Wallace Fry

DYKE SEEKS A NON-EUCLIDEAN UTOPIA, OR ALTERNATIVELY A FEMME TOP

i forget my dick
the purple one
in the shower and
my roommate finds it.
now you and i have
a story for the next party
or somewhere
we arrive
and allow somewhere
to leave us.

you bruise
accidentally
my tailbone. just a little
to the left. stop.
you are not
the first person
to read my birth chart.

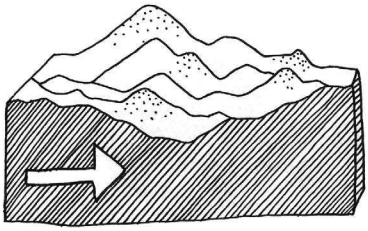
can we save that part for later?
can we eat something un-vegan?

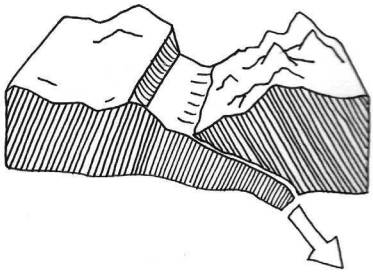
i come inside you
except not.
we are unable to do this
due to our physiology. le guin
would probably give us a word
for that if we asked nice enough.

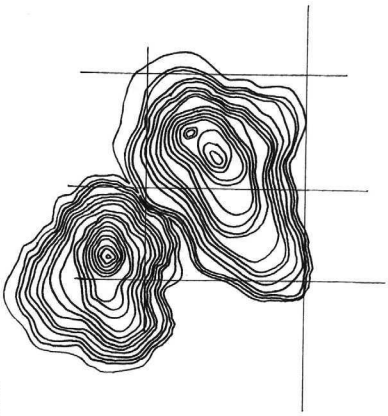
le guin would probably give us a world for that
if we asked nice enough.

you fold the future
                into quarters
and tuck it behind my ear.
somewhere we
        carved wood
        into more wood and
forgave ourselves
the form.

LANGUAGE







Hari Alluri

JUNGLE, AT VOLTAGE

I growl at rumble—I humble mumble—I hunter and I bones—I
sunder and I jones—I loosen grime divisions in the wealth—I
nocturne stealth—I stretch the echo valley of my voice out to receive—I
gather wings—I graves—I bask and weave—I exhort to cavort—I
thicket spice ng miracle, kapwa—I slacken breach—I
bracken thorn as thief—I tala rising cyclical—I
rack and braille and screech—I congregation every type
tail and speech—I teem—I matte—I glean—I racket and steam
at thunder, at beam—I compost meritocracy, overhand a feather—I
wick or leather—I brandish anguish dark and laughter after—I tether—I
constellation fireflies—I juke—I flute—I architecture weather—I
mangrove swamp—I tromp vs. I slither, prowl with jowl vs. hop away
and scowl—I pyaar se aashiq scar—I riverbell—I canopy an oceanswell
of green—I sediment in pigment—I quit desire never—I
flap—I trap—I preen—I ground—I under—I brown—I
get cut down—I hello gorgeous every shape of moon—I
medicine to sky listen—I lay—I sprawl—I feed—I
toil—I trouble o I choke—I where there's smoke—I
photosynthesis polyamorous water and sunshine—I source—I brood—I
element—I excrement or spore—I swarm—I warm—I pull down rain—I
fawn and dream of touch—I prism drip—I time reclaim—I
land's refrain—I lose my way—I die back to the one—I
kin—I each direction threshold every step—I terra firm—I
spectacle to worms—I metonym—I stumps—I
the part of rhythm you don't hear but you become—I erode abode—I
hold relentless on, elegy harana sutra ode anting-anting Anagolay
loob—I famish, to devour you I flex—I goad I mode I signify I mollify I
pollen's fate, de-holify, transliminate—I slime sublime—I
rile ya vile ya guile—I the gathered heat that chants entrancing risen dew
above the highest reaching branch—I fountain chalice mountain—I
prance—I hum—I variegated foliage—I poultice—I multi-thumb—I
suddenness that quilts—I fallen log nurse to roots—I
fold upon—I shade—I know how I get high—I
anthill spill—I cacophonic harmony—I rock—I glade—I

crocodile ng sultry—Ling-ling-o ako—I property: not I—I
pre-religion orgiastic heathen demon rubric to holier than thou—I resist
plow—I tongue at sprung—I verte-braid—I
any day could be your last—I lung—

—after Gwendolyn Brooks / after Terrance Hayes, with interpolations of Sally Wen Mao, Outkast ft. Erykah Badu, William Shakespeare, and Nas

Helen McClory

THE ETHICS OF SEX DREAMS

The dream had to it textures and rhythms of motion more than a clear narrative or physicality. In its wake Alisha pulled herself up from the bed with rosy cheeks and a slick cunt and went to the kitchen to make tea, moving through the lingering memory of soft cream skin and a room with green wallpaper, sunlight, ivy, pale striped furniture. The full name of the man in the dream had been supplied, somehow—a sign, with light bulbs around it? A black set of letters on his door? But she didn't, at first, understand who he had been. She cracked open the laptop and typed the name in. A list of videos—various celebrities, talking about their latest releases. He was the interviewer. Dirty fair hair. His smile was nice, ready, as the job required. Expressive eyes, the frosted pastel green of a lawn in winter. Kindly, clever, if you could gauge such things in five minutes. She watched him neither blushing nor totally unmoved. He was not nearly as attractive as the people with whom he was speaking, but his voice, with that accent and slanted timbre, was just as she remembered. She said his full name out loud, savouring the complications of it. Then she clicked away. Over the course of an hour, the dream lifted, the way of all dreams,

and flowed through her and out into the deep, calm sea where all our forgotten thoughts go.

Two weeks later, she dreamed of him again. This time she waded in lucid, stepping through the green and well-lit room, watching for the shifting outlines of the chair back and the window, managing, a moment, to pin them in place. When her attention drifted, so did they. He was standing in a button-down shirt at an olive green stove, stirring with a wooden spoon a pot of white candy floss. She went up behind him and wrapped her arms around him; he turned and fed her some sweetness. In her mouth it dissolved, tasting of the kisses it soon became. They moved to the moss green bed and she felt the world throw them at each other, hard on a soft and falling plane. She woke with a thud and a fading moan, stripped the linen from her real life bed, and pondered the significance a nudge longer than before.

In the next dream they were in the corridor outside his room. He was trying to open the door with his key, but his hands were shaking. She was looking at his hands; they were beautiful, but they kept flickering out of existence.

"I want this," he said, "but I'm not sure if that's a good thing."

She leaned against the wall and it pushed in like a rubber sheet. "Well, we don't have to go in. How about a walk?"

A wood came up around them, the wood reticulated, and then a lake that was golden and covered in tremulous birds, or balls of brown soot, it was hard to tell, making small actions that stirred up their reflections. No one was on the path—it seemed to forge its way through ahead of them, and the trees only moved a little out of its way like reluctant figures in a crowd.

"I'm going to say something strange," she said, "I've dreamed of you before. But you're real, a real person."

"Yes," he said softly, "I know I am."

The atmosphere was unlike any dream she'd had, though she lacked the language to say how. If pressed, she would say it was a sense of tension that did not appear to come from her imagination, but seemed imposed. It gathered her inside of itself, an alien and instinctive crux.

"Here comes the night," she said—and the sky turned that pale green it does, then shunted into dark blue, and they rose up into the stars and were dragged apart.

It was a strange dream, Alisha thought, but who cared? These dreams had no significance. Everyone's dreams were weird, and that hers were imbued with a kind of elite, delicious mournfulness should be enough. Still, that afternoon, when she was supposed to be working, she looked him up on Twitter, scrolled through his retweets of arthouse articles and pinned-back snark, a piece bemoaning the lack of female directors, another exploring how the current political climate was manifesting in this year's television shows, to a tweet of his own.

> At the risk of boring you, do you ever get haunted by a dream you had? I keep dreaming of this woman. Here's how it happens—

The list of replies was exactly as expected.

Her fingertips brushed the keys. Direct Message, the internet's whisper. "Do you ever dream of this woman in a green room with ivy?"

There was no way to expand on that, not until he had responded. She clicked away and pulled up her essay, scanning for typos, badly, for the rest of the work day.

That night she lay down and went to the place where the doors were, and knocked on his. He opened it, and looked at her directly. It was his eyes, she thought, they tinged everything in their likeness.

"I'm the woman who wrote to you today," she said, as he was already taking her arm, and kissing it. He stopped.

"Yes," he said. Being present was a slippery thing. For her, and for him too she could see it was hard to remember the other world, the world above, outwith, and she wasn't sure either of them wanted to, not when this world was so enrobing, tactile, warm. It was the reluctance of getting out of bed on winter mornings. Now they were sitting at the side of a glowing pool in a dark, cavernous room. The black lane markers at the bottom of the pool swayed below their bluish, swaying feet.

"This is from that horror film," she said, "I saw that one too."

"Sorry, I don't mean to," he said, "well, anyway."

"I feel like I should be insulted."

"Aren't you afraid? I am, I'm a little freaked out," he said, quietly.

"I don't think so. I'm in it, here with you, and I don't feel afraid. I suppose that's the logic of dreams, though. You feel what they prompt you to feel. We can't trust ourselves to think or act clearly here."

Across the surface of the pool, a fine golden scattering, like fairy lights, rose to intermittent, pleasing heights.

"Is that you or me?" he asked.

"Do you think it's dangerous, to be in one another's dreams?"

"That would depend," he said, "on the intent."

She paused a moment. This deep within each other, the boundaries between them were porous. It was possible they could alter each other, physically, spiritually even, in ways impossible to predict, by degrees of magnitude, and that this might be irrevocable.

Droplets of blue water lined her thighs. Her swimming costume, when she looked at it, was deep red with a plunge between her breasts, belonging, she supposed, to a costume in his archive of images. She leaned forward and the pool came over her, and she swam through it, wondering if breath was necessary and, though she was afraid, if they might kiss again. He stood upside down, feet on the underside of the water. And she thought she saw him then, who he was, behind his welcoming interviewer's persona: he looked remote, austere, but more than that, like someone lost. She swam to him, across the expanse of their dreaming, and their hair flowed, entwined, turned pale green.

"I do want you," she said, without opening her mouth. He looked away, held out his hand.

"I hear you," he said. This time contact was more tangible, slower, more awkward. Their arms lay against and through softness, her knees bumped against his. They had handfuls of each other, they reached for a bright and searing joy in each other. They fucked in the water, drawn up into some medium more dense and illuminating, of a colour indescribable, breaking at the surface only when they woke.

The messages were waiting when Alisha got to the computer.

> To begin with, none of this makes sense.
>
> I don't know what someone might do in this situation.
>
> It reminds me of a film (of course it reminds me of a film).
>
> But more importantly, who are you? I mean, I've looked, a little. But I only know what you look like. I don't know you.

Well, in a way, that's arguably disingenuous of me.

He had probably written a synopsis of the film he was thinking of, she thought, a mini thesis, but then deleted it all. Which was considerate.

Alisha wanted to write "let's meet." To face the thing square on. To understand how and what they would say to each other, do to each other, in real life—how real, warm skin would feel against skin, how good the sex might be—or how disappointing. But the interviewer lived across the ocean, and she doubted either of them had ready money for a transcontinental flight. Or the courage for the inevitable pain of meeting. When their own limits would show so nakedly, whatever they chose to do. So she selected and attached a photograph of herself from a few months before, where her hair looked nice.

"This is me," she wrote. "I write freelance. Here's my website. That doesn't tell you anything about me really, does it?" She paused, fingers hovering. "Do you have a girlfriend?" She deleted this. She wrote, "Do you have a partner?" She deleted this. She wrote, "Is there someone meaningfu—" she deleted this. She wrote, "Have you talked to anyone about this. I mean, in real life?"

There was an eight hour gap in time between their lives, so Alisha walked to the bakery and bought a fresh, hot baguette, and ate it with some black grapes plucked from the stem, slightly withered but sweet. She considered having a nap, since it was a Saturday, a justifiable day for such things, but she filled in her tax return instead, and after that watched all extant episodes of a Netflix show about teenagers on the run with their griefs. By now it was morning where the interviewer was, but she allowed for more time. She edited a piece and submitted it to the magazine that had commissioned it. She called her mum and then a friend, neither of whom it was appropriate to tell. A whole day carrying this bundle of desire and anxiety. At last she let herself check Twitter; he had answered, two hours before.

I remember your face. There's more clarity here.

You're beautiful.

Is that awful of me to say?

Like sleazy? I don't mean to overstep your boundaries.

I sort of mentioned this to a friend but he doesn't believe in these kind of things.

So I guess I'm alone.

Have you told anyone?

It could all be a coincidence. But I remember you.

I wouldn't have believed someone else telling me this story, even last week. Horoscopes, palm readers, signs from 'the universe' or whatever, none of it makes sense, logically.

But there's your face in my head.

And all of the things we've done. I feel weird about it, and I don't, you know?

"Are you still afraid?" She wrote. She deleted that and wrote, "It's weird, but it's wonderful. What should we do?" She deleted 'what should we do' and wrote "What do you want to do?"

He answered immediately. "I want to go to sleep."

Alisha shuddered, some unknown impulse rummaging through her body. She found she had got up and was putting the kettle on. She opened the sachet, tipped in a blob of honey straight from the jar. She inhaled steam, drew back into herself, and tried to parse. Did she want to go to bed? To go to bed to see him. To hold him and be held and fucked in a warm unreality space. The tea was chamomile, so perhaps. Something in her wanted her to move to him. It was early for bed yet, and for him, even more so. And who was he?

She pulled up another interview and watched his hands, his encouraging but elusive smile. She turned up the volume and let another play on, and heard him say, "So tell me about…." "And how was that…" and she knew something else about him that wasn't this. She felt a white heat strike through her, and shiver down between her legs. She pulled up his messages, writing, "Does it matter, if we meet like we do, does it cause some damage in the world?" She deleted this, and wrote, "I want you too,

but I'm not sure." "If we met in real life would we even like each other?" "What part of this is real?"

"I don't know," he answered. "Shall we try to sleep? We could talk there differently."

She stepped forward into the dark and fell into the room, landing with a flump on a baize sofa that took up the whole of one wall. A row of three windows facing an indistinct but bright outside took up most of the other. He appeared from another room, dressed like a gentleman and pulling behind him a bushel of dark green branches.

"I brought you a bouquet," he said, "but I don't know anymore."

"Thank you," she said, scooping them up. In the crook of her arm they were smaller, and covered in silver pinecones that jingled. He offered her his arm.

"Shall we?"

They walked into a shopping centre both now attired in early Georgian silks. The shopping centre was full of people with the faces of fish while streamers overhead declared things in letters illegible but emphatic. Likely it was all the sentiment and complication they could not bring themselves to say. They came to a fountain in the food court, and waded out to an island turfed in green velvet folds.

"I think this is mine," she said, "I saw an island like it once, moss all over."

They lay down together and looked up at the skylight. The shopping centre was buried in a gigantic dune, it seemed, and all they could see above was sand, pressing down on the glass. A trickle fell between them.

"I suppose we could read this, one way, as the passage of time," he said.

"Oh don't be obvious," she rolled over on her side. It seemed an appalling thing to state, that there be time, that irresistible force, operating on their drifting selves.

"Hey! Unfair. I'm trying to understand this, just like you are," he said, "unless you know something more than you're saying?"

"No," she said, in anguish, and tried to say, "only that, if you touch me, or I touch you, it makes sense. But otherwise, it doesn't, and that makes me mistrustful. We can't believe in what this world makes." But only the last part came out.

"We can't keep doing this, then," he said. In high feeling his voice grew beautifully strained, but she could see no way to defuse this.

"Yes," she said, "if we're both real, and this is not, then maybe it should stop."

He sat up sharply, took a breath. His frozen grass eyes met hers, and it seemed she might slip all the way into his mind and leave behind her own forever emptied. So she closed her eyes and covered her head. He was on his feet, and the last sight she had of him was between her fingers as he marched away into thigh-high water, pulling off his cravat and undoing his cuffs. She clutched at a thread on the velvet and tugged it loose until the whole island unravelled, and she was awake.

For months, Alisha used the final image of him—wet hair, clothes spilling about in the water—as fuel when she married the bed. The difference in sensation between what they'd had and this was the rough weight of time and the coldness of her crooking fingers. In dreams they had had their way explicitly, sans scope that things would end, that their bodies would not suffice. She wondered if he thought of her, and sure he must, she committed to ritual the tea and the honey, the early nights and languorous mornings. In this way the puddles of poor rest, under her eyes for years, dried up. But she never went to him in her dreams, and he never came into hers. In the dark she walked chastely in other places, ate gold bars like éclairs and ran in throat-clenched fear from faceless pursuers who secretly did not want to find her. If choice it was not to meet, then whose? If fate, then for what? She wanted to find him, but she wanted him to look.

Then late one morning a message came in as she was browsing:

"I want to see you," he wrote.

The limits of the medium allowed for no tone, but it felt exposed. The time for him was well into the small hours. She imagined him drinking alone at a bar, shirt undone, shoulders slumped, used up after a day of being nice for the right answers and for pay, tapping out with his thumb these five simple words, while the staff turned stools and coughed politely. She could smell his desperation, but wasn't sure if it was for her, or of the usual, terrible, everyday kind.

"Really?" She deleted this, and wrote, "I've been waiting too, you know." She deleted this, and wrote, "It's been so long," she deleted this, and wrote, "I've missed you too. Whatever we are to each other, let's keep trying." She deleted this, rewrote it all, and adding, for a chaser, "Now." She went to her bed, took off her clothes, and lay down.

Lou Garcia-Dolnik

WHAT'S YOUR BODYPOLITIK?

new msg: what's ur bodypolitik
and is it a margin ?
i kno a fair bit about liminality n the
post-internet condition
having read foucault & foster wallace
(ur f*gness//tr*nsness a desirable thing
according to late corporate capitalism) //

new msg: what's your bodypolitik
and does it weave between the sheets
a defiant thing equivocating
rabbit in hiding
from the audience of the hat ?
[i read something about being too laden with language
to fashion signs with new signifieds
when you are the signifier] //

new msg: what is your "bodypolitik"
does it dance
and will it dance for me ?
are the veins of it strung out
in threshheld space
between definitional inexactitude and pithy tweets ?
is ur politik
an ampersand
(if ure waging war w the full force of your trauma) ? //

new msg: are you that boy-girl
scowling from beneath world-weary eyelids
an eviscerated carcass
rotting meat for gulls
clinging death-like
to the mantle of your
membrane ? //

new msg: if you give up the gig of evasion
denigration throw-me-under-the-bus
contortion of my feminism
we can be friends

or "neuro-atypical enby b*tch"
perhaps you'd like to articulate
discombobulate
gimme your dworkian butlerian
kristevan view of determinism in 1000
words or less
or, let me put it this way: r u too mxg*ndered
to take ur torch to the bureaucratic capital ? //

@McDonalds would like to make a complaint about the 'gender-neutral'
drive thru guy who was like obviously just a v confused man??

new msg: is this shoneys? //

new msg: heya! was just wondering…
(for research purposes only)

what's ur

Colleen Baran

THE SPRING OF GRADE NINE

my method
included staying out
for days
breakfast at noon with
mint tea and muffins
math textbooks
and French homework
Tuesday and
on Wednesday
I wonder
if it's time to go home
I'm not sure
it's long enough
without phoning, before
the SkyTrain ride
before she looks at me
to see me
and she says, oh!

of
sleeping on couches
the floors of
new people
and quads of acid for
cafes, parks, parties
unremembered
when it's time to go
after five days and
is it long enough
if Aunt Linda will be angry
if I've gone too far
downtown
I could be anywhere
feeling
like it's a
home

trying
drugs
strange men
paying for
lunch
dinner
before it's
back
nights
to be noticed
but
but
but then
and it's
like
surprise
!
it's you

Benjamin Swett

VR

When we sat down to the venison stew, the stew you had made that morning before we drove up to MASS MoCA, which had sat in the refrigerator getting better during the course of the day as stew does, Laurie Anderson's strange mellifluous voice roved around in my brain like a repetitive element from a dream, nonsensical words she had chanted in my ears a couple of hours before, back at MASS MoCA, while I hovered over a makeshift pond, and drifted down among falling paper leaves along a paper tree that didn't stop and then did—at a mirror that was supposed to be a pond that reflected back everything but me—and flew over a gray landscape of two rivers joining and twisting away in a way that made me think of Berlin (though I have never been to Berlin) while objects such as flowers and blackbirds and typewriters floated toward me, and if I grabbed them they said things or took me places, and one glass globe took me to a blue pond with a gold Buddha at one side, and the Buddha sat contemplating me, as I contemplated him, for quite a while before the MASS MoCA person said, okay now it's time to take your headsets off: and it was Laurie Anderson who started us four off talking, as we dug

into our bowls of stew, about the mind's duplicity, and how you can be in a plane breaking apart over the earth with typewriters flying at you, while at the same time you sit in a hall in a museum wearing a headset.

But how does it actually work with the headsets, Willie wanted to know, how is it that you can orient yourself in that virtual space where you are flying through a maze-like structure of high walls, platforms, alluring openings, and dizzying drops into space, and your orientation, confused at first, nauseous, coping with vertigo and a loss of normal boundaries, very much as if in a dream, begins to stabilize in the new space, and new boundaries begin to take shape around you and your mind begins to focus on exploring—just how, technically, Willie persisted, do the headsets allow you to become oriented in this way in two places at once, so that if you push your arms out in front of you in actuality, you move forward in the virtual world, and if you pull them back you stop. If you move them down, you begin to fly down, and up, up. You turn them to the left, you go to the left, and to the right, right. How can a computer strapped to your head understand what your arms are doing?

Almost simultaneously Nicky and I, though we had only the vaguest idea what we were talking about, said, "gyroscopes," and then—because his preoccupations in graduate school have exposed him to recent scholarship in linguistics—Nicky began talking about an Aboriginal community in Australia whose language has no words for left and right, only for the points of the compass. The thing about the people from this place, Nicky said, is that you can put them down anywhere and ask them to point north, and they will do so instantly. Their entire orientation is around the compass. They will say about this wine glass, it is northeast of the knife, or about that salt shaker, it's due west of my plate, but I am south of both. Because their language has no words for left and right, Nicky said, they have no concept of left and right. Without the language the concept doesn't exist.

But isn't everything about language, you said, isn't that how we think?

But no, said Willie, language isn't how we think, or at least not according to Stephen Pinker (because Willie had been reading a lot of Stephen Pinker in his freshman year), there's something deeper than language that forms into words and images, so that when we say "stew" we all know what is meant by "stew," but different stews pop up in our minds; the word has different applications for different people.

But then, you asked, if you all think of different stews when I say stew, why is it still always the word "stew" that makes you think them?

—which question made *me* think, as I sat there listening to you and our sons in the candlelight, of the stewpot in my grandmother's kitchen, a huge light blue enamelled casserole dish with a dark blue flower on it, which would be bubbling on the stove on Saturday afternoons in Goldens Bridge while, still in her apron, my grandmother sat in the living room with my grandfather listening to WQXR's *Saturday Afternoon at the Opera*; and I realized that of course it was from her *Joy of Cooking,* which my mother had saved for us eighteen years before, that you had improvised the recipe for this stew, substituting venison for veal and adding peas and carrots left over from Christmas; and then—because this is how my mind works—I remembered that my grandmother had died, at ninety, in Goldens Bridge, around the same time Willie was born, and I thought how strange it was that she should still be so present for me, even to joining us at this meal, yet in Willie's mind she existed barely at all; and, rather abruptly, I think, because these thoughts made me think of something else, I stood up and left the room.

That's just the word in our language, Willie was saying when I came back. But in Spanish it's estofado and what is it in French.

Ragoût, you said.

Exactly, ragoût, Willie said, yet for us a ragoût is different from a stew, it's more—spicy? I don't know. If I were to say, Mom, this is a delicious ragoût, you might think differently about it than if I said, it's a delicious stew.

Either way, you said, I'd be happy to know you liked it!

But the words come from the thing, Willie said, not the other way around. It's like the Aboriginal community Nicky was talking about. Couldn't it be said that they needed to know the compass directions so they evolved a language for them first, and ended up solving all their needs for description? In other words, who's to say that their language caused their thinking, and not the other way around?

Speaking of compass directions, I interrupted, and gyroscopes, and I held up the water-stained legal-sized binder of my grandfather's memoirs as recorded on cassettes by his oldest friend before he died, and, miraculously, it seemed, and luckily, because I was imposing something new on the conversation, I opened the browning sheaf to the very page I was looking for and began reading—because why not?—my grandfather's account of how, as a teenager at the St. Mark's School, he had become fascinated by a gyroscope that had been given to him for Christmas, had developed a theory of how gyroscopes could be used to help Zeppelins to

navigate, had written a paper on the subject for school, and, encouraged by his father, who was a lawyer in New York City, had applied for a patent at the US Patent Office. But the patent application was turned down because, as my grandfather put it, a man named Elmer A. Sperry, in Brooklyn, had come up with the same idea and sent in a patent application first, only there was a flaw in it. My grandfather had gone out to Brooklyn to speak to Mr. Sperry at the Sperry Gyroscope Company and learn of the flaw, which, my grandfather said, turned out to be the rather obvious one that gyroscopes always point to magnetic north, and in a fast-moving vehicle far above the earth, such as a Zeppelin or, as had just come into being, an airplane, the gyroscopic direction would have to be continuously adjusted to true north if the vehicle was to keep flying in the intended direction. How to keep that constant adjustment going while flying at high speed over the land was the problem that Elmer A. Sperry was trying to solve at his headquarters in Brooklyn. My grandfather, finally taking in, as he gazed around at Sperry's enormous factory in Brooklyn, that Elmer A. Sperry was a famous inventor and already the manufacturer of a gyrocompass that worked in ships, concluded that the problem was not one that he was prepared to tackle. And it was then that my great-grandfather, who must have been a kind man, and who had been so encouraging of my grandfather's interest in science, said, perhaps now you'll come back to my original suggestion and study law.

You see, you said to Nicky and Willie when I had finished reading the passage, where your grandmother got her math brains from.

Nicky looked up from his phone and gave a vague yes, and Willie said, but there you go, Nicky, those Aboriginal community members who are so compass-oriented, do you think they're pointing to true north or magnetic north?

I think it doesn't matter, Nicky said, now without looking up from his phone. The point is that it is not left and right, it is three hundred and sixty degrees. If you plunk them down anywhere they know where they are. It's like perfect pitch. He started typing rapidly.

Speaking of perfect pitch, you said, I wonder what the weather is in Iceland right now? Nicky looked up from his phone with a smile.

It's raining, he said.

It's always raining in Iceland, Willie said.

It does rain there a lot, Nicky said.

And you said, why don't you just get Geirthrudur on the phone and we can all talk to her?

And a moment later Geirthrudur's voice came jutting out of Nicky's iPhone propped against a candlestick: hello everyone! and we all shouted, hello! at the candlestick, causing the flame to waver; and because you understand that the answer is inclusiveness, and the point is to join together realities whether virtual or not, you started asking Geirthrudur about her concert, how it had gone for the group and how she had played; and Geirthrudur said it had gone very well actually, this year it was in a less drafty hall—was in a really fine hall in fact—and they didn't have to wear sweaters and coats while they played; and Willie asked what they had played, and Geirthrudur named the pieces (I now forget what they were), and Willie said how much he liked one of them, and you commented on how hard another of them must have been; and then I asked after Geirthrudur's parents and asked her to say hello to them from us, and she said she would, and how she knew they would want her to say hello to us from them, and then you said, it's been great talking to you, we should probably let you go, and Geirthrudur said, okay, I'll see you back in New York, and she added, enjoy the venison stew! Wish I could have some! and then Nicky took the phone and said goodbye and signed off, and Willie said, anybody else want more stew? And you said, you might as well bring in the pot.

And so Willie carried the pot around and we each ladled ourselves out some, and you said, but I still don't understand what this thing is that you say is underneath language, because—

There is something that comes before language, Willie said, structures in the brain. That's what Pinker says. When I say uncle, we each know what is meant by uncle, but the quality of uncle is different for both of us. You might be thinking of Uncle Alton, for example, and he has all kinds of associations for you, he gave you that down jacket and he gave Dad those studs, but I never met Uncle Alton, he died before I was born, so I might be thinking of Uncle Irving, and all he means to me, with his painting and Julie and everything, which would not be possible for you, because he's your brother. When I say brother, I think of Nicky, but you think of Irving; I say sister and I think of Rachel and you might think of Mary Ellin or Elizabeth. Or you might think of Rachel because I'm saying it, but then you're thinking of Rachel as your daughter and my sister, and all that happened to her in relation to us… Willie stopped.

That may be so, Nicky said. But that doesn't change the fact that the way you use language in a given culture affects the way you think. Here—he held up his iPhone with a triumphant smile—is the article I was talking about by Lera Boroditsky comparing how speakers of English, speakers of Hebrew, and speakers of Kuuk Thaayorre, the language of that community in Australia, represent time. They were given randomly ordered photographs of someone at five different times in his life and told to place them in a sequence. Invariably the English-speakers organized the sequence from left to right and the Hebrew speakers from right to left. That's the direction the people who speak those languages write in. The speakers of Kuuk Thaayorre arranged the cards from east to west. No matter which direction the experimenters faced them to do the test, they arranged the cards from east to west. The left-to-right scenario never occurred to them. They arranged the cards toward themselves if they happened to be facing west, or away from themselves if they were facing east. Always the photograph of the person when he was youngest was in the east and the oldest in the west. Not having words for left or right made them extremely good navigators, so they always actually knew the compass directions, no matter where they were. Even five-year-olds, Lera Boroditsky found, could invariably point north, whereas professors and graduate students at Stanford and Harvard weren't able to point north, or very few of them could, and none with any accuracy.

But might that Aboriginal child—

Pormpuraawan.

What?

That's the name of the community, Pormpuraaw.

Might that Pormpuraawan child, you asked, be dependent on being in Australia to be so sure of the points of the compass? What if you planted her down in Palo Alto or Cambridge?

I think she would be the same. That's why I say it's like perfect pitch. You've just got it because you've been thinking in compass directions all your life.

I wonder, you said, how Pormpuraawans would approach directions within a virtual world, like Laurie Anderson's, where you navigate using your two hands, left and right. Would they construct a compass for that world?

Probably, Nicky said—and we all fell silent for a moment, thinking of the arbitrariness of any of our constructed realities, and how easily, just by donning a headset or answering the phone or reading an email, you can

find yourself involved in an entirely other set of concerns than the ones you had been confronting a moment before, and into my mind came an image of an airplane, and an ocean, and a jagged snow-covered mountain, and my daughter in a hospital bed strapped to tubes and a heart monitor; and then I was back with the faces of you three in the candlelight, and the whir and rattle of the pellet stove beside us, and I was thinking of Don, our neighbour who had shot the buck somewhere back behind our house and hung the buck in his barn and cut it up when it was ready and sliced us out the loin; Don who had brought the venison by on Christmas Eve and stood in our kitchen with his rosy cheeks and white beard exchanging Christmas news like some Santa Claus in a camouflage jacket: Don who said, standing there with his merry blue eyes and his black watch cap, you can make a stew with it if you want, but if it were me, I'd grill it with just a little salt and pepper. And then I noticed Lulu stirring on your sweater, which had fallen from the back of your chair to the floor, and the glitter of your amethyst earrings, and I tasted the warm brown stew in my mouth and the sharp wine—and why was this, in particular, in the context of all that was and might have been, so dear to me? You say I am so silent, you wonder what I am thinking, and it is true that through experience I have learned to cut myself off, there are things in my heart I would hide, because they would scare you. They scare me sometimes, even though I keep them well locked up. I am not an evil beast, just a very selfish and self-destructive and stupid and sometimes sad one, given to thoughts that stray far from the conversation, against which, perhaps, this—well—crazy talk—is the only safeguard I know. And as you refill everyone's glasses with some more of your mother's wine, and Willie ladles the last of the stew into everyone's dish, I think of the distance we have travelled since New Zealand, how far we have come, in this our "new reality," to be so full of Laurie Anderson and Stephen Pinker and Lera Boroditsky, and Geirthrudur, and Don our neighbour, and your mother with her wine, yet at the same time, in my mind at least, and I know in yours, and I'm pretty sure in those of our sons, how we still have not come all that far at all; how this sense of relief and pleasure we four take in being together over a bottle of wine and venison stew, indulging in wild talk, our minds going in all directions, still always has in it, never gone now, fuelling it, even, the shared memory of the impossible becoming real, and part of the conversation gone missing, so that the one we all want to text to say, hey, just to let you know, we're here, thinking of you, that one can no longer be reached, her message box is full and will not be emptied.

FUTURES

Jade Wallace

PHENOMENOLOGY OF NIGHT

If the sky is dark, then I am
dreaming, space-time folding to
cover my body, even as I slink along
the city's hazy lines, a shadow creature trying
to find my direction, eyes shifting to catch
rustles of light, for though I feel better than
dead at this hour, I know that I am not, and
if someone wished to make of me an exquisite
corpse, I could call out, but the nondeviant
sleepers would not hear, would only wake to
untraceable dread—careful crypsis is the
closest I can get to *solus ipse*, so I ply it
all the way until I stand at the foot of your
apartment, where, with daylight's tacit
imperatives of conscience gone, we could
say *effets de soir*, take each other in hand as
if we were strangers, the homeworld
inconsequential until the morning, which
lies far enough that it may never come, and
it makes sense to risk whatever lives are
possible hereafter for the seeming infinity of night.

Liz Worth

NOT EVERYTHING AT ONCE

I am not the way you left me.

What did you learn of my life, reading too much into the coffee stains on my papers, patterns of dust on the bathroom mirror.

Every night I close my eyes and let the sun's last hour burn the day off the lids.

Remember how we used to wander for hours on Sundays.

Around here the streets have no sidewalks. People look at me from their car windows as though I'm breaking a rule.

I have six words written on the first page of a notebook. I can't take them any further than that.

In my kitchen I bend spoons, take inventory of what's already been used, the parts of me that once had a story to tell.

I didn't come all this way to write books my mother would like. At least empty cupboards are easy to entertain.

You were the one who wanted a strange future. But that wish was the wrong spell. I knew it the second you said it. Remember? We were outside the supermarket. As the words left your mouth an old woman lifted her finger to the sky, clutching a rock to her chest with the other hand. Her grip crushed it to sand.

What pressure we were under, then.

I have since learned to relax. Not everything has to be said at once. It's why walls take their time to talk.

Sometimes I dream that my tongue is a bone that clack-clack-clacks the questions I'd rather not ask.

You understand now why I wouldn't take your call. If I sit here long enough this place will finally tell me something.

I still wear the necklace you gave me. It looks different, too. The bloom of tarnish.

Do I still sound the same, at least?

Places like this aren't what you think they are. Up close the white vinyl siding is always stained with dirt. The grass is thin; you can see the earth between the blades and the whir of the bus route three blocks away is enough to wake you just as you're falling asleep.

What is it that you couldn't find. Does this feeling ever leave, the one that says there must be more, always more than this.

Grace Lau

PEDICURE AT PINKY'S

Did Jesus have the world
-'s first recorded pedicure
when a woman washed his feet with her hair
and perfume she couldn't afford?

I guess it shouldn't be surprising
that nail spas are run by immigrant
hands that have built railroads,
immigrant feet that have crossed oceans—it's nothing

a mani-pedi won't cure
the TV on the pink wall tells me
"immigrants aren't welcome"
in Canada because they're taking "our jobs"

and I wonder if this is the first time
the losers of a race
have demanded their competition
be removed

as if jobs are taken
and not given or created
as if anyone dreams
of scrubbing feet

my feet ache
from a sunny stroll down Queen,
I chipped my nail
playing basketball

father, son, mother, sister bent
over feet and hands
folding into themselves as my body stretches
out on a red leather throne

they knead pleasure
into my spirit, comfort into my bones
they give me
what they do not have

this is the inheritance
of immigrants by success
-ion and I have betrayed
my blood

Shaelin Bishop

WISHBONE

On the way to the grouse lek, Alana does Elijah's birth chart. She doesn't believe in astrology, not anymore, but she did in college. Well, it's not that she doesn't believe anymore, she's just forgotten. Hasn't thought about it in years, only realizes when he brings up astrology that her daughter is a Sagittarius. Apparently when they'd last talked, she'd always been going on about it. That's what he says, "Back then, you were always going on about it." True, she supposes that's true.

It's 4 a.m. The sky around her is mulberry and a band of orange hovers over the horizon. Her phone won't load his chart, and by the time it does he's probably forgotten he asked. That was twenty minutes ago, and he has more important things to talk about. He's the co-founder of a company that makes hiking socks out of recycled water bottles. It's so interesting that she feels bad changing the subject to her thing, which isn't even hers specifically. She didn't create; she just believes. They've got seven years to catch up on and it's embarrassing how little she has to say.

"Well, tell me who I am," he says.

Aquarius sun, Libra moon, Scorpio rising. Neither of them know what that means, but the explanations sure feel good on her tongue. Like she's some mystical, tarot-reading sorceress who knows all his secrets, can read them in the stars. Juggle his persona with a dexterity he can't keep up with, slam it to the table and shuffle it under a trio of cups, watch carefully Elijah, where did it go? Oh look, she pours it steaming and strong from a teapot, don't burn your tongue. Presto. Magic. Seems like a good advantage to have. She likes knowing something he doesn't.

She tries to explain what the houses are and what they mean without making it seem like she's just reading from her phone—which she is—but her astrology phase was junior year of college and that was eight years ago.

"Interesting," he says.

It probably isn't. It probably makes her seem childish or stunted. Same as she was at twenty-one. Fluffy interests and bitten nails. Forgetful and gullible with bad budgeting skills. She still wears her black-brown hair waist length and in a braid, bangs thick and overgrown. Her face still bears the shape of childhood, with fleshy cheeks and muddy owlish eyes. He's so different, or maybe she's just forgotten him well enough that his features can be a surprise again. Narrow green eyes, sinewy limbs, hair shoulder length and pulled back, leather cord strung around his neck, the charm snug in his jugular notch. His features seem new even though he's always had them. He climbs mountains and takes photographs with an expensive camera and hitchhikes even though he has a car, just to meet people, just for the thrill. All like he used to. He's different and the same. Consistent but evolved.

"What are you?" he says.

"I'm a Taurus."

"Is it accurate?"

"Sure." It's very accurate, that's why she believes in astrology. "That's all there is." She skips the section about sexuality because talking about stars seems so purposefully romantic, and she doesn't want to be purposefully suggestive.

Elijah stops to get coffee. She waits in the car, knees folded and hiking boots printed to the dashboard. When he comes back, he's bought a coffee for her too. She never asked for one and can't tell if the coffee is as consciously romantic as her star chart reading, or just common courtesy. Not that she was being consciously romantic—he suggested it after all—but the gesture seems, by nature, a romantic one. Stars and fate. The kind of thing people talk about on a first date if it's a really good one.

He forgot a sleeve, so the cup burns her palm and she doesn't mention it, but he remembered one for himself. As they drive and the cup pulses heat into her hand, she weighs whether or not it seems like an accident. She can't remember if he tends to be forgetful. Maybe she can check his star chart.

As they drive, he asks her stray questions about astrology and other things she was interested in as a college senior. She went through phases back then, a new hobby every three months: D&D, gardening, baking, slam poetry. Tabletop games were a tradition with her housemates, but she hasn't played since college. She has a cup of mint on her windowsill, and has started baking again because that's motherly, but now it's oat bars and zucchini muffins sprinkled with pumpkin seeds. In college, her designated role was pot brownie supplier. She didn't even like getting high, never ate them, she was just the best at baking. That's how she first met Elijah's friends, who subsequently became her friends, by showing up with a shrink-wrapped plate of pot brownies. She went to a slam poetry open mic a few months after Isobel was born, to treat herself. She'd brought Isobel since Ross was working; getting a sitter would mean saying where she was going, and that seemed embarrassing because she knew she couldn't pull off pretentious. Isobel had started crying during a whimsical girl's tearful poem about her eating disorder, and Alana had left with stares hot against her back.

Alana doesn't tell Elijah any of this. She doesn't tell him she has a husband named Ross or an eighteen-month-old daughter named Isobel. She'd thought this through as she waited for him to pick her up and changed her phone's background to a neutral default—mountains—instead of her daughter's glossy algae eyes. Not because she's ashamed of them, but because being a mother, being a wife, if she's those two things to Elijah she will only be those two things. He'll look down at her instead of at her. Judge her for being reduced to domesticity. They'd promised they never would. They were going to travel the world, get woozy on high altitude and sleep at train stations and scratch dried ocean salt off their forearms. Collect sand from the Dead Sea and gravel from Everest base camp and wear them in miniature jars around their necks. They were going to climb Kilimanjaro and trek Salcantay. They were going to sip chai together in Ladakh. Now it's too late to bring them up. How shameful to have discussed astrology before discussing her own family.

She switches to asking him questions, ones that require long answers, so she can look out the window without having to feel herself speak.

The moon is a sickle in the dusty orange, sky the texture of chalk pastel. Prairie swishes around them.

It's not like she didn't tell Ross where she was going, but the sleeveless coffee cup burns in its spot nestled between her thighs, the warmth seething through her jeans like an accusation.

When Elijah messaged her last week—because they'd stopped talking as people do when they move on from their college lives, but never stopped being Facebook friends, just forgot they were Facebook friends—she'd told Ross right away.

"My old friend from college, he knows where there's a grouse lek," she'd said.

"What old friend?" Ross leaned against the chair back, hands on her shoulders.

"Elijah. I've mentioned him a few times. He's the one who lived in his van all of freshman year."

"Is this the same guy that stole a tree from campus?"

"It was the campus mystery for a month," she said with carbonated excitement. She only noticed the disappointment in Ross's voice when she played the conversation back in her mind while unable to sleep. Sophomore year, Elijah had shown up at her house past midnight with a young poplar, and they'd rooted it in the backyard. It was the most rebellious thing she'd ever done. "Turns out we're in a few birder's groups together. I never even noticed that."

She'd mentioned Elijah before, though still prefaces his name with my friend from university to smother the fact that she mentions him relatively often. He was her freshman roommate's boyfriend, but she saw him more than she saw the roommate. The roommate was in engineering and had so much work they never talked, and Elijah, sometimes forced to park the van he lived in far from campus, copied her key. So he could nap between classes, is what he'd told her, and Alana only faintly made the connection that nap meant sex and between classes meant when she wasn't there. It was a co-ed floor, so he could sneak in easy. By the end of the year, the roommate moved out a month early and texted Alana, *If you want him, I don't give a fuck. I just didn't think you were that kind of girl.* She'd never shown Elijah the text. If he knew other people thought they were sleeping together, he might think she wanted them to be sleeping together. She liked him more as a sexual possibility. A housemate with a separate bed. Someone she arrived at a party with but left without.

"It's in two weeks," Alana had said. "I'll ask Elijah if I can go with him. So you can have the car for the day. And it'll be nice to catch up. If he's in town. I've been wanting to go to a lek for years."

Alana usually takes Isobel with her when she goes birding. It means she had to stay on gravel public trails, can't army crawl through the brush to get the shot she wants, and never sees much interesting save the same blue jays over and over. But that's okay, you make sacrifices. What she always wants is to roll off the trail, into the plush grass, and let it bind over her shoulders in a cocoon. And just wait. Listen to the tiny sounds and the squirm of earthworms trapped under her belly. Just wait for something to hop in front of her. Of course, she can't do that. She's walking with her baby on a pathway flanked with aspens, where joggers and dog walkers brush past her, survey her.

It's a five-hour drive from Calgary to Innisfree, but Alana half-dozed for the first three. They'd left at 1 a.m. Isobel's absence, just for one day, is disorienting. For this one day, she's stepping out of the shell and becoming twenty-one again. She feels like she has no organs, but it's a little bit freeing. Like cutting off all your hair, even if it looks bad.

Eight years ago, Elijah and Alana sat in someone's backyard at a party. Music and chatter thrummed from inside. Alana leaned her back against the wall with a garden hose bundled against her hip. They'd arrived together, like they always did, and Alana had orbited him while he socialized and flirted. He would always lean against something, forearm up against a wall, hip tilted into a table. Always a fluid bend to his posture, while she stood next to him, both hands on her drink.

They'd retreated to the backyard at 2 a.m., when Alana had remembered that a meteor shower or a special moon or some rare celestial event was going to occur. She'd fluttered her hands, and Elijah had caught her elbows to steady her, then led them outside. Light hazed the sky, but they'd stayed there, forgot why they'd gone outside initially.

The house had a vegetable patch, so she plucked mint leaves and ate them. Elijah said they tasted soapy. She uprooted a mangled carrot.

"That carrot looks radioactive," Elijah said.

"No, this is what normal carrots look like. The store just throws away the ugly ones or shapes them into nice ones." The carrot had split over a rock, like a ravine into two tributaries. "Here, it's like a wishbone. Let's wish, Eli." She felt drunk and dreamy. The light pollution softened the stars. It didn't seem impossible for the wish to come true; they could have

willed anything into existence. The backyard was a circus. The carrot was a genie in a lamp. She could wish on all the shooting stars they couldn't see.

He took one end. "How about, instead of a wish, the winner gets a dare."

She didn't want a dare, she wanted a wish. She wanted to will something into existence with him, not will him into something. But she spoke faster than she thought, so took her half of the carrot and said, "Sure."

They tugged, and snapped. An uproar from inside signalled someone had won a game of beer pong and the sound hummed through the wall into her thigh. He got the stalks.

"I win." He eyed the bottle leaned against her hip. "You should probably take another shot." She did, eyes on his face, cinnamon whisky hot through her nose and throat. He swung open a pocket knife. "We give each other matching scars."

"That's not a good dare. That sucks for both of us."

"It's one of those things where, in a year, you'll be glad you did it."

"Why? Because I'll have a gross scar I can't hide?"

"Because you regret things you don't do more than things you do. Besides, I won the carrot wishbone. Roll up your sleeve," he said. The notion seemed a little exciting. It would scar, and hurt, but the danger was alluring. It almost made her want to do it.

She didn't even ask him what he was going to draw before the knife bit into her bicep. There was a tearing, an unknitting. The pain was distant, something that would hurt tomorrow; it would be a hangover. The pain felt like adrenaline. A trickle of blood dripped off her elbow and into the dirt. The plants would drink it all up. She'd become part of them, her DNA chopped up in someone's salad. She plucked another mint leaf and ate it. Blood coiled between her fingers.

"Done."

"What is it?"

"An E." He wiped the blade clean on his jeans. "Now, carve a nice A for me, Lana?"

Alana pressed the serrated edge to his arm enough to indent his skin, but not enough to draw blood. "I can't do this," she said. "I'm drunk." Her own wound throbbed. Around the knife, her palm was sticky with blood.

"Wishbone, Alana. Wishbone."

"No, no. We have to wait until I'm more sober." She pressed her fingertips to her temples.

"You're too responsible a drunk. The point is that we do it now. That's the whole point, that they match. Not tomorrow, not in an hour. Now. In this garden. Right now. I don't care how it looks."

She nicked the skin. "Is it true alcohol makes you bleed more?"

"Sounds like an urban legend."

"I think it's true."

"Cut me, Alana."

The first line opened like an eyelid. Blood smeared his skin too much for her to see what she was doing. When she blinked, she saw double for flash moments. The thing that felt most wrong was that it was her initial, like this was a brand, like she was trying to mark him as her own belonging, like she could trap him in her possession forever. She listed other things the A could stand for. Apple. Appleseed. Alberta. Ash. Alligator. Amethyst. Aquarius. Alchemy. Airplane. Azalea.

It wasn't a bad A. The angle was wonky. The cross section lopsided. But it wasn't too bad an A. A for a good grade. A for a job well done. A the first. A the beginning. He won, he wished, he got.

She cleaned the A in the bathroom. Blood flecked onto the floor and counter. She rooted through the medicine cabinet while he sat on the bathtub edge. She'd make it an A that would heal clean: dabbed it with a cotton ball, flushed it with antiseptic, gummed the wound with polysporin. She dumped toothbrushes from a cup and handed him water with acetaminophen.

"I'll take two." He held up a peace sign. There were only two left, but her arm didn't hurt too bad. It was just sticky and pulsing like a heart in the wrong place. She closed her work with crisscrossed Band-Aids, and wondered if it was too late in her degree to switch from sociology to nursing.

Elijah fell asleep in the bathtub—nicely bandaged, shirt bloody. She sat on the counter and tried to doctor herself. When she touched the injury, pain shot from her fingers. She tried to clean it with a cotton ball, but the tacky blood pulled the fibres apart and wisps stuck to the wound.

Instead, she searched through Elijah's pocket for the knife. He slumped against the tiles, limbs overhanging the tub lip. Who carries around a knife? She washed that instead, in scalding water. The water ran clean, and her hands were clean, and her skin mottled red from heat, but she kept washing it as her own cut scabbed. She couldn't stop thinking about how strange it was that he carried around a knife. Wouldn't that be something: to be more dangerous than anyone realized, to have that potential.

Not far out of Innisfree, in a dun field, male sharp-tailed grouse gather for their mating dance. The sky looks like embers and ashes. Behind them, a dry riverbed and sparse birch trees—a forest the colour of bones. Ahead of them, grass the texture of burlap awaits the dance.

The bird hide is a structure of faded wood, particle boards with narrow slits for eyes or lenses. Behind the blind, a rough wooden floor, low and small enough that they have to crouch with their knees touching.

The grouse arrive with throaty cries, backs speckled brown and white with arrowed tails, orange crowns, and splashes of purple wobbling on the sides of their throats as they sing. They bob their heads and cross the grass with full-bodied struts.

Cramped in the hide, Alana's hips ache from being pressed to the wood, her back from leaning upright. Elijah takes photos in bursts, as if every moment of the lek will be an important keepsake. Alana only takes photos when she remembers, when she's more focused on remembering than being present. Even when she takes photos, she knows she'll probably never look at them again. Sometimes she deludes herself into thinking that when Isobel is eight or twelve or fifteen, they'll sit together on the couch and Isobel will be interested enough to look through them. Dozens of washed-out photos of birds in a sepia field.

They watch the display for hours. It goes like this: two grouse approach each other, circle each other. They spread their wings, the tips rounded toward the ground, and they begin to spin, rattling their upright tails. Sometimes, they fight, clipping the other's torso or head with their talons. It's the best two hours she's had in a long time, even though her bones hurt. She matters less than these birds, and that's what makes it so good.

She doesn't know why she's so unhappy. Not in this moment, but outside of this moment. Her life feels like an ibuprofen-smothered ache, like anxiety behind the meds. Everything should be pink and working. She has a healthy daughter. She has a cup of mint photosynthesizing on her windowsill. She takes vitamins, has rosy cheeks, waist-length hair.

"They're called fire birds," she whispers. Elijah pulls away from the peep. "Sharp-tailed grouse. They're also called fire birds."

"I didn't know that."

"You know why?" She wants to tell him something he doesn't know, be right for once, be the prophet or the scholar and tell him something more interesting than turning water bottles into socks and stealing a poplar from their university quad. "It's because they require brush fires to

live. They need open habitats. Isn't that strange?" A bird whines, and for a moment she thinks it's her daughter crying. Her heart kicks at her throat.

"Why would it be strange?"

"Because fires destroy everything else. But they've evolved to depend on them."

"They're just birds, Alana."

They could be in that backyard again, a second chance at that same moment. She'd just wanted to make a wish, a pretty one that could float between them like an iridescent soap bubble. They could pop it and smile through the splatter. They could make the wish together, for each other. Health and happiness and easy final exams. Good summer internships and cheap plane tickets. The stars tell her who they are, but where can she read who she would have been if she'd won the snap? She knows only this: sometimes you let someone into your life despite knowing that one day they'll hurt you. Sometimes you let that person in because you know they will.

Alana can't move, or she'll fall out of the hide. She chews her thumbnail, then tries to hide the bad habit by balling her hand, even though he definitely noticed. A child's habit. Her mother used to dip her fingers into jalapeno brine to deter her. It only gave her an unnatural tolerance for heat. "Do you think they think about that?"

"The birds? They're birds."

"The ecosystem has to burn for them to thrive. Other things live there, too."

"They definitely don't think about that."

"It just seems unfair to me."

"It's not unfair. It's just nature."

She can't really argue with that.

He leans forward, sits up tall. She mirrors him, like a mockingbird.

"Here," he lifts the camera from her lap, frees the strap from around her neck, and places it in the scratchy grass. She hugs her knees. Their shins press together. He fiddles with her jacket drawstring. Tugs, and her jacket hood scrunches. "It's one of those things that's just inevitable," he says. And she supposes, that seems about true. She can't argue with that.

She's not sure who leans toward who. One of them does, and it'll be easier tomorrow if it's not her. She realizes with surprise, when the heat of his breath finds hers, that this is the first time they've ever kissed. The roommate had thought they'd been sleeping together. She means to pull back, because if she does now it can be something she lies about until she

forgets, but she laces their fingers on the hide floor. It's been so long since she's decided anything that she's not sure she remembers how. His other hand knits up the back of her skull and into the base of her braid. She can't decide whose fault she wants this to be. Right before they'd snapped that carrot, she'd practiced how she was going to pronounce the words, how she'd fold her tongue around them. *Kiss me. I dare you to kiss me.*

His hands close around her waist and he pulls her in, first like a question, then insistent. She hooks her knees over his hip bones.

She's known this would happen. She's known since wishbone. Inevitable. Potential energy. A match sleeping with its face against the striking surface. He unbuttons her shirt from the bottom up, toward her throat. The sleeves snag on her elbows when she tries to shrug it off. She could mention Ross, but she doesn't. Cold goosefleshes her torso, like she's stepped into a ghost. He slips his shirt over his head and her hands fit into the swoop of his shoulder blades. Maybe he'll see her wedding ring, or feel its bite on the back of his neck. Her back slides across the splintery wood; her spine notches with the planks. He folds his fingers under the waist of her jeans and pushes the denim down her hips. She could say she's married. She could say it right now. Instead, she listens to a heart beating. Feathers rustle on the other side of the blind. Maybe he'll see the scar from her C-section, but her chest is caged under his chest, and his hip bone crushes into her waist, and he doesn't. She is either gaining control or losing it. Holding her breath for a different reason depending on the answer. Maybe she should have another baby. When she gets home, she'll tell Ross she wants to have another baby.

To Elijah, she doesn't have a daughter, and she doesn't have a husband, and not because she never told him. It's because she never grew up. She is still twenty-one and in a backyard eating mint leaves and doing shots of Fireball. She is still baking pot brownies for his friends and tenderly carving an A into his arm. She is still sitting on her dorm room bed, and he's sitting on the other side. She bumped their fingertips, then wefted their knuckles together. They held hands, that was all. A neighbour is going to tell her roommate he was there, and the roommate is going to think they had sex.

His breath frays against her ear. The air in her lungs feels solid. This is not like sex with Ross, dreamy and slow and safe. Habitual. Once a week on the duvet they've had for four years. In his neck, she no longer finds a scent distinct to him, but a woven-togetherness of them both that blankets their entire house. Elijah thumbs the vein in her wrist. It's

strangely reminiscent of the way she'd imagined sex with Elijah would be when she was in college, that her fears and her body would thaw under his gaze and hands.

His scar is faded and pale, smoothed out. It has no distinct shape. It could be a scrape from a biking accident or a knife fight, depending on who he's telling the story to. Her own scar is still jagged and maroon, the lines raised. People always ask, "What does the E stand for?" Ross saw it the first time they slept together, stopped her half-clothed, panicked, and asked if she used to cut herself. They'd started dating in winter, so she'd worn long sleeves on their early dates.

"It was just some stupid thing my friend did at a party once," she'd said.

"Someone did that to you?"

"It's fine. I let him."

"My god Alana. That looks like it hurt."

"Not really." It had hurt, she just didn't want to talk about it, because the real story—wishbone carrot and Elijah passed out in the bathtub and an empty bottle of acetaminophen returned to the cabinet—made her feel at fault and so, so stupid. It had hurt, but it hadn't hurt more than she'd needed him right then. If anything, it had fulfilled a kind of obligation; it had hurt the amount she figured was necessary for him to exist in her life.

She tilts her head back to look at the sky. Grouse chant and scratch on the other side of the blind. There had been a lot of sounds on the other side of the wall, at that party. He'd dug the blade into her muscle; she only gave him a scratch. She gave him both the painkillers. They don't match, like he said was the point. Wasn't this supposed to be permanent, that some piece of each other would be in the bed of every lover they ever had, and in whatever grave they finally settled in?

Soon, he'll drive her home. It will take five hours. Her clothes will be recently buttoned shut. Alana has no idea what they'll talk about. Maybe she'll flick through her photos and they won't speak at all. Maybe he'll ask her if she still gardens, because he'll try to act like he remembers who she is. He has no idea who she is. Maybe she'll subtly slip her wedding ring into her pocket, or maybe she'll fold her hands in her lap in just the right way to show it off. Maybe she'll tug her jacket tighter around her shoulders and feel a splinter wedged into her back. Maybe she'll tell him about it, but maybe she won't.

Jade Wallace

CONTRETEMPS

It is hard to believe in
the apocalypse when,
so many times, we have
passed in dread the eve
of our devastation, only
to wake and find that we
must still fulfill our dull
obligations. The narcissist
in me, anguished and myopic,
longs for a waning world's
saturnine symmetry to
complete the lyric lunar
phase of a girl. I think
I might relax at the close
of known life, see death
as letup, end to soul-trying
attacks. Are you and I of
a kind in this? Most at ease
reclining in the arms of those
who are dying as the sun burns
to dust and the world elapses
because, at last, not one
thing can be asked of us.

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childhood, everyday mundane beauty, and a desire to calm her anxious mind.

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Lou Garcia-Dolnik is a mixed-race Filipinx-Australian writer and editor working on unceded Gadigal land. A poetry editor for *Voiceworks* and alumnus of the Banff Centre's Emerging Writers Intensive, they were recently shortlisted in Overland's Judith Wright Poetry Prize.

Carmella Gray-Cosgrove grew up in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver and now lives in St. John's, Newfoundland. Her fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Riddle Fence*, *Broken Pencil* online, *The Antigonish Review*, *Freefall Magazine*, and an anthology called *Hard Ticket*. She is currently working on a collection of short stories.

Becky Hagenston is the author of three story collections: *Scavengers*, *Strange Weather*, and *A Gram of Mars*. Her fiction appears in *Pushcart Prize 2020* and has been selected twice for the O. Henry Award. She lives in Starkville, Mississippi and teaches at Mississippi State University.

a.m. kozak is a social worker currently living in Ottawa.

Angélique Lalonde's ancestors are Métis and Québecois. She lives on unceded Gitxsan Territory. Angélique is the recipient of the 2019 Journey Prize and has work published or forthcoming in: *The Journey Prize Anthology*, *PRISM international* (56.4), *The Malahat Review*, *Prairie Fire*, and *Room*. She holds a PhD in Anthropology.

Grace Lau is a Hong-Kong-born, Chinese-Canadian writer living in TkaRonto, part of the territory of the Mississaugas, Anishnabeg, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat peoples. Her debut collection of poetry is forthcoming in 2021 from Guernica Editions. She's been published in *Grain*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Arc*, and elsewhere. Find her at @thrillandgrace.

Helen McClory is a writer from Scotland. Her books include *On the Edges of Vision*, *Flesh of the Peach*, *Mayhem & Death*, and *The Goldblum Variations*. There is a moor and a cold sea in her heart.

Caroline McDonald is a poet living in Coquitlam, BC. She holds a B.A. in Creative Writing and Psychology from Kwantlen Polytechnic University and works in the non-profit arts sector. Recently, her writing has focused on her experiences as a disabled woman. She enjoys exploring new trails, knitting, and tacos.

Cooper Skjeie (/sh-ay/) is a Métis-Germanic educator, curriculum developer, and emerging writer from Treaty 6 and Métis Territory. He was longlisted for the 2019 Pacific Spirit Poetry Prize, and his work appears or is forthcoming in *Grain* and *The Mamawi Project Zine*. He lives in Saskatoon.

Benjamin Swett is a writer and photographer based in Manhattan and Upstate New York. His books include *Route 22* and *New York City of Trees*, the latter of which won the New York City Book Award for Photography. His essays have been published or are forthcoming in *Cabinet*, *Fiction*, *Salmagundi*, and *Orion*.

Diane Villadsen is a creative commercial photographer based in the San Francisco Bay Area. Through her photos, she aims to transport the viewer into an alternate universe dominated by colour, geometry, and a dash of "weird."

Jade Wallace's poetry, fiction, and essays have been published or are forthcoming internationally, including in *Room, Vallum, The Dalhousie Review*, and *The Stockholm Review*. They are currently completing an M.A. in Creative Writing in Windsor, Ontario, the land of the Three Fires Confederacy.

Liz Worth is the author of seven books, including *The Truth is Told Better This Way* (Book*hug) and *Treat Me Like Dirt: An Oral History of Punk in Toronto and Beyond* (ECW Press). She lives in Toronto where she works as a tarot reader and astrologer. Find her at lizworth.com.

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"I hello gorgeous every shape of moon—I
medicine to sky listen—I lay—I sprawl—I feed—I
toil—I trouble o I choke—I where there's smoke—"

— *Hari Alluri, "Jungle, at Voltage"*

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