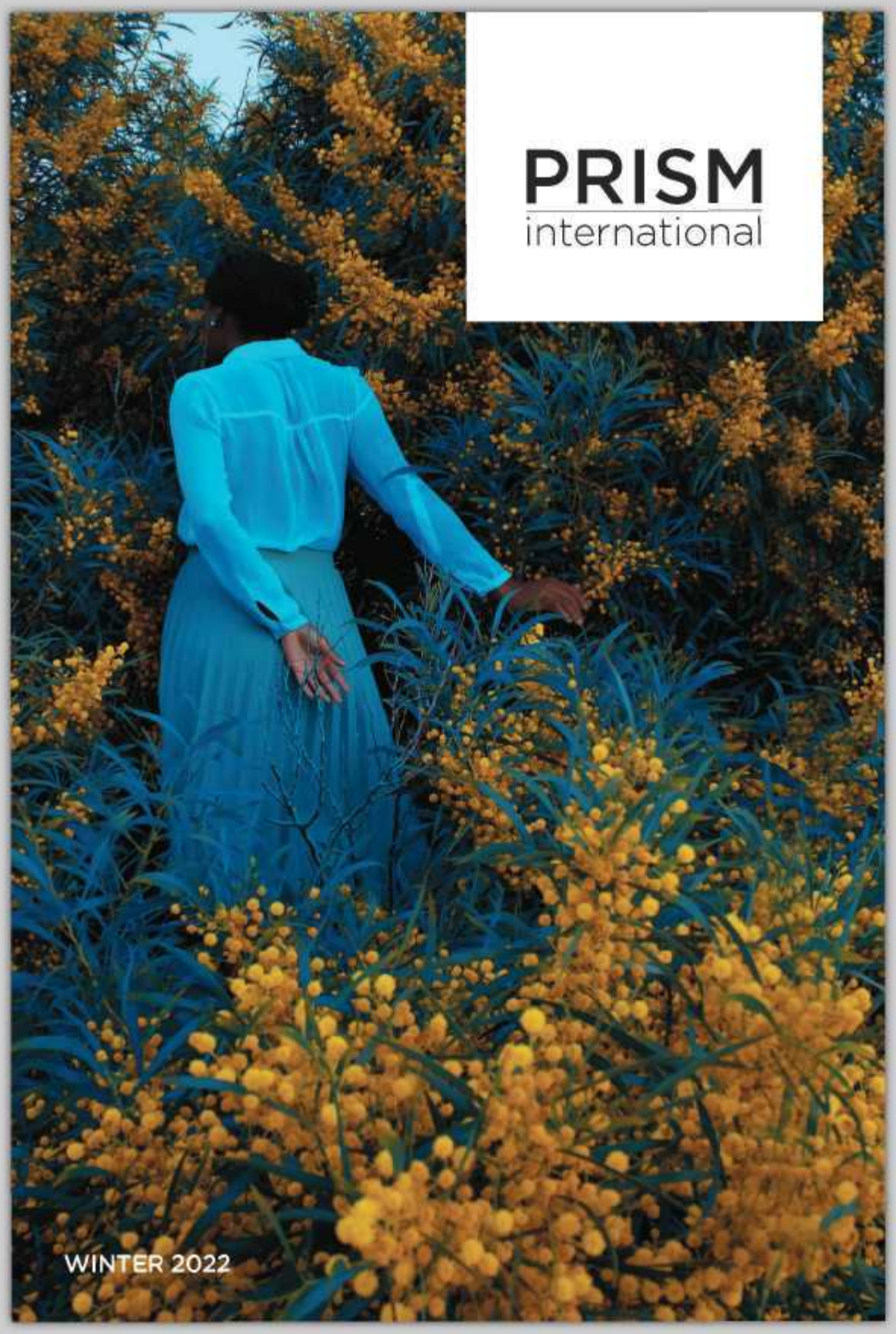
PRISM
international



WINTER 2022

PRISM international

CREATIVE NON-FICTION CONTEST

GRAND PRIZE

"Translation" by Emma Zimmerman

FIRST RUNNER-UP

"Pelvis" by Jess Taylor

SECOND RUNNER-UP

"Notes from Encampment" by Daniel Kessel

READERS

Warren Bowen, Maria Ford, Rasma Haidri
Natalina Halas, Colleen Haughey, Micah Kj
Tonya Lailey, Clayton Longstaff, Margaret McCutcheon
Sofia Osbourne, Marc Perez, Chris Preston
Jo Ramsey, Roshni Riar, Marianna Schultz
Andrea Scott, Sierra Tan

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

Website: prismmagazine.ca

Copyright © 2022 PRISM international. Content copyrights remain with authors. Cover image © Fares Micue and 20x200, "The moment is now," 2021.

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

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

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

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

January 2022. ISSN 0032.8790

a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

UBC CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM

BRITISH COLUMBIA ARTS COUNCIL

Canada Council for the Arts
Conseil des Arts du Canada

PRISM international

PROSE EDITOR	Vivian Li
POETRY EDITOR	Emily Chou
EXECUTIVE EDITORS	Alison Barnett
	Emma Cleary
	Eleanor Panno
FACULTY ADVISOR	Sharon McGowan
DESIGNER	andrea bennett

EDITORIAL BOARD

Shauna Andrews, Dylan Bach, Tanya Banerjee, Heather Bant
Phoebe Blanding, Andrew Calderone, Emily Cann
Chia-Hua Margaret Chu, Josh Comia, Zachary Cooper
Zoë Dagneault, Paul Dhillon, Sonia Di Placido, Brook Ellis
Síle Englert, Isabella Esser-Munera, Robyn Finlay, Eleanor Fuller
Rasma Haidri, Solveig Herzum, Sarah Hobbs, Sara Ibrahim
Samantha Jones, Madura Katta, Mimi Lam, Tena Laing
Dayna Mahannah, Quang Mai, RJ McDaniel, Lisa Moore
Stuart Moore, Carmen Morgan, Kristen Morrison
Catherine Mwitta, Rachel Oestreich, Rick Overwater
Deborah Patz, Fiona Revill, Owen Schaefer, Antonia Schubert
Jaime Silverthorn, Elisabeth Shenher, Colin Sterling, Cecilia Stuart
kathy thai, Bevan Thomas, Elaine van der Geld, Heather Walmsley
Ashraf Zaghal, Mormei Zanke

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

Brandi Bird

Affordable, world class literary cross-training at UBC

Write and learn on our breathtaking campus in **Vancouver, Canada**, one of the world's most livable cities. Or participate in a **vibrant online community** from wherever you live. Study at the BA Minor, BFA or MFA level, or take non-credit courses through the edX platform.

Why choose UBC?

- Work with award-winning faculty.
- Unprecedented 12 genres of study.
- Entrance and continuing scholarships.
- Flexible, part-time low residency MFA.
- TA in undergraduate writing courses.*
- Teach in local high schools.*
- Edit and manage one of Canada's oldest literary magazines, PRISM international.*
- Participate in the Brave New Play Rites theatre festival.

*Note: some opportunities are MFA-only

www.creativewriting.ubc.ca

CONTENTS

JUDGE'S ESSAY

Marcos Gonsalez 7 Judge's Essay

NON-FICTION

Emma Zimmerman 9 Translation
Daniel Kessel 38 Notes from Encampment
Ronaldo Acuna 53 Fathers
Jess Taylor 62 Pelvis

FICTION

Judith Pond 25 Pictures
Tehila Hakimi 82 Relocation
Trans. Joanna Chen

POETRY

Janette Platana 21 This is where she showed me the weed for washing hair
Antony Fangary 23 Psalm 47
Camille Lendor 34 there are *Two Fridas*
Ashleigh A. Allen 35 I see three bison before
Poonam Dhir 36 aftermath in hot air
Sun Tzu-ping 50 Placing the Body
Trans. Nicholas Wong
Debora Anthonypillai 51 As the Sun Comes Down
Fiona Tinwei Lam 58 Pentimento
Betsy Struthers 59 Can't sleep
ALHS 60 the collarbone percussionist
Elena Bentley 78 Losing the Excess
Jesse Holth 80 Bodies

Contributors 91

PRISM *PRESENTS*

GROUSE GRIND LIT PRIZE
FOR VERY SHORT FORMS

CONTEST OPENS: Feb. 15, 2022
DEADLINE: April 15, 2022
ENTRY FREE: $15

CONTEST PRIZES:

Grand Prize: $500
First Runner-Up: $150
Second Runner-Up: $50

PRISMMAGAZINE.CA

MOTHER TONGUE
PUBLISHING LIMITED
Salt Spring Island

AUTUMN FICTION AND POETRY

Half Brothers and Other Stories
–a novella and four fictions–
Bill Stenson
Illustrations by David Lester
978-1-896949-85-7 | 165 pages | $19.95

From the Cowichan Valley, children born to ex-cons, lawyers, longshoremen, wood carvers, investors and gamblers write their own new-generation tales. "These stories tease with sly humour and, like all great stories, never fail to surprise." – Bill Gaston

blue gait
new poems
shauna paull
978-1-896949-88-8 | 85 pages | $19.95

Long-awaited, limned in deep listening, an elegant and wise songbook in the key of alterity. blue gait offers witness to another way of living where "human and material concerns are not at the centre. "In the face of grief and loss, her words sing us back to life, again and again." – Rita Wong

Order from your favourite bookstore. Free shipping when ordering direct.
mothertonguepublishing.com

Marcos Gonsalez

JUDGE'S ESSAY

Great writing transforms us. When writers present some of their best writings, it is always difficult to make a choice of who is best among them. That is the difficulty I had when judging these various nonfiction pieces which all were stunning in their own ways, as each told a unique story of a particular kind of searching. The searching for family members we have never met before. The searching for how to care for one's body after trauma and the changes it undergoes. The searching for one's origins and familial pasts which seem foreclosed. Each piece showcased a riveting search for self and knowing that only the written word knows how to do best.

I was moved by "Notes From Encampment," and the ways it beautifully, and contemplatively, showed us the searching for an aunt and one's cultural roots. This piece asks of the reader what it means to paint a portrait of someone you have only known from one perspective, engaging this question in thoughtful and nuanced ways. "Pelvis" was a piece which awed me. It relayed an important and oft-overlooked message to the reader about the body: the body's fragility, the pain a body goes through, the body's need to be recognized as something which can be changed and transformed. I was moved by the way this piece highlighted pain and how it shapes us, in ways that others might not always be able to witness. Pain is real and experienced, nonetheless, and this writing reminds us of that important lesson. The prose of this piece moved, strikingly, as if it were a body, guiding the reader through its individualized rhythms and movements. I was most especially captivated by, "Translation." Each sentence found me mesmerized by the way the writing captured the longing to know one's origins, and to know why those we love make the choices they make which ultimately shape our lives. This piece sought answers where answers are hard to come by, and where answers are intentionally not meant to be found. Yet, by showing us the attempts in language to figure it out, we were shown how a writer is best equipped to probe these impossibilities. There was a studied tenderness, too, in the approach this piece took to inquiring into the past and to learning erased histories from our elders. This piece emphasized to us the tightrope that needs to be walked when you do not want to hurt those you love when trying to find answers.

We search in efforts of being transformed. To become what we could never imagine ourselves becoming. In their searching, each of these pieces demonstrated the power of transformation, and the way writing lets that happen.

Emma Zimmerman

TRANSLATION

My mother did not learn she was Puerto Rican until she turned ten years old. The occasion was a camping trip to Canada, a station wagon, Papa and Grandma in the front seat, and three kids and a dog in the back. There was a border. A man in a uniform. A request for documentation, identification. *Born in San Juan, Puerto Rico*, he read aloud.

Suddenly, my mother, not yet my mother—in frayed jeans and a pastel sweatshirt—piped up from the backseat, "But Daddy, you were born right here in New York, right?"

When my mother retells this story, I can see her, every bit of her. She is all skinny limbs and wide eyes, a high-pitched voice, and ragged brown hair. I can hear the childish slipping from her voice. It is the type of slipping that happens when you realize the adults in your life are not just morning briefcases and newspapers, tattooed with coffee stains. I can see my mother, and yet, I search for him. I search for his darting eyes, his hands clutched to the steering wheel, and his coarse black hair, thinning on a tanned scalp. Though I have known my grandfather for my entire life, I have spent those twenty-five years searching for him.

I was in seventh grade when I began to test the findings of my excavations—to show them, speak them, and roll them on my tongue. Papa and I sat at the long, wooden table that my parents had purchased when we moved from New York to rural Connecticut. It was a table that could fit our extended family for brunch, where a pack of neighbourhood kids with L.L. Bean backpacks and fleece sweatshirts could huddle over homework sheets after school. To me, it was just a table. To my parents it was hard work, comfort; a bigger, prettier table, to go with this bigger, prettier house. I wonder what it was to Papa—whether he relaxed into the sleek, wooden embodiment of all that he, and by extension she, and by extension we, had become. I stenciled words on a fill-in-the-blank worksheet, the kind I fancied myself too old for at age twelve. Papa sat catty-corner to me; his eyes locked on T*he New York Times*. My eyes remained locked on the sheet in front of me, too, but my mind was elsewhere. Slowly, I moved my gaze upward towards Papa; I asked him for help with my Spanish homework.

"I don't remember any of those words," he mumbled, turning back to his newspaper. So, I began to savor the sounds aloud—the flavors tantalizing, provocative; the way sin always tastes.

They were clothing words, all of them: shirt, jacket, pants.

Tantalizing, rich. A diabetic holding a piece of chocolate cake to his tongue. The yeast of the bagels he brought in a bag from Long Island—a welcome jab at our Connecticut pretenders.

I let the words drift through the air, mixing with that yeasty-seedy. Provocation. But he just tightened the skin around his lips, his words stitched shut.

Dress, skirt, pants.

Breathing, tightening, stitching.

Sweater, tie, shoes.

How *could* this not bate him?

"Zapatos!" he yelled. "Zapatos, shoes. And that's about all I remember."

***

What he has given me:

- A book filled with medical jargon that I will probably never read. Gifted to me because I like *non-fiction*.
- A home-baked carrot cake, each year on my birthday. When I went to school in Iowa—over a thousand miles from him—

it traveled halfway across the country. A springform of sugar and flour, eggs and golden raisins, cushioned by Tupperware and bubble-wrap, and held in my college mailroom for the weekend.

- A pair of binoculars. I am eight years old. Red fleeting in the skeleton of December trees. Hands on my shoulders: *find it with your eyes. Your eyes first. Do not move those eyes. Bring them to your eyes.* I am not here—at an iced-over pond in a frost-topped forest in Connecticut—to see birds. I am here to see him: gleeful, impassioned, like a little boy; showing me all that he knows.

***

Papa arrived in Harlem when he was nine years old. Actually, I don't know this for certain. Nine is what my mother, his daughter; and my grandmother, his wife, have deduced. Nine or ten. But he tells us that he rode the train to Yankee Stadium, climbed the steps and ate a hotdog in the stands, alone, at seven years old. He tells us he was just a baby when he came here, that he doesn't remember San Juan.

But he also tells the waiter at Di'Maggios that he is Italian. He tells the waitress at Shish Kebabs that his family came from an island in Greece. Papa might be trained in medicine, but I think he is pretty good at telling stories, too.

On the rare occasions he speaks of his childhood, it comes in spurts of smiled-upon memories. His voice is cautious at first, terse and quiet sentences that crescendo as he warms up, loudening and lengthening into images: His mother—toiling all day at a garment factory in Midtown West, before taking her evening shift at the restaurant in Harlem. His mother—*The best person I knew. The most hardworking woman. Never wore makeup a day in her life; she didn't need to. She was beautiful.* I can hardly imagine him, now a staunch atheist, standing in front of the Baptist congregation, lifting his voice to meet the choir—a cherub boy, black loafers, and a long robe. *The only boy soprano*, he'll remind us, whenever an opera song comes on and his face does that sinking, searching thing that it does—his eyes widening, and his jaw loosening into the slightest smile. On schooldays, he tells us, he would wake at four in the morning to deliver milk. He would climb aboard that big truck with those big metal crates and that big milkman. And Papa, with muscles too big for

his little frame, would haul crates and jugs of milk to restaurants all over Manhattan.

In these rare moments, he is an artist—eyes aglow with remembrance—and we want so badly to not break the spell. We know it is fleeting already, his voice drifting, mellowing, and slowing to a pause. Slowly. He will change the subject.

In these moments, I grab hold of his puzzle-piece memories, flipping, turning and trying to fit them into the memories my mother and grandmother have handed me. I will hold his up to the light to discern fact from fiction and hope that one day it might build to a luminous picture—complete and only true.

Papa's mother died of an allergic reaction to penicillin when he was just a teenager, but he was not orphaned. Papa had a father. He just never speaks of that man. Still, I feel that I have met my great-grandfather in some long-ago movie. Or maybe in a dream or a ripped photograph. Or, perhaps, just in my mother's memories. He never wanted Papa to leave Harlem. He never wanted Papa to go to college, to medical school, or to residency. He never wanted Papa to become a doctor—a Long Island man who went camping and played tennis on the weekends. He wanted Papa to stay right there in Harlem and take over the family bodega.

My mother remembers an older man coming to stay with the family for a week when she was about twelve years old. *This is your grandfather*, Papa told her. But the old man was not interested in talking to the kids. He couldn't speak their language, anyway. He was there to recover from surgery—some orthopedic procedure Papa paid for. He moved back to San Juan soon after that visit, and my mother never saw him again.

Papa had two younger siblings, too. Lucía and Arturo.[1] Had a sister. Had or *have* a brother, I am not sure which. Lucía and Arturo. But I have never heard those names on his lips before. And I wonder, if his lips moved in an Lucía and Arturo formation, would I hear the drawn-out vowels? The soft, romance consonants? Would I catch a glimpse of the accent he gave away so many years ago? *Lucía and Arturo.* Would any sound come out at all?

There is so much Papa has never spoken: Lucía and Arturo; his father, Roberto the First. I can hardly picture that boy—the boy who sold milk and sang soprano in the Baptist choir. I can only picture the man who got a scholarship to college, who worked his way through medical school,

1 Names changed for confidentiality.

through residency, who denounced religion, who went on camping trips and played tennis on weekends; the man who left Harlem and never looked back.

***

What he has given me:

- A trip to Alaska. I am ten years old. We sit in a canoe watching grizzly bears catch salmon with their woolly paws. They grab and strip bones, feeding and catching. Neither he, nor I, have ever been so close to something so wild before.
- A college education. He paid for much of mine. He is the reason my parents are so comfortable; the reason why I never worked the hours that they did. That he did. He is the reason why my parents might retire soon.
- A down coat for the Midwest winter. It is deep purple and falls to my thighs. It keeps me warm. When I walk to class, when I am caught in a snowstorm, and when it is still dark and cold in the mornings, it keeps me warm. I think all he ever wanted was to keep me warm.

***

In residency, Papa fell in love with a young nursing student, Irma.[2] Her accented English sounded nothing like his—the robe he kept locked behind the door of an apartment in Harlem, wearing it only on the rare occasions when he visited his father. No, she wore her identity in patches, home-sewn on linen dresses; and ate it in liverwurst sandwiches, unpacked from brown bags in the hospital cafeteria. She didn't just visit her parents; she dined with them every night, in a German neighbourhood in Queens. I think Papa fell in love with her because she knew exactly who she was and wasn't afraid to speak it, wear it, or eat it.

The other nursing students were bashful—*Yes Doctor. No Doctor. Whatever you say, Doctor.* But she spoke to him like a childhood buddy and knocked him down three pegs when his head got too white for his body. She wanted to talk politics, the *New York Times* articles she read over the weekend and the historical oppression of immigrants. When

2 Name changed for confidentiality.

she grew frustrated that her nursing classmates couldn't pronounce her name, he started calling her *Emma*. Forty-five years later, their youngest grandchild would inherit that name. I would, and still do, spend most of my days trying to live up to it.

***

Translation: False Cognates

- *Embarazada* means pregnant, not embarrassed. A student in every single middle school Spanish class, without fail, has made this mistake—to the unceasing amusement of her peers.
- *Éxito* sounds like exit but means success. He has given me, his children, his grandchildren—all of us—a shot at so much *éxito*.
- *Roberto Ortega*[3] translates to Robert Orth. It was *Roberto* who finished top of his class in college. *Roberto* who finished top of his class in medical school. *Roberto* who applied to his first job. *Roberto* who they told to go back to his people. I know, because my mother told me. *Roberto, you will only find a job in Puerto Rico, or maybe Harlem. Go back to your people.* It was *Roberto* who went to city hall, *Roberto* who made the translation. But it is Robert, only Robert, who I ever knew. For, with that name, he became an entirely new man.

***

The Fairest Island

Papa's great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandfather was just a boy when Christopher Columbus landed in Puerto Rico. "The fairest island," he called it, smiling at the way the aqua water lapped the rocks when tucked away in a tree-shaded lagoon. "The fairest island," he said, as he proceeded to mine its fairest gold and militarize its fairest shores and sell its fairest families and rape its fairest girls.

---

3 Last name changed for confidentiality.

A few centuries later and a few less greats, Puerto Ricans began to migrate to the United States. None of this movement came as a surprise. Many had been bidding slow farewells for decades, if not centuries. Perhaps, they started waving goodbye when those first Spanish ships arrived, anchoring like knives on those fair, fair shores. There were plantation jobs turned to manufacturing jobs and domestic goods turned to export goods and some jobs turned to no jobs and love from Spain and love from the U.S.—and love that looked a lot like war.

In 1917, the United States Congress passed the Jones-Shafroth Act, granting Puerto Ricans something they called "citizenship with limitations." I imagine Woodrow Wilson announcing those words—some regal bravado in the way he lifted his chest. The coy whisper: *citizenship*; the deep breath, the lungs filled, the loud decree: *with limitations*. Suddenly, there was another Big Man in charge—the United States, that glimmering, promise-filled, open hand of a place. Puerto Ricans left in droves.

In another twenty years, Papa's family would join them—a grocery store owner, a seamstress, two toddling things in patched knickers and weekly-shined shoes, and Papa, their oldest son. Papa was nine or ten years old on the day he arrived in Harlem. He was twenty-two years old when he left—to read books and fix brains and marry a nurse and have three kids and call himself Robert.

I am twelve years old when I travel to Puerto Rico for the first time. My father's mother, a widow and retired English as a Second Language teacher, acquires friends like photographs—the kind that you store in translucent sleeves in a vinyl album, placed beside novels and frames on a living room shelf. She keeps them close. She is Brooklyn-Jewish, and they are Polish, Swedish, Russian, Spanish, and Puerto Rican.

When I was a young child, I would associate my Jewish grandmother with warm and bright things—pastel blankets, soft baby birds, and French toast straight from the griddle. I am not sure whether these associations came from the fact that her body was softer than my other grandparents', her lap and arms the perfect throne to cushion my bony limbs. Or maybe because her honeyed voice recited words from the memory books she designed for my sister and me, her scent something like cinnamon mixed with high-end perfume. I like to think it was mostly because her house

was filled with people and accents of here and there. When her teaching friends retired to Puerto Rico, she joined them in the winters, renting an apartment in a peach-coloured tower by the sea.

In pictures from that first visit, I am all frizzy braids and skinny limbs. At the fortress in San Juan, a "Do Not Touch" sign stands beside a pile of bullets. I place a converse-clad foot on the pile, my arms splayed wide. My Jewish uncle laughs behind the camera lens. I am a soft rebellion waiting for the world to make me harder—still caged behind pink and green braces, scuffed Converse, and a baby face. I have just started to notice my Puerto Rican hips, the ones that will grow before the rest of me. I will gawk at them in flip-phone pictures, noting the way they bulge out from the rest of my bikini-clad, child's frame. It is not hatred; not yet. They are foreign items, not part of this person. Not part of this place.

When I return to school, I wear a tie-dye shirt, "Puerto Rico" in block letters across my chest. I am a tourist, simply that. And yet, in a white middle school in rural Connecticut, I am bemused by my otherness. I grip hard to my otherness. Knuckles whiten on tan skin. I tell teachers and friends that I spent the week visiting *family* in *San Juan*. I forget to mention the disconnect between the two subjects. I forget to mention that the *family* is a Jewish grandmother, that *San Juan* was never passed in blood from her to me, and that, while the two subjects surely exist together, somewhere, I have never met them that way—aside from Papa, I have never met *my family* from *San Juan*.

When I visit Papa a month later, I wear a different shirt. I don't show him the photos. We talk about the upcoming election—Obama versus Clinton, the melting snow, the birds outside the window—and never San Juan.

***

By the time I am seventeen, I know the history. I know the tourist traps, the casinos, the crumbling economy, the debate over statehood, debate over voting rights, the exoticizing and romanticizing of the place that has made me, and yet, that is far from mine.

I know that I do not know whether or not I should check Hispanic/Latino on my common application. Before the college deadline, I sit at my family's computer, checking and unchecking for what feels like an hour. I learn that a check mark can take human form—an imposter's smirk, fraudulent in that little white box.

I know that my mother pronounces Spanish words like a tween girl in her first foreign language class. We are visiting my Jewish grandmother when, at a restaurant in San Juan, she reads aloud—*cam, cameroon, cameroonees?*

Shrimp, Mom. Just say shrimp. I ask her if she wants to learn Spanish. *Oh no, I'm so bad at languages,* she giggles, girlish. I know. But I also know that, when we return to Connecticut, she buys a bunch of plantains, blackening them in a brown bag until they are ready to cook. I watch the way she scrolls through recipes.com, the quick clash of her knife on the chopping board, the sizzle of oil and cinnamon, the way she leans over the steam and breathes in, as if, by inhaling, she might reclaim missing pieces of her.

I know that I will follow that same recipe. A year later, sweet plantains will sizzle on a dorm room stove. I will share with my roommates, certain that I used too much cinnamon, the wrong type of oil; one thing, something, never quite right.

I am twenty-one years old when Hurricane Maria sweeps through Puerto Rico. I do not remember Papa talking about the hurricane. But I do remember him watching *PBS NewsHour* every Wednesday at 6 p.m. around that time, laying old newspapers on the white carpet to protect from dinner stains. He heats up leftovers for himself and my grandmother, eggplant parmesan from the Italian restaurant bubbling into palatability again. He watches the footage; I know, he must. There are pictures of pastel homes snapping in two, and windows and doors carried away. There are trees and powerlines fallen over misshapen remains—something like a T-shirt, something like a set of drawers—trapped within the rubble. Donald Trump tweets denial. My Jewish Grandmother sends money, makes phone calls, and frets over her friends in her second home. Papa sinks his fork into melted mozzarella and says nothing of his first.

Everyone loves Papa in that Long Island town. I am royal by association, in that Long Island town. At DiMaggio's, the chef comes out of the kitchen upon our arrival, his white apron striped in grease. At Yamaguchi's, we are escorted to a back table; there are plates of free appetizers and

platters of fruit. I have narrowly avoided set-ups with so many yacht club grandsons. I have endured unsolicited career advice by so many old, wealthy men. When I call the local physical therapist, I am given an appointment for that very day. In the waiting room, where patients sink further into plastic chairs and silent threats drift in wait-weary eyes, I am ushered past them all.

She is Dr. Orth's granddaughter, one PT says to the next. *Which granddaughter are you?* They ask. *The artist? The doctor?*

No, I'm the one they don't talk about, I respond, a joke barely audible in the sharpness of my voice.

Laughter, laughter, nervous laughter. *They talk about all of you. They love you so much. Such good people. Dr. Orth is such a good man.*

***

On the day my mother found out she was Puerto Rican, Papa had just gotten a job at a hospital on Long Island and moved his family out of the Bronx. To him, it felt like finally making it. To her, it felt like a lot of trees.

If my mother or her brothers had requested details about Papa's childhood before that car ride, the topic would have been easy to evade—to make up some story or leave for work. Papa didn't raise them, after all. Grandma did. He was always at the hospital—fixing every brain, every back, fixing and fixing, climbing and climbing—every step, for him, for them, for us.

A few years ago, we—grandparents, children, and grandchildren—were sitting around his big patio table, repeating oft-repeated stories the way families do. My uncle spoke of watching my mother play high school, and then college, lacrosse—of witnessing her team's big win.

"What do you mean?" Papa said. "Debbie never played lacrosse." My uncle stood up and walked to my mother's old bedroom. When he returned, he held a picture: a cluster of smiling girls, sticks, mouthguards, grainy pixels in a tabletop frame, high schoolers, a Long Island championship, and an undefeated season. "Here, meet your daughter," he said.

By the time Papa's six grandchildren came along, he wanted to be there. So, he showed up. For birthday cakes and piano recitals; for soccer games and track meets; for Christmas music, dancing to Rudolph the

Red-Nosed Reindeer around the kitchen. Every holiday, every birthday, and every graduation. In every picture, he was there.

And in the places where he was not entirely there—in queerness, in ripped jeans, in my piercings and tattoos, in paths that are not med school, law school, or business school—I watched him try.

When his best friend's grandchild changed their name, he asked me about pronouns. He wants to know why I hate Amazon, what bike I am riding, what books I am reading, what stories I am writing. He is searching for an open bench in the stands of some lacrosse game that he missed forty years ago. He wants to bake me a cake, to teach me about wine, to send me home to Brooklyn with all of the leftovers in his fridge. He once built a sandcastle with his own two hands—scooped it up from the little grains of sand that filled Jones Beach. And I know that he is trying to build it still—to smooth it, to bolster it, and to make it sturdy and still—with every hour of every day that he has left. I want to give him more time to build.

This December, Papa turned ninety-three. It seems that, every year, Grandma has a new scare with her heart. When she is in the hospital, Papa sits by her bed all day, for weeks on end. He talks with the nurses and doctors—jokes and tells them about his favorite surgeries, his favorite birds, his grandchildren, and what he ate for breakfast. They don't mind; they know him by name. Papa was once the chief of neurosurgery at that same hospital, and he points to his plaque hanging on the wall, each time he walks by.

When I visit Long Island, Grandma insists on walking down to the water with just her cane, and her own two legs. Papa storms away to the nearest picnic bench—*Fine! Fall again! Break your pelvis! Go back to the hospital!* So, I walk him to the water to calm him down, as if he were a child.

"I just want to protect her," Papa says to me, angry and swimming, in his baseball cap.

"I know, Papa," I say. "I know you do. It is so hard. Just so, so hard." On the way back to Grandma, I am walking slowly to stay with him, when suddenly he stops, a boyish smile flashing across his tanned face, and his arm raised to the trees above.

"Look! Quick!" he whisper-shouts. I see a bird, a flash of red, nestled in the skeleton of trees, and I am eight years old again, and he is teaching me how to use binoculars. *Find it with your eyes. Your eyes first. Do not move those eyes. Bring them to your eyes. Let me show you all that I know.*

Some days, Papa tells me that I look like my grandmother when she was young. Other days, he tells me that I look like his mother. *She didn't wear makeup a day in her life. Didn't need to, she was beautiful*, he'll say. I am not sure whether I look like both of them, or neither of them; I think I just look like a memory. And he is getting more sentimental every year.

My Jewish grandmother tells me I should try to find my family in Puerto Rico, that I should ask Papa about them. She says it like I am running out of time. I want to ask him. Instead, I let my questions linger on my tongue—chocolate cake, carrot cake, the yeast of a New York bagel. I let them linger and drift and sink. I want to ask him, but I have not found the language yet. So instead, I tell him about grad school. I tell him about Brooklyn. I tell him what I am reading. I tell him all that I know.

Janette Platana

THIS IS WHERE SHE SHOWED ME THE WEED FOR WASHING HAIR

from "Dear Upper Canada" or "French Knot"

It grows beside the ice-cold creeks
and tastes like mint: split its stem
with your thumbnail: eat the vein.
Not so much lather
but it feels good on the scalp.

Here, Queen Anne's Lace conceals
a carrot. Squawroot
to hurry your monthlies.
Pisanli for salad,
before the flowers come out.
The pink onion whose head is a pink ball of
pink feu sauvage stars.
That weesukapuka makes
real tea, pijoune,
best boiled over a fire in an iron kettle.
(Which she called
a duck—un canard).

Three sun dogs mean a week of cold.
Poplar leaves turn their backs to rain.
This is where she and her brothers walked home
through the storm,
together.
The youngest one, wolf-faced, scares me still
though he is dead and his teeth blackened long before.

A calf, a car, a dance, a knife.
The time she and her sisters rolled
their city cousin in a rag rug
for visiting while wearing a store
bought dress.

I have a Degree in English, a language I speak.
You taught me everything I know,
I say.

We don't even like the same books,
she replies. Where'd you learn to speak
that French like that?
The CBC?

Antony Fangary

PSALM 47

…the lord is a man of war
—Prime Prayer, First Hour, Coptic Agpeya

God snaps like an AK &
Blows oh's through mathematics.

A caterpillar flew into a bullet
& I saw god whisper through a clip.

The tenor was aromatic/static
splitting poppies and sermons.

Rust, fear, and love; both tracing
from trigger from jerk, from flash,

spitting light like art,
like splendor & shadow,

like lamps, sand, and old fairy tales, like
faith isn't just a loophole,

like loose leaf tobacco, like feta
cheese, like watermelon seeding

into strips of Xanax,
swelling faster than a

sober god can arrange bullet
casings into a painting

of North Africa as an old
Kalashnikovs factory,

ringed cleaned by
shoelaces and motor oil.

It was copper gossip,
it was full metal gospel,

hymns old as stone, old as
muzzle-breaks, & iron sights

cold forged into pity.
let your tongue rejoice in
salvation.

Judith Pond

PICTURES

For E.W.P.

Oh, the things you find when you're moving, which, here I go again…

- Antique cat scratching post in hall closet (which cat??)
- Ancient sandwich (from the anorexic phase) in vanished daughter's bookshelf
- Seriously ancient Kodak photos from before existence of said daughter, or iPhones, for that matter…

Here's a bunch from that long weekend back in 1976, when we took the Greyhound out to the Okanagan, to visit Eric's parents…

The Bus Station

There they are. Bob and Ilene, world's hippest retirees. Bob's vigorous and tanned, grows grapes, makes his own wine, never misses an early bird swim or a chance to read to the blind. Ilene's not only a first-rate cook

and 'domestician' (her word), she's on the altar guild at church, plays in the symphony, volunteers three afternoons a week at the library, and in her 'spare' time collects art, still-lifes particularly. She likes to call them *Memento Mori*, because they're supposed to make you think about how short life is, and all that. Woman's got more pictures of quiet lutes and solemn baskets of fruit than you can shake a stick at.

Okay, I admit it: The whole Ilene-and-Bob thing friggin' terrifies me. It'd terrify any self-respecting Newf, which before I was a grad student at UBC (where I met Eric) I was, and secretly still am. See, there's nothing vigorous or volunteering about where I come from. Back home on the Rock, they don't know Latin words about life's shortness or what have you, I've never run into a symphony in a back alley, and nobody'd be caught dead calling themselves a 'domestician.'

But let's face it. Back home is not where I am.

The dust in the parking lot's as thick as sausages, but Bob and Ilene are both tricked out in perfectly-pressed chinos and the pastel polo shirts with the little Ralph Lauren thingies on them, and looking, despite the blistering heat, like they wouldn't know sweat if they fell in it.

Hugs and kisses all around, the recorded voice blaring arrivals and departures. Ilene (she's driving) pointing the way to the Peugeot, her thin hands veined and tanned. "You'll have to forgive the mess in back," as we climb in over the fresh dry cleaning and bottles of expensive wine, and complicated looking breads, and cheeses I've never heard of in my life. Ilene says, "We figured since we were going to be out and about anyway, we might as well pick up some supplies for a special meal"—those terrifying hands skillfully manoeuvring the wood-paneled steering wheel—"I just think it's always so *nice* to have a special meal when you children are home!"

Twenty-six and twenty-nine and she calls us children.

But I remember my manners. "Ilene, please let us help with the cooking and housework while we're here…"

"Oh," she chuckles, "You two didn't come here to work after all that studying, and I'm certainly not going to let you." Expertly she shifts down to second as we hurtle downhill. "Everything's under control."

The Peugeot slows, speeds up, shoots out of town, and dives down a long narrow country road past crumbling walls, quaint bridges, mourning doves, and grapevines. Pretty soon exotic trees start popping up, and ornamental grasses, extravagant blooms, and then: Ilene's and

Bob's trim rose-covered home is standing at attention right across from the botanical gardens.

"Home at last!" Ilene pulls a smooth U-ey in front of the house, its watered lawns prim and stately, still deliciously green, and this late in the afternoon, barred with long cool slants of evening sun. The place is so perfect it doesn't look real.

All that and a special meal.

***

The First Night

We sit in the living room after the bags are stashed in the granny suite, 'Elvira Madigan' stately on the stereo as the evening light pours in through the big bow windows, everybody all smiles and chuckles.

Eric's busy making "paper knots" out of old newspapers—"in case it gets cold later"—for a fire.

Bob's in his favourite chair, concentrating on the new Rubik's cube he got for his birthday, planning to figure it out "If it's the last thing I ever do." There's a trick to these things, he says, there's always a trick.

Ilene's bustling back and forth setting out the snacks. "Just a few things I had around."

Asparagus and herbed cream cheese roll-ups. Warm brie baked in phyllo. Smoked oysters. Twelve-year-old port with cashews and ripe Bartlett pears.

"Ilene," I gush, "this is so—"

"Oh it's not much," she laughs. "But"—smiling sternly at Eric—"make sure you save some room. We're having trifle for dessert!"

"My special trifle!" Eric tosses a paper knot for joy.

Even after two of Ilene's special cappuccinos, I sleep like a baby.

***

St. Sebastian

I wake in the rosy dawn, all set to jump Eric's bones, God knows, it's been a while. Wouldn't you know it, he's dressed and ready to haul two old mattresses, an ancient preserve cupboard, and a bunch of paint cans to the dump, the type of chore Bob saves for when we're here.

"Oh, come on." I go for his trousers. "Just a quickie…"

"Ange." (Gazing Heavenward, pained as St. Sebastian)…

"What?"

"Hiloo-hoo-hoo!" (Bob, serious Hamlet-lover, on the landing at 7:13 a.m., ready to rock and roll).

"Right." I zip him back up. "Have fun at the dump."

And I head for the shower, grabbing my trusty vibrator along the way. "Don't worry," I call in Ilene's plummy voice down the hall, "Everything's under control."

Instead of heading up to the kitchen once I'm done (which I'm not, since I didn't come, that would hardly be polite), I loiter, not ready to take on Ilene and her terrifying druthers. Through the sliding doors, I can see Eric out on the patio, hands in sad pockets, downcast eyes, and I know I should apologize. But some combo of bad temper and dismay that I won't understand until a lifetime later, keeps me from going there.

Still-life with Pissed Off Newf Sitting on the Stairs…

***

The Kitchen

Don't get in Ilene's way if you value your life. Tonight's the special meal. By the time I'm cowering at the counter, she's been at it since the crack, with her choppers and weigh scales. The place looks like the *MasterChef* Test Kitchens at full throttle, herself grim as Hannibal.

"Morning," she barks mid-measure. "How was your night?"

I assure her it was great.

"Wonderful. I'm just doing a quick batch of zucchini muffins for our breakfast."

Ilene doesn't talk about 'cooking,' she talks about 'doing,' like she's engaged in a performance or a jail sentence. In addition to the muffins, she's *doing* lemon-garlic tiger prawn shrimp appetizers, followed by cold curried cucumber soup, her special chickpea and black bean salad, Beaujolais-braised summer lamb, herbed new potatoes in foil (from her own garden), and for dessert—she's changed her mind—your choice of black currant mousse or 'gooseberry fool.' I get a pang when she names that one. It gets me thinking of back home, and how we all used to go berry picking up back of the smoke shacks when the tide was out, even

the little ones, bringing home the berries by the bucketful for Mum to put in her pies.

Them were some pies, Dad used to say.

"Coffee's in the urn," she adds as I open the fridge door. I've been here enough times to know what that's code for: *must be nice to be able to stand around glowing from your beauty sleep while other people are busting their posteriors with the complex rigours of food preparation!*

That's what Ilene calls cooking, *food preparation*

"Can I do anything?" I say weakly, hoping to high heaven she says no. Back home your number one rule of etiquette is: catch-as-catch-can. They'd look at you like you were simple if you said *food preparation*. Thanks to my own culinary training, I wouldn't know a whisk from a waffle iron.

And I get the absolute bivvers at the thought of helping Ilene.

She's standing in the middle of the kitchen surveying the terrain, going over the annotated list in her notebook and pressing her pencil eraser into her bottom lip, pressing and rolling it, the big blue lapis she wears on the fourth finger of her pencil hand snatching at the morning light like it owns it.

"Well," she says, not looking up, "you could stack the dishwasher." A fool's job, though not to be taken lightly. There's an exact place for every fork and plate and vegetable steamer, certain things that have to go on the top rack, and others that can only be put on the bottom, and these are not to be confused. Plus, there's always more that can be stacked than I can imagine, and ever such cunning ways of wedging them in there. And you can't just toss them in any old way, some handles have to be up and some down, to prevent 'nesting.' And you're never to use the liquid detergent (God help me, I tried that once), only the powdered Cascade with etching protection, and don't forget the Jet-Dry, with its special sheeting action. Plus you're not to use the full wash-and-rinse cycle, that's wasteful, you have to make sure to use the Water Miser. "And then, let me see…you can polish the flatware."

Praise God, I know what that is now.

Through the open kitchen window you can hear Bob and Eric strolling down the garden with their gourmet coffee, Bob companionably pointing out all the hard work and time and money that's been poured into the back half acre since we were last here. See the composter, see the Mighty Mack, look at the retaining wall; how about that deck! And all

the while, the Saturday sun shining and the birds gaily twittering. I'd give my firstborn, if I had one, to be out there with them in the ordinary air.

For there's no innocence in being a woman in another woman's kitchen.

***

Lunch

Here we are, four of us, cozily crowded around the table in the kitchen "nook" in front of the bow window that Bob and Ilene had specially built for birdwatching. Imagine. Plants and crosswords and bird books in a pleasant jumble on the wide sill, and two pairs of binoculars, plus notebooks with comprehensive lists of "sightings," complete with date, name of the bird, natural habitat, and markings.

So far today there's been two pileated woodpeckers, three purple finches, one grosbeak, and a load of common sparrows. Lunch, light leftovers from last night's spread (everybody on orders to hold back for the special meal), is finished, and Ilene's going over her list from this morning, while Bob scans the backyard, ever on the alert for something out of the ordinary—a hummingbird, say, or an oriole, or somebody's escaped parrot. Ilene excuses herself from the table, and when she returns, she's wearing a crisp sleeveless linen shirt and belted khaki Bermudas, her handsome hair whipped into its customary gray crown. She takes one look at us lowly minions, then holds out her compact with one hand, drawing on a lipstick smile with the other. Rubbing her lips expertly together, she says, to no one in particular, "I have to run up to the market to pick up a few more quarts of peaches to ripen, and some berries for tonight. Anybody need anything?"

Eric's good.

Bob's good.

I'm friggin' fine: three hours, give or take, until further food preparation.

Now she's rummaging in her purse, collecting sunglasses, car keys, the post office key. "I'll be back around three, to finish up for tonight. Ange, if you could take care of the dishwasher. Don't worry about putting things away, just if you could empty it out, and I'll do the rest" (she quite reasonably doesn't trust me) "when I get back, that would be nice. Eric, while you're here I'd like you to clean out all your old stuff in your

bedroom closet. I intend to set up my sewing room in there. Bob, the front flower beds'll need watering this afternoon, if you can get around to it, the impatiens, especially, I noticed, are looking a bit tired with the heat. Just to have everything looking nice for the special meal tonight."

And she's gone. You can feel the house let down.

***

Damage

What I'd give to be back on that bus right now. The special meal's on the table, Eric and Bob are nowhere to be seen, and Ilene's fit for lift-off. One thing you do *not* do is show up late to Ilene's table. And who gets the brunt of it? Me.

"Run and check the downstairs fridge," she goes, without looking up from her notes, "to see if the tortes have set."

Christ, how would *I* know?

"Then you can pop out to the garden and get me some parsley. Not the curly, the Italian, it's the one with the broader leaf." She pauses, remembering. "Oh, and I could use a bit of fennel."

Jaysus, what's that?

As if reading my mind she adds, "That's the wispy stuff that looks like dill, but it's got a bit of a liquorice smell if you rub it in your fingers. And bring it in out of the heat as soon as you pick it, so it doesn't wilt, it's very delicate." She rolls her pencil eraser over her bottom lip, and I can see mean little hairline cracks in her work-roughened fingernails. "Be careful, though," she adds, "the wasps are bad this year."

I'm back in five, with one hand full of what I hope is fennel and the other sporting a hot welt.

Ilene looks up briefly from her Bechamel sauce. "Honestly, what is the matter with those two?" Then she spies my hand, and away she goes to get the baking soda. "This'll draw out the sting."

I take the next chance I get to slip out to the lawn, where Bob's showing Eric the new sprinkler system. "You two need to come."

Bob's head snaps up. "Oh goodness; right you are. On our way!"

But it's too late. By the time the two of them show up, Ilene is grim. "Weren't we going to dress for dinner?" she enquires politely of the room.

Bob darts a look at Eric. "Whoops."

Ilene studies the Still Life with Dead Pheasant above the sideboard. "I'm afraid the lamb may be a bit overdone."

The food—for only the cook knows where the damage lies—is perfection. The wine flows. Dessert follows. Bob opens the usual after-dinner bottle.

Ilene, in the kitchen between courses, cries only a little.

Though, thank the Lord for good food and wine. With a couple of glasses each or three, plus the saffron risotto warming our bellies, the men have relaxed, and Ilene has eased to the point where actual jokes can be told.

Bob: Where does the General keep his armies?

Eric: Where?

Bob: In his sleevies.

Eric: Speaking of arms: How does a squid go into battle?

Bob: Search me.

Eric: Fully-armed.

Ilene: Never criticize someone until you have walked a mile in their shoes. That way, when you criticize them, you'll be a mile away, and you'll have their shoes.

I dream of being a mile away, with or without shoes.

***

Hands

Bob and Eric are back in the living-room with their sherry, and for now, Ilene's done with me.

Destroyed with relief at the survival of another special meal, I descend to the basement's cool obscurity.

Down here amongst the signs of Ilene's suspended industry, there's a twilit calm and more still-lifes, though these are real, not like the painted scenes above stairs: Still Life with Ripening Pears and Ironing Board; Still Life with Preserving Jars and Pressure Canner (please let me be far from here when that job starts); Still Life with Gardening Gloves and Secateurs, the gloves still curled to the shape of Ilene's never-idle hands. Which by now will be dutifully double wrapping the leftovers and heroically slamming shut the dishwasher, scouring the kitchen to Kingdom Come.

Then—for it's well after midnight—the silence of the tomb.

In that final quiet, I look down at my own hands, so smooth and unworn, compared with her tough, ephemeral ones.

***

The Rock

That was all so long ago. I saw one night late, trawling the internet, about Ilene's passing. All that elegance and gourmet efficiency, only to have it dismantled by dementia.

I've been back here on my own three times as long as I ever was married to Eric, though never in the same place for long. Nowadays I don't know if he makes paper knots, loves lamb, is satisfied, dead, or suffers quickies, though I suppose those are in the past for most of us now, too.

The things you remember, a lifetime later. A handful of fennel. The blinding sting of a wasp.

When a person is twenty, what the hell can she really grasp?

Camille Lendor

THERE ARE *TWO FRIDAS*

Two Fridas
holding hands
and a house
centipede stuck
to a glue trap
have more in common
than recurring dreams.

The Fridas are not
watching you.

The Fridas are gazing at
the centipede,
waiting for it to escape.

They hold their
archaic quarter-smiles,
waiting to let go of
each others' hands only
when the writhing insect
matter-of-factly
rips off an eleventh
hind leg
to break free—

to dauntlessly continue
in a newfound,
deconstructed form

Ashleigh A. Allen

I SEE THREE BISON BEFORE

my eyes fully open this morning/ Dream them in my sheets, clouded tea, their snouts plowing/ Outside I see the trees I've screamed your name up into/ Woven nests of our vowels: i, o, e, a/ You should turn away now/ I've been dragging July behind me like a corpse, a life offered to October nothingness/ Knowledge pulses in our gut of guts/ I pull the month by her hair/ The blood and bones and force of sacrifice/ Both of us calm/ To be clear: it was not "you're coming with me" but more so "let us go"/ Everything here is alive is fungus is future fountain harvest/ I breathe close or not at all and want your breath with me like fog/ I want your body stretched over mine like hide into the daytime and I want this life as extraordinary as tits released in an occupied moment/ sainthood coming out of the cracks/ colossal blessings when the soil sends out her reachings for planetary poon/ There's no turning around, no thing near, no before/ I continue/ Heaven is enduringly heaven/ Abscission is what botanists call this de-leafing/ Fall shrugs at us and we shrug back/ No matter/ What animal hearts find house now?/ Where will I sight my oak?/ Trees in winter indicate a sojourn as earth freezes/ They wet whisper lyrics through the cold underground/ A devastating chord progression/ There is a static solitude in someone else/ in someone's eyes carrying handfuls/ We learn not to reach out for farewell but to dig infinitely in for good/ The trees dream of bison horning and rubbing against their bark/ the beasts approach for an autumn scratch/ Mimic a promise, dislodge medicine from her root/ Nothing will be here next spring but the stones

Poonam Dhir

AFTERMATH IN HOT AIR

the aunty you met as a child. her face scarred from the of deep frying. pleasure fascinated by pain.

lamps underscore the cement landing. a northern veranda. standing at a junction in pyjamas. your mother held her stainless steel tray spreading clouds of agarbatti while your sisters wondered what was happening in beverly hills. how donna and david were thinking of having sex. how bathroom tiles are cold to the touch.

put your head down. foreheads touch concrete. there's a sizeable difference between belief and understanding.

this is infinite and
this [ ] is infinite
the infinite proceeds from the infinite[1]

1 excerpt from verse 5.1.1. of *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*

Daniel Kessel

NOTES FROM ENCAMPMENT

Inside the tent, Frank's photo illuminates my face.

Tribal member spotlight: My uncle poses with a powwow drum. He grips the cowhide handle, concentric loops he wove himself, and wears a beaded vest, chlorine blue, unfurling bursts of orange diamonds. Visible on his left hand: a gold wedding band.

That's the larger photo. The small, inset photo I pinch to see bigger. My aunt Ruby stands beside my uncle. She smooths his vest. She looks into Frank's eyes, and he returns her look. Between their eyes something is exchanged, but I can't pinpoint what. Frank's whole bearing changes; there is light.

"You're still awake," Avni whispers.

All is quiet on the powwow grounds. We're sharing a cot. Mark, my older brother, sleeps on the second cot, on the other side of the tent.

"I was just checking something," I whisper back, and when I put my phone down the tent goes dark. "Night."

My eyes closed, I feel the day's drum beats on the resting earth.

***

This year is the last time I see Ruby. When we visit their home—and the visit is kind of miraculous—Frank calls us Markie and Danny, remembers Avni from the time they met once years earlier. He does not ask about my mother.

A sizable feast is spread out on the kitchen table: bread and cold cuts and cheese, pale green romaine hearts, several types of soda. I can tell Mark feels the way I do, surprised and a little embarrassed. We're empty-handed. More than anything, it's the soda that touches me. I don't even drink soda. But there they are, arranged like some kind of sacrament, the two-liter bottles a hopeful phalanx of sugared carbonate.

"Where's Ruby?" Mark asks.

Frank smiles; I see the lines on his face, his cratered nose a large porous bulb I love, and I realize I wouldn't have ventured that question myself. Frank is a soft-spoken shy man; he wears glasses and, like my brother, has long black hair he usually keeps pulled back.

"She'll be right out," he says, and changes the subject. "It's hot out today. You want a drink?"

So I sit down with a plastic cup of Sprite. Avni sits by me, Mark across the table next to Frank.

***

Mom called the day before we got to Oklahoma. Avni and I had just split a sandwich in Santa Fe, we were staring at a sluggish little dog splayed out on the stone pavement, we were wandering in and out of art galleries when my phone rang.

"You should really get there," my mother says. Mark forgot a piece for the tent, she explains, and had trouble setting up camp. "I feel bad he's alone."

"We leave tomorrow morning," I say. "First thing."

Avni and I have been driving. Salt Lake City to Moab, Mesa Verde to Santa Fe. She's leaving Utah permanently, to join an ophthalmology practice in another state, and I have flown from New York to help her move. That is partly what is happening—the rental car is full of her things.

The other part of what is happening: this trip to powwow. Encampment. A return, because nobody in my family has attended

since my grandmother died three years earlier. Mark drives the twenty-something hours from New Jersey to Oklahoma by himself, stopping only to get gas and use the bathroom in several towns named Lebanon.

Mom is forced to stay in New Jersey because arthritis means she can no longer walk, and because her weight means no doctor will put her under for knee replacement surgery. I'll think about this injustice, an Indigenous woman immobilized, as my white-presenting body moves across states; as I tour Ancestral Pueblo cliff dwellings at a national park in Colorado, and a woman passes out from dehydration, and Avni gives impromptu medical care; as I squeeze beside her on a little cot.

My mother, meanwhile, cannot *encamp*.

But on the phone she is upbeat. She's sober now—she's sober and it feels different this time. She brims with advice, things to do, drop her name to so and so, dance the intertribal, live it. Always that phrase, only in connection to powwow: *live it*.

She says, "Grandma is smiling down on you three."

She brings up Uncle Frank. She swallowed her pride and called, left a message when he didn't answer, said his nephews would be in town. She tells me to check my phone; I might hear from him; which, the next day, I do.

Her voice cracks. She wishes she could be with us. She says it more than once: Grandma would be so ashamed, ashamed that drinking put her in this position. This shame—I feel the burden of it. My words do nothing. I see my mother inert in bed, imagine another reality where her knees extend and she walks again.

***

Frank asks if we're enjoying the powwow. Asks if Avni has ever been to one. She sits straight up, shakes her head no. Mark, with his conversational ease, talks about the categories and dances, gourd and shawl and fancy, some of the vocabulary new on our tongues even if the dances are familiar. Frank just nods along, polite. Still there is no Ruby.

I'm both eager and nervous to see her. I anticipate the metaphysical weirdness that comes from sitting down with Ruby, the odd aunt: she inhabits a mystical plane, talks to animals and plants, yet pays very close attention. My mother says Ruby will turn on a dime. She tells a story where Ruby and Frank came to my grandma's house. They'd just finished lunch, but my mom joined after and made herself a plate. Mom made

a slightly off-colour joke about how she'd never eat sushi—something about raw fish and worms—to her great-niece, a child, who also sat at the table; the great-niece laughed. Ruby had no food left on her plate, but she slammed her fist down. "You do not talk like that at the table," she snapped at my mother. "I'm still eating. I will never eat with you again."

Mark laughs off stories like this—says our mother's retellings are all the same. Always innocent; never sharing in the blame.

***

In his 2016 "Letter to a Just-Starting-Out Indian Writer—and Maybe to Myself," Stephen Graham Jones writes, "Don't ask for permission." He says, "Don't be an elf." He says, don't "take a blood quantum test on the page."

I read his words and drink them in. I understand—I think.

In a dream, my keyboard is missing several keys.

I reread everything I've written, see the various lines in red.

***

Mark and I have never been to Frank and Ruby's house before, at least not this house, and this is why I classify the visit as miracle. After my grandmother died, a rift grew between my mother and her siblings. Possibly it was always there: my mother the youngest of five, a half sibling with a vastly different childhood, raised not in Oklahoma but New Jersey, always furiously close to my grandmother.

But according to my mother, a new Frank emerged after Grandma's death: he went from sweet to businesslike, absorbed in the work of selling off what little Grandma owned. The one-story house my mother knew so well, the house on the corner lot where she spent much of the year taking care of Grandma, was sold as quickly as possible.

Donna, my mom's sister, joined Frank in this pursuit, forming a sober front against my mother. To my mother Donna was the worst offender, Donna who was briefly relieving my mother of her caretaker role when Grandma passed away. Everyone acted friendly at the funeral, united in grief, but afterward my mom blamed Donna entirely.

Only Levi, the oldest brother, hadn't changed in his attitude toward my mother; to Levi she was his little sister, his Jennifer, pronounced *Ginni*fer. But then, within a year of Grandma's death, Levi—who when

I last saw him at the funeral had surprised me with the smallness of his ankles, the incongruous thinness of this tall man who once dove to the bottom of the lake where we camped in Tennessee and made a full chess set out of clay, formed by hand and heated on a grill—died too. My mother shut herself in her room and drank. I didn't think she'd ever talk to Frank again.

***

Ruby steps out from a long hallway. She looks exactly like she did at Grandma's funeral, her face big and doughy, streaks of grey in her hair, glasses that magnify her busy, active eyes as she scans each of us in turn. She remembers Avni too, and I wonder if that one time Avni visited, my mother let them all think she was still my girlfriend, wonder if they know, even now, that we are only friends, that I am queer. Or maybe my mind is simply tunneling the way it always does when I smoke—right before coming here, we showered at another aunt's house, and she offered me and Avni her vape pen.

"Let's eat," Frank says.

The mood shifts now that Ruby is here. I follow Mark's lead, gingerly place pieces of turkey and lettuce and tomato between slices of bread, arrange handfuls of chips on my paper plate.

Ruby looks at Avni. "Aren't you hungry?"

Avni breaks the news that she's vegetarian. Both Frank and Ruby erupt into an endearing state of panic. Ruby grabs a tupperware of washed green grapes from the fridge, pulls frozen vegetables out of the freezer.

"Do you want peas?" she asks. "I can heat them up."

"No, this is fine," Avni says, but Ruby insists it's not. She puts a tub of Nutella on the table. Avni appears happy with this development, spreads a gleaming layer of chocolate on a piece of bread, and I remember high school days in New Jersey, meeting her on the football field and eating sandwiches of peanut butter, apple, and Nutella. PAN sandwiches, we called them, our own invention.

She leans to me and whispers.

"Have I been acting weird? Or eating too much?" she asks. "I'm so high."

I laugh. "No, you're fine," I say. "I am too."

***

What did children do in the early 2000s, before smartphones and YouTube? On Twitter, a teenage boy earnestly wonders. True, eleven-year-olds live many lonely moments, but in my case this never came from lack of technology. One summer after I had exhausted all other options I watched *Bug Juice*, a Disney show that followed a group of adolescents at summer camp. They form friendships—do camp activities and trust exercises; that's the show. My dad made fun of the cheesy theme song, but the lure of representation got me. *Bug Juice*, which premiered in 1998, was perhaps the first reality TV show created exclusively for children.

Only one dramatic moment ever occurred. A charismatic camper named Eve was abruptly kicked off the show. I have a vivid memory of watching Eve pack her bags as she cried into the camera. Eve was polarizing; charismatic and popular, she also made enemies simply by being herself, too outspoken for camp's idea of an adolescent girl. Then she was gone. A title screen explained that she and another camper brought "inappropriate materials" to camp.

After Eve left I couldn't really watch the show anymore, even though I hadn't even realized that I liked her, that she was an integral part of *Bug Juice*. Eve's absence only proved the show's emptiness, its unreality. I've never rewatched, but I still hold the image of a deflated thirteen-year-old Eve expelled from camp, tearfully stuffing shirts into a duffle bag.

I have no idea if this shot really happened.

***

"Where do the dancers come from? Are they all Otoes?"

I am asking the questions. Mark doesn't bother making a fool of himself. But Avni is just as keen to know the answers, and in my mother's absence now feels like the only moment.

Ruby looks at me with magnifying eyes.

"Oh, no," she says. "They come from all over."

Frank says dancers train all year for powwows, not only for the sake of dancing but to win: every powwow comes with a prize. (When I read *There There*, this makes sense; the safe full of money at the heart of that novel.)

"Do most dancers have more than one costume?"

"Regalia," Ruby says, and I wince, make eye contact with Mark, feel like the most ignorant person in the world. But Ruby's voice carries no

judgment. "You cherish every piece of your regalia. Every year you might add a piece or two, and you keep them for life."

Ruby tells Frank to show us the article. He brings out a glossy issue of the tribe's magazine, open to a two-page spread. I see the photo: Frank holding the drum, the inset photo with Ruby. The columns of text—a profile of Frank's work for the tribe—make me dizzy, I can't focus on the words and also hold conversation, so I take a picture instead.

Something occurs to Frank and he turns to Mark, speaks in a voice I can barely hear.

"Did you get your…?"

"No. Not yet."

It's like some weird meta-conversation I know and don't know. I'm still high, I think, and I watch Avni stare blankly at the magazine and know she is in this space too.

"You will."

***

One day at encampment, a neighbour invites us to play horseshoes. I am terrible at horseshoes. They've already met Mark, but the guy, the group spokesperson it seems, tells me they drove down from Kansas. He reminds me of Levi. He asks what my story is, and I tell him in a kind of performative shorthand that Mark is my brother.

He points to Avni. "How about you? What tribe are you from?"

"I'm Indian," she says, pausing. "From India."

At this, everyone in the group bursts out laughing.

"You look more Indian than these two," the spokesperson says. He's not wrong, and we all know it, and we're all laughing as we play horseshoes. Mark blends in effortlessly, but I stick out, I have no coordination and can barely toss the heavy steel pieces across the other side. Some part of me imagines how I must look to these men—not man enough, not Indian enough—but another part of me knows my self-consciousness is not what matters here, is, in fact, antithetical to what is happening. We are here. We are *living it*.

***

Avni and I tell them about our drive through Utah and New Mexico, Colorado and West Texas. Ruby lights up. When she turned eighteen she

moved to California, found work in New Mexico. "If I had never been to California," Ruby says, "I wouldn't know the sun shines brighter there. And if I had never lived in New Mexico, I would never know that some clouds really do have a silver lining."

I can just imagine my mother rolling her eyes at talk like this, but sitting at the kitchen table I believe every word Ruby says.

They tell us, in the way two people tag team a story, about the time they went to Europe. Frank, a drum maker, had been working for the tribe for several years when he got the chance to travel to Switzerland on an art tour along with a group of fancy dancers. Frank asked if Ruby could come too.

"They said only if we paid her airfare."

"Well, Frank didn't have that kind of money," Ruby says, "but he had this big gun collection. What kind were they?"

"Shotguns. A few pistols," Frank says, and by his look I feel he remembers the exact contents of this collection.

"So he found a buyer and sold every last one, and that's how we went to Europe," Ruby says. "The Swiss just loved our fancy dancing, and I got to show them how to make corn husk dolls." She turns to Frank. "Wasn't that nice?"

***

One day, on a whim, I search #BugJuice on TikTok. I don't see Eve, but someone has posted a grainy video with the show's theme song, still embarrassingly corny. In the comments I read, "*Bug Juice* led to *Jersey Shore*." (Debatable.) I read, "Speaking of drama, I always wondered what those two girls did that got them kicked out."

Of course I'm not the only one who remembers Eve. I google her and within seconds I'm listening to a thirty-something Eve on a podcast. She recalls being cyberbullied as a teenager because kids online impersonated her in AOL chatrooms. On *Bug Juice*, she went by Eve LaFountain. Now she is an artist, and her name is Eve-Lauryn Little Shell LaFountain.

My eyes linger on "Little Shell." I find Eve on Instagram. Her adult face vaguely matches my memory of the young Eve who got kicked off *Bug Juice*. She lives in LA, and her art is informed by her background as Jewish and Turtle Mountain Chippewa. It's strange to be looking at Eve's art, one series where she juxtaposes strips of negative film with the handwritten words, *You are on native land*. Or the photo of an aunt who

passed away: "The toughest cowgirl I ever knew with a soft heart of gold." It's touching to feel something in common with Eve, this woman I felt an intuitive kinship toward as a kid, who now identifies as an Indigenous futurist.

Stephen Graham Jones writes: "*Assume the Indianness*. Of everything. Because we are everywhere. Insist on that."

***

I'm reminded of Carl Wittman in his 1970 *Gay Manifesto*: "Free the homosexual in everyone."

***

While Ruby and Mark go outside to smoke, Frank invites me and Avni into the sunroom. It's a recent addition to the house, Frank says, and I notice they have divided the room in half: on one side Ruby has art supplies, paintings and sewing projects. On Frank's side is a computer and a giant leather massage chair.

"We just got that," Frank says. "Try it out."

I climb up into the big, obscene contraption, navigate the digital menu. Frank says he has a good massage there every day. I feel simultaneously relaxed and embarrassed, sitting in Frank's spot, watching Avni stand there as I get a massage. I end it early and tell Frank how nice it was.

Before we leave, Ruby gives Avni a gift.

"It's a shawl," she says. "Try it on. Let me show you."

Ruby wraps the shawl, a deep maroon, around Avni's shoulders. A lighter maroon fringe hangs down over Avni's forearms.

"Let's take a picture," Ruby says.

One, Avni in the shawl. Two, me, Mark, and Frank. Three, with Avni too. Ruby takes photos on my phone. Then Avni takes one with me, Mark, Frank, and Ruby.

Later, when I look at the photos, all of Ruby's are out of focus.

***

Around the time I first started hooking up with men, a few years earlier, I told a guy in bed that my dad was a machinist. That my grandfather was too. That all the men on that side of my family, immigrants of German

descent who came to Jersey in the 50s speaking no English, worked in the machine shop at one point or another. My brother included. But not me. The guy lived in Boerum Hill, he went to Columbia, he was going to be a lawyer, he was touching my hand and moving his fingers up and down my back.

"You don't feel like a machinist," he said.

I liked him, but it took me a while to understand that comment—and even longer to unpack my own sense of being flattered. He meant that I didn't *feel* working class. As if everything could be gleaned by the surface of one's skin. As if skin had no layers.

***

We drive by Grandma's old house on the way back to encampment. It looks like a bit of a shell, a husk of corn, a memory of what was. I feel the emptiness, the unreality, the strangeness of being here without my mother or grandmother. But also fuck that narrative, because here we are driving on familiar roads, and fed, and loved by Frank and Ruby, our relatives, our tribe. This, really, is what has been happening all along.

***

My mom calls.

"How was the visit? Did Ruby seem sick?"

I don't know what she means.

"She has COPD," Mom says. "It's bad. She didn't seem off?"

I'm surprised. Nothing stands out, only that Ruby seemed tired when we left, which I decide not to mention. I don't want my mother to slip inside the experience we just had. I am realizing that, although I love her deeply, maybe having my Indianness filtered almost entirely through my mother has cut me off from forming my own relationships. Maybe, too, my experience of queerness has left me open to people my mother only ever clashed with.

"No. She was fine."

"I guess she was on her best behavior."

It's spoken as a joke. It's a script. I'm expected to laugh. For years I did. But I don't.

***

Reading the article on my phone, one line in particular interests me. Frank was only ten months old when his father died. Once Frank started working for the tribe, he spent time alongside elders who were *willing to tell him stories of his father*. This phrasing touches me, the hope beneath the tragedy, the individual surrounded by community. It heartens me to know that Frank, now an elder himself, learned about his family the way anyone does: by talking, by proximity, through story.

Avni wraps Ruby's shawl around her shoulders. As she stands to get a view of the dancers and the floodlights silhouette her hair, I understand she is my family, and will always be. Mark and I sit on the extra lawn chairs our aunt gave us. When there is an open intertribal dance, we enter the arena for the first time all weekend. We step to the music, improvise as if we know what we are doing, and I allow myself to put my feet on the grass, to step this close to the drums and the singing voices.

***

A year later, a relative sends me the link to Ruby's obituary. I knew her death would happen, but I never imagined our visit was goodbye. I learn many things, things my mother never told me. Her name was Ruby Jewel. She was born Cherokee and had thirteen brothers and sisters. From an early age she could see into the future, could find people's tears and make them cry. (True: Ruby, and only Ruby, did this to me at Grandma's funeral.) She was a massage therapist for more than twenty years. The Cherokees, the obituary says, have no word for goodbye, only *donadagohvi*: until our eyes meet again.

"Do you think Frank wrote the obit?" my brother texts. "It's very well-written."

I text back, "I bet. You can feel how much he loved her."

***

My mother is quiet, cagey. Immediately I understand my tone differs from hers. Ruby is survived by many, but only one of Frank's siblings is listed: Donna. My mother is not named at all.

"Oh, Ruby wrote all that," she says on the phone. "I just know it. I know her writing. That was Ruby."

I read the whole thing again. My mother may be right. There is something idiosyncratic about the turns of phrase, the mention of two

birthdays, the description of raindrops as angel tears. When I text Mark our mother's theory, I realize his is the correct response.

"Oh," he says. "Again, it's very well-written."

***

I kept thinking of Frank when I learned that Ruby died. I imagined him in the sunroom, sitting in the massage chair for ten or twenty minutes every day, surrounded by Ruby's paintings and her corn husk dolls. A Cherokee word, lingering in the air.

Then a vivid memory came to me.

I'm sitting at their kitchen table and I make some self-disparaging remark. Ruby says nothing. Like she hasn't heard. But later, when we hug goodbye, I feel her cold soft hands as she squeezes mine.

Ruby magnifies me with her eyes and shakes her head.

"No one is more beautiful than you."

Sun Tzu-ping, translated from the Taiwanese Mandarin by Nicholas Wong

PLACING THE BODY

Squat deep, then stand upright
Sit, then walk away
A simple greeting of inverted syntax
A familiar hand cut by pronouns
An elevator stands in solidarity with irrelevant floors
All over the eyes, characters crawl
The clear weather gradually fatigues

Occasionally, the plot blunders
As sounds undress a jacket's morning
And pass through the crack between a silent prayer and a fiery curse
The glass exemplifies final strength
But I'm extremely drained because of it
Now the bed has turned into a cake
Come tell me how you keep yourself out of it

Debora Anthonypillai

AS THE SUN COMES DOWN

padura rolled up
loud voices footsteps outside,
stove kettle whistling

I walk across the dark grey roof barefoot, coarse asbestos tingling toes. I sit down cross-legged and watch the neighbourhood wake up from afternoon nap. In my garden, the white and black dog is pawing at the grotto; nails scraping concrete stones, ripping orchid vines. Mother Mary will soon find home in his mouth. The red-eared slider is crawling toward the big pepper tree. There he will bury himself in dirt, only re-emerging when ready. My sister is on the veranda, nightie hiked up to mid-thigh, bare back pressing against woven wire of rattan chair, eyes focused on chess pieces in front of her. Aunty, arms full of pan, is silently swearing at boys swinging cricket bats in front of her house. She sneaks around the game, almost tripping over a forgotten ball, and disappears through the door.

sun slowly comes down,
seven sisters play, chirping
circling in cool air

Anta is in the backyard, hunched over a bucket of soap and soiled saris as she pumps the rusty tube well. Unki is on the ladder, big belly pressed against cement wall, wielding a machete to hack at the neighbour's jack tree. My cousin and her husband are in front of the iron gate, wrestling with keys. Their son and daughter race out of the house, greeting them with hair unkempt from nap and feet without slippers. I can feel my cousin huff hot air before ordering the children inside; mosquitoes are starting their hunt. Next door, Aunty is shouting at her son to finish his homework. A nearby train whistles and trudges along the tracks, bringing tired workers home. Mama, in the kitchen below, calls us in for tea. The other households do the same. Soon I'm outside alone; only stifled snippets of conversations and soft clinks of china to be heard.

hues of pink purple
blue hug the neighbourhood and
lull it to nighttime

Ronaldo Acuna

FATHERS

When you were in school studying to become a counsellor, you were given an assignment to provide therapy to a couple and write a paper to reflect on the experience. Your mom and dad were visiting at the time, so you thought this was serendipitous. There were articles online that stressed a counsellor should never give therapy to a family member. It's too easy to blur boundaries, they said, too easy to slot your mother and father into their old, familiar roles without considering the ways they had changed. Despite this, you still ask. It's only an assignment, you think, not a real therapy session.

"What am I supposed to do?" your dad says.

"Talk about what's going on in your life," you say.

Your reply is vague, and he searches your eyes for a fuller answer. You look away, so he can't find one.

"Are we going to get deep, my boy?" he asks.

You shake your head. "It's only an assignment," you say. "No big deal."

When you ask your mom, she takes your arm and walks you into your room, away from your dad's ears. "That's a good idea," she says. Her voice sounds drained. You can barely hear her when she speaks. She tells you that she and your dad have been arguing about money lately, about how there is so little of it. She says their lives are different now they are both retired. Like you, she keeps things vague. But she's fine, she says. She prays and goes out with friends, so that helps. But it's your dad. He looks like he needs someone to talk to. You've sensed this. It was in his eyes when he spoke to you. But you turned away.

Back in the days when you would visit your parents in Fort St. John, your dad would play the piano downstairs and sing songs he used to cover with his bandmates long ago. By that time, his bandmates either lived in a different city or had passed away, and he was left to sing alone. And when he wasn't singing, he would watch videos that his brothers from the Philippines would email to him. Videos of the village where he grew up. He would call you over to watch, and you'd sit beside him on the carpet and listen as he would recount stories from his childhood. You would feel the joy in his voice as he reminisced about a period in his life when time passed by so quickly that it took decades and decades for him to catch up and feel every sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell he experienced.

Your mom says that your dad wants to go back to the Philippines. He wants to take the whole family—you, your brother, your mom—but maybe he can go by himself for now for three months.

"It's still hard because where are we going to get the money for his airfare?" your mom says. "We have so many bills to pay. Talk to your dad, and see what he says."

You forget that this is supposed to be an assignment and no big deal. You forget that you are only supposed to talk about the easy stuff.

"Okay, Mom," you respond.

***

You've gone into counselling to hold the space for others' pain. You also have this thought that listening to others' stories will help you understand yourself. You know that's not a good reason to become a counsellor, but you're not exploring that particular problem in depth right now. All you know is you're tired of the same stories you've been telling yourself. The

ones that you refuse to let go of because they're embedded in your identity and allow you to explain to yourself why you're closed off.

There's the singular way you tell yourself you had a father who didn't know what to do with your fragility when you were a child. You remember all the times you came home after school with tears in your eyes because you were bullied. Your mom comforted you but your dad had a different response. He furrowed his brow and made a sound: "Ah!" And then he walked away, frustrated, leaving your mom to deal with you. It left you frozen, questioning what to do with your suffering.

You tell yourself this story of a father who forced you to play the piano. He taught you the notes, the scales, and the songs, but you couldn't play with grace. When your fingers struck the keys, he would stand over you. "Not like that," he would say. "Play it with feeling." But your feeling had already been buried so deep inside that you couldn't bring it up when he asked. He would take over to show you what playing with feeling meant. You watched, witnessing the piano as an extension of his soul, one that communicated his silent emotions. "Like that," he would say. And you would try to imitate what he did, but you would hesitate when you played the keys, stop, and then sob.

"Ah!" he'd yell.

He sent you to piano instructors, but they didn't help you uncover the emotion you buried. You played the piano for seven years and desperately wanted to quit each week. You felt you had to continue because you were scared of the irritation he would show if you decided to give up. You kept it in. For years and years. Until you couldn't.

You were both in the van, waiting to pick up your mom from work. Afterwards, you would get dropped off at your piano instructor's home for a lesson.

You sat in the back seat and thought about going to that class.

"Dad," you said, trembling.

"Mhm," he said.

"I … don't … want to play the piano anymore."

You hoisted a wall inside you to prevent the inevitable, but the tears fell through. You wanted to stop, but you couldn't. You were already opened up. You looked down, trying to hide your face, knowing it was shameful to weep.

He paused for a long time. You took in deep breaths to calm yourself. Finally, he said, "Okay, you don't have to play anymore." Just like that. You stopped wailing. When you looked up, you expected to find a look

of disappointment. Instead, you saw he had put his sunglasses on. He was trying to stop himself from crying. Neither of you said anything after that.

***

A therapy session in your living room. Your mom's eyes are directed up, searching for the words she wants to say. You glance at your dad. His eyes are downcast. His shoulders are slouched. His posture is different from when you asked him to do this. Everything about this is different, but you try your best to make it the same. You try to make it seem as though these aren't your parents and this is only a random couple going for therapy. You recite from a script. You thank them for taking the time to come in. You lay down some ground rules. "We're going to go back-and-forth about the main topic you came in here to discuss with me," you say stiffly.

They both nod.

"Dad, we'll start with you."

"Okay," he says quietly.

"So about money?" you ask. You force the topic onto him when he isn't ready. A mistake. One you need to reflect on.

He opens his mouth, then pauses. The feeling of homesickness that your mom observed in him trickles its way up. A howl of grief leaves his mouth. He faces you, but his eyes are shut. "I miss the Philippines," he says. You see him try to calm his despair by taking deep inhalations and exhalations, trying to breathe it all back down or all the way out, never letting it sit.

You didn't prepare for this. You think about what to say next, but nothing comes. You're barely breathing. And you just keep sitting.

You've been silent for too long, so your dad opens his eyes to look for you. You want to meet him, but something inside you avoids his gaze.

"I'm retired and I don't know where to go," he says. "Depressed or something. Philippines is where I'm the happiest. But we're retired and on a fixed income."

"What if you sell our house in Fort St. John?" you ask, trying to solve things. Thinking life is as easy as that.

"I don't want to sell the house because it's the place where you grew up."

"The memories?" you ask.

"Yes," he says.

Buried moments reveal themselves, ones that don't fit into the old narrative you tell yourself. How he would drive you to and pick you up from school every weekday, even when he was dead tired from working a night shift as a janitor at the college. How, when you would play-wrestle your stuffed Ninja Turtle, he would watch you, smiling, and pick up the little pieces of stuffing that fell out of the doll because you were clotheslining it a little too hard. How, when you were watching cartoons on TV, he would cook you a bowl of champorado—chocolate rice pudding—because he knew it was your favourite dish. Then, before you were about to eat, he would place his hand on your head and rub your hair, to let you know he was there, thinking of you, seeing you.

"Getting up with nothing to do is really hard," he says. "I planned to retire for a long time but I don't know if I made the right decision. You and your brother and your mom, that's the only reason I stay in Canada."

He sighs.

"There's always hesitation. I want to bring the whole family because if I go to the Philippines by myself, after a week, I'll miss you here. Sometimes I think you and your brother are still little boys. That's why I want to bring you wherever I go. For many years when you were growing up, I didn't think like that. But now that I'm older…" he trails off.

His words hang in the air, and you let them absorb into you and lightly touch on the locked part of your soul that you've allowed to atrophy. The part of you that wishes to express the plainness of how your emotions sit inside of you because it's exhausting to have to hide them or dress them up with complexities. The part of you that wishes to say, ever so simply: *Dad, you're sensitive in the same way I am. I can't shake it out of me no matter how hard I try. It's a part of me. The same way it's a part of you. Can I talk to you so we can share how we can live expressing this delicate part of our personality without burying it? Can you share what you've learned about it so I can tell myself a different story about how a man should be with his emotions?*

This. This is all you wish to say. But it's still all new to you, so you don't. Instead, you do something different. You tell yourself this story of a father who needs someone to talk to. In that moment, you stop trying to become a counsellor and instead become a son. You set your hand on your dad's knee and place every bit of love you have into that simple gesture. He takes in a deep breath and looks into your eyes. This time, you don't look away. This time, you let him find you.

Fiona Tinwei Lam

PENTIMENTO

Outside the front window, a frolic
of loose stars obscuring bare branches
and furred buds after weeks of hinted
froth. Framed on a wall beside my desk, stilled
blossoms, my mother's painting on rice paper
now freckled with age. Purple-tinged petals
clasp and unclasp the flare of snowy
interiors, every curve and furl echoing
brushstroke. No sign of sentinel leaves, only
the blotted ghost of a branch almost masked
behind splayed blooms, as her brush delicately
delved, overwrote missteps, like the years since
her death, transmuting ache into shadow.

Betsy Struthers

CAN'T SLEEP

I am so very tired, she says out loud.
But not too loud (not loud enough
to set the black dog barking).

She's learned to organize her days—
rise at seven, shower, put coffee on,
read the local news. In the morning,
a household chore; in the afternoon,
a walk around the park. At four,
his doctor calls, *condition stable, but*
(the weary patience of a horse
left bridled in its stall).

She longs for sleep so deep the dreams
can't catch her, heave her sweating
into the hours before dawn, acid
clawing at her throat. It's barely dark
but she hauls herself upstairs, brushes
teeth and hair, puts her nightdress on,
chooses his side of the bed.

There's a trick she's trying
to still the what ifs and if onlys
cycling through her head. Envision
this: lie flat, as if on a sarong
on white sand, heat bearing gently
down, breeze a lick of salty lime,
lulled by the swish and sigh of tide
(not his finger on her thigh, not
his mouth). Breathe in. And hold
for two. Breathe out.

ALHS

THE COLLARBONE PERCUSSIONIST

under the justicetree my grandmother bites her tongue
the treacherous thing betrays rhythm as she makes a promise
to the indian goddess of rice *please make this child eat*
and i will bring you her weight in rice the leaves that fall
are dying things stretched across boneveins
and midribs the mother hisses at the child to cover up—
i learn to count to three-hun-dread on my bones—
it is all very inauspicious

like parchedland like emptying the rice pot without leaving a morsel (*for another day*) like waking up to the hungercries every morning like a beat
gathering speed that has never known pause

he comes to the justicetree, the collarbone percussionist
who chases time into her retreats her reprieves beats that leap from technique
into a soft soft exalting soft as skin soft as tapping tapping your feet

to this
this strike upon the bone where the parched throat meets
the breaking shoulders when he wants a softer beat, he says,
her turn will come but for the most primal sounds
the very best, says the collarbone percussionist, he sends
for the starving for the taut skin stretched over geometric bones
whose marrows echo mothers who feed their daughters ash
and pray he does not play upon them whilst they live they listen
and throw their hands up to the measureless measures
and the collarbone percussionist chooses
the most prominent ribs
for snares

they fear him and despise him and they dance to his beat they throw their
last coins at him and go back to their daughters with nothing in their hands
not even brittle guilt

each day my grandmother wraps the throw of my little sari
across my back brings it over to the other shoulder tucks it into the neckline
the child that won't eat says, *we look same*
and plays with the brittle leaves of the justicetree (now all bone)
that have fallen like fate

Jess Taylor

PELVIS

"I broke my pelvis but not in the fun way." I tell the joke again and again, lying in my bed at Sunnybrook Hospital. I tell it because I want to turn everything that happens into a hilarious prank by God. I tell it because I want to believe that all my ex-partners were wrong about me and that I'm funny and cool even in the worst possible circumstances. I tell it because for several years, for always, I've been obsessed with sex and now my pelvis has been broken by a car turning left into me as I crossed the crosswalk. No sex for me!

There are many reasons why I see this as a hilarious prank by God. I talk about God now when people come in as if I believe, and I expect people visiting to know that I am being tongue-and-cheek. I know I'm only joking because when I was on the asphalt, sitting and broken, I thought that this was how I would die. "I'm scared," I said over and over, and more at the hospital in between jokes. Joke through the pain, trying to forget about the pain, even though laughing sends the pain shooting through me again.

I ask my colleague to tell my co-workers the joke. I ask her to tell everyone that there's a reason I'm missing the meeting that day, that I'm not just a slacker. I'm not sure how much gets reported. Apparently, everyone is just horrified.

***

Birds overhead. Gulls. It's a seashore. There is sky above me. I move slightly. Pain. I touch God for a moment. No sand below me. Sheets and plastic. Birds overhead. Made of brushstrokes. Tile beside another tile. A painting on a ceiling tile.

I know this already. "Am I broken?" I say to the nurse attaching a new bag to my IV stand. "My hip?"

"Yes. Your pelvis is broken."

I know this already.

"Do I have to get surgery?"

"Today or tomorrow."

I have been told this already. Asked these questions before. A curtain wrapped around my bed. The nurse holds the cup of pills to my mouth and I swallow. I will do whatever they say.

***

I'm part of the womb. The womb opens and I'm staring at a ceiling. I have been moved. I'm new again. The world is there if only I can open my eyes, raise my arm, if only I could touch it. Womb again. Eyes open. Machinery moving. Pain. Touching God. "She needs something."

"Fentanyl."

Someone in scrubs, mask covering their mouth, passes a needle to a being that looks exactly the same. I am naked. The needle pokes into my arm. Womb again.

***

My alarm wakes me and before I press STOP, I press the button that says Outlook because even in my sleep I've been thinking about work. My alarm still rings. I finally turn it off and continue to skim through the email, reading one or two, making a plan for what I'll write back in my head as I pull the covers off me, kicking at the duvet, brand-new, an attempt to start

over after my last break-up. I wanted to throw out anything that would remind me of him. But even my attempts to start over remind me of him. *Think about work instead.* My feet hit the floor and run to the shower, and, in the shower, I think about work.

I don't just have one job, I have two, even three if you count writing, which most people who aren't writers don't but I do. But I only really think about one job these days: the union. I teach at a university, but I'm not in love with it. I used to like teaching because I felt it connected me to something bigger than myself, and I felt that these students were perhaps on a path to do better things than I was doing, that maybe they all had an inherent goodness and clarity of mind that I'd failed to possess. That was why they'd travelled the world, had the confidence to live in a new country, could speak multiple languages, participate in several extracurriculars that both showed their charitable natures and helped them develop several transferable skills, and be technically proficient enough to build bridges or use biomedical engineering to develop cures for cancer. As I edited their resumes and cover letters, their statements of purpose for Master's and PhD programs, I knew they all would succeed, and many of them only wanted to do good things. I felt good by association, even though I was sitting in a room circling commas for people much more intelligent than I was.

For me, writing seemed to be closest to the type of energy they possessed. While I didn't want to be a face or a figurehead of a cure, a building, or an app—the way I felt many of my students wanted to be—I still wanted credit for my creations when it came to writing. And I'd worked at it, as hard as I'd ever worked, always writing in a notebook, sending things out, or updating my website. The way I always needed to be attached to email and Facebook or finding a new side job created problems with friends and my partners. One time, back when things were still new with my ex, he slid into the chair behind me while I was answering student emails and wrapped his arms around me so I couldn't type anymore. I made promises. I tried to slow down.

But then I fell into union work, as a representative for teachers like me. And that was the work I was fixated on now. That feeling of helping people, pushing people up, being the one helping others do good, combined with the mental interweaving of planning something bigger than myself. Not just sitting in a room circling commas. A battle, a fight each day for the good guys. I forgot about my break-up most days—there

were always emails in my inbox to answer, an interviewer to speak to, people on campus to organize.

But there's a problem with obsessing like this, if you have a mind that skips and jumps from one thing to another. While you answer the emails in one inbox, you think about another inbox. While you make a spreadsheet keeping track of the different organizations you need to email, you think about the novel you're afraid of writing. An assignment that is coming up that will need to be graded. A friend who you haven't talked to in over a week. And then the break-up…

I step out of the shower. I make my spreadsheet. I pack my bag with several notebooks, my laptop, and two bottles of vegetable juice. And then I walk into the sun and snow with boots I bought just yesterday to keep my feet warm in a rally we had during a blizzard. My phone is full of messages coming in from my colleagues, and I slip it into my pocket, zip it safely into my parka.

Today. Union meeting, then teaching, then pick up copies of my book from its publisher, then dinner with a friend. A lot, but doable. I can do anything, I know, as long as I keep my mind focused on the present. As long as I work hard and fast, time blocking. I feel I've broken through to a new level of productivity.

I walk down to the crosswalk. I always walk down to the crosswalk to cross because I fear getting hit by cars. I also fear not being a good person and good people follow the rules and cross at a crosswalk.

Walk sign.

And I'm crossing.

My new boots are heavy on my feet.

My bags are heavy on my shoulders.

There's a group of people waiting at the bus stop. They see me.

I look at the pedestrian countdown, and it's counting down, in the tens. Nineteen, eighteen, seventeen.

And below me, my new boots, Timberlands, beige grey, the asphalt and yellow of the line to separate the lanes because there needs to be order in the world.

Order like my laptop, stowed safely in my bag on my left side, where a car presses into it. A crunch. My laptop. It must be broken in half to make a crack like that, a car pushing against it. The world tipping over. The world spinning.

This is the right way.

This is how the world actually is.

I think this for a moment.

And then the spinning stops.

It's like I've never been real until this moment. The grey is greyer, the yellow more yellow, and I can see every piece of slush and stone on the asphalt of the road.

I'm on the street.

One hand presses the ground behind me, soggy in my glove in the slush. One hand presses the ground in front of me. To keep me level. To keep me sitting. I can't move. Pain. My hip, my back.

I'm going to die like this. The light is going to turn green and the cars are going to drive over me.

And despite everything I've worked on, since I was a little girl calling my mom into my room to ask her about death, begging her to tell me it's all a lie, that sweeping fear opens up and swallows me whole.

I'm going to die.

Like this.

Now.

I start yelling. I scream, "No," because I'm not ready. People stand at the bus stop staring at me, not moving. "Someone call an ambulance!" I yell at them. "Someone help! Someone help me!"

A man touches my shoulder. "I'm so sorry. Are you okay? I hit you!"

"Get away from me!" I say. "You hit me! You hurt me!"

"I'm calling an ambulance," he says.

"Not you. Someone else."

The idea of him being the one to get me help enrages me.

In the middle of the road, I want to lie down. I'm so tired, but my body won't let me lie down. I don't feel the pain the way it actually is, only as a warmth that throbs and spreads across my hip, thigh, and back, but I know I can't lie back. I know something is broken.

A woman comes and holds my hand. Her greying brown hair cut at the shoulders, tortoise shell glasses hiding eyes that flicker from my face to my hand to my hip. She points out her house, beside the place I was hit. "How old are you?" she asks me.

"Twenty-eight."

"My daughter is your age."

I have a mom, I remember. A boy from the bus stop follows my instructions. He unzips my pocket, takes out my phone, and calls my mom for me.

I can see myself from the outside, as if I'm floating above, looking down. There I am in prime bossy-mode. *Do my bidding!* I want to shout. *I'm injured and amazing!* When the paramedics come, I make sure I have some jokes for them.

***

The pelvis. How was it only when it was something broken that I appreciated it? That I saw it as something beautiful? I had never given thought to any of the bones in my body—when I went to yoga and they told me to direct my pubic floor to the ground or scoot my sit bones forward, what lit up instead was the hot throbbing spot of my clitoris, which never quieted, even once the room fell into darkness and we all lay still in Shavasana, corpse pose.

The bone and its many sections seemed alien. The face of a praying mantis. Or just a man in pain, praying. Myself in pain, separated and connected to myself through pain. A tear through the core of me making me more me.

***

"Am I broken?"

"Yes, your pelvis is broken."

"My pelvis."

"Yes, luckily your hip joint is fine."

"Luckily."

Gulls overhead.

My mother and brother stand beside the gurney bed. She tells me she spoke with the surgeon, that I'll go into surgery tomorrow. He told her my pelvis was shattered like an egg. I remember my father was here. Now my brother. He sits with me, dutifully types messages for Facebook and texts to my friends and colleagues.

I show him the gulls.

***

Shattered like an egg.

***

Since I'm not going into surgery until the next day, they put a traction rod through my leg. A doctor comes and explains where the rod will go through my bone, that they'll drill above my knee. He touches my knee. I stare into his eyes and ask if I'll be awake, and he says I will be. I beg him not to do it. He says they have to, that it will help the pain and stabilize me until my surgery the next day. "I'm so scared," I tell him.

"I know," he says and returns my look. For a moment I fall in love, but he doesn't laugh at my jokes like the residents.

I get through it and I can't tell if the traction rod helps the pain or not. The hardest part is the searing pain as I'm transferred from one bed to another. One nurse promises me that I won't be moved again, once I'm in my room.

But soon orderlies return and say they are taking me somewhere else. "Please, don't. No. I don't want to."

"I know, but we have to. You need X-rays."

"But I can't move—I'm attached to the bed, look." I point at where the traction is pinned through my knee, attaching me to the bed.

"No," they say, as if I'm the one being silly. "We can move that too. It comes off."

"No," I say, but with different meaning.

"We have to."

My nurse comes into the room. "You lied to me," I say. "You promised me I wouldn't get moved again. I told you I couldn't take it. I can't be moved again."

"I know. I'm sorry. But we need these X-rays. Honestly, if you relax, it won't be that bad."

"Okay," I say. "But I'm going to yell. You don't understand the pain. It's worse than any pain you can imagine."

"We'll try to be careful. It's okay if you yell."

Four peppy people in scrubs surround me. One more at my feet. They count. They move together. I yell.

***

I want to find new ways to describe my pain. To some visitors I say, "I once thought pain had a ceiling, but it doesn't. Pain isn't finite. It can go on forever. It can be worse than our minds can comprehend."

The worst pain I had in the past was nothing. Period cramps. An inserted IUD that caused contractions and made me feel like I was going

to shit all over the doctor's office. An itching discomfort from a cellulitis-infected bug bite swelling up through my thigh and buttock in the hot summer. A toothpick through the bottom of a foot, pulled out by my father.

A pain in my chest, always with me, that I tried to find new ways to describe: a little man sitting on my chest, a child, a spot where someone punched. That pain was impressive only in its resiliency, stayed through elementary school and high school while I crossed my arms over my breasts, bought high-necked T-shirts and zipped up hoodies to keep eyes away from where I hurt. The pain remained through university, through living on my own and first jobs that made me puke, although I always puked back then, after sex or behind doors in the morning. From fear. Nervousness. The dread of being witnessed by other people.

That pain in my chest I took so seriously was only loneliness in the end and went away when I realized what a good friend I'd always had in myself.

But this pain is different. I'm erased.

***

My desire has always been to be erased. By love, falling into another person so that our two humanities merge into something more beautiful than I can experience everyday. By work, concentrating with such love that you feel like you're flying, like you aren't a body, only a mind—floating, free.

I want to be out of my body—to escape the trap of being alive.

Those words hang in front of me like a pivot, *the trap of being alive,* and I can see both sides. How in my body I am trapped, yet the only escape—death—is so terrifying it traps me in the present.

These desires make me feel like I deserve it, the way my pain erases me.

***

Once I've healed for a week and take my first steps with a forearm walker, I'm moved to a rehabilitation facility, where I'll live for the next five weeks. I have a large bathroom, my own wardrobe, a giant bookshelf. There are a couple chairs for my visitors. During my walks around the

floor with a physio, I see a common room that includes a kitchen, TV, games, and books.

As I recover, I begin to be more independent; I can get my own clothes from the wardrobe in double the time: two fifteen minute intervals, separated by lying in bed and rubbing my calf, the back of my knee. And it's only after I get my two-wheeled walker, Scraps, that I'm able to pick out and bring my own clothes over to the bed in the morning. To get out of bed, I learn how to lift my leg from the bed with a soft, silk belt my mother brought me. One of my favourite nurses recognizes the pattern, colours, and fabric, and claims that like her, it's from Korea.

Recovery is a communal thing. I have my team: A., the resident who talks to me about my pain; Y., the occupational therapist who runs our group workout sessions; and J., my physio. J. gives me walkers, which I give names like horses, my herd of wild bucking stallions carrying me where I need to go. I start with Periwinkle, a forearm walker, and move on to Scraps, and then get The Twins, my crutches. Eventually I have Midnight, the cane.

How alone everyone must be outside of this place. Without their stallions and their two nurses a day and someone to help you in the night. Without residents and doctors and physiotherapists who support you through touch. And Wednesday massages. And social workers who bother you when you're on the phone and occupational therapists who give you weights to hold and devices to help you put on your socks. Where everyone is working toward your success.

In the OT room, we all gather to lift weights or move bags of sand around the table. Y. says it will help keep us mobile with all the time we spend in bed. I know that she also sees the benefits of getting us out of our rooms once a day and together with other people who understand. When it is raining outside, or sleeting, or the sky gets dark, that's when we're unified. We enter the OT room late. We groan and ask each other about our pain, and the answer often is, "It's worse." Or, "It's a bad day."

We cannot communicate our pain to each other because we don't have the vocabulary. Everything we ever knew about pain, were taught about pain, is wrong. Actually pain is ineffable except through the most overblown means, and those who experience pain do not want to alienate anyone through our descriptions of pain, as we're already alienated.

There are people like me, who use a walker to get to the OT room, but then work out their arms, back, and shoulders fine. I joke that I'm going to get buff.

Mrs R. comes in, a woman of about eighty, and she is so shrivelled in pain that she can barely open her eyes. But over time, she begins to smile at me and I start to visit her and wave and talk with her about pain when I do my lap around the halls with my physio. We don't speak the same language, but we find a way to make it work.

W., tiny and greying, tells us tales of where he's lived from around the world. His favourites were Italy, Greece, and South Africa, where he's from. Tall, lanky D. jokes every day that he's swimming across the Nile when he moves the sandbags in sweeping arches over the surface of the OT table. He can't really participate in conversation other than that, although his wife sometimes comes in and interprets.

People ask me where I hurt. Doctors, friends. Everyone wants me to describe my pain on a scale from one to ten.

A spot at my back.

"Clench your hand into a fist. That's the size of the place where I hurt." I make a fist. I lay it along my spine, to the left, the top of my pelvis.

There was a story I read when I was doing my undergraduate degree. I can't remember the name of it or the professor or my classmates or much of who I was back then. I only remember a moment.

The boy's father is dead and there is snow on the ground.

The boy is maybe a man, but his father is definitely dead.

He stands with another person he doesn't know or who didn't know his father.

He says, "My father was like this." And punches a hole in a snowbank. "He was like this." He punches another hole.

Sometimes it seems like all I remember from my life is this one scene from a story I still can't fully remember.

My pain is like this, I want to say. *It's like this.*

I want to punch a snowbank, but to do this, I'd have to be able to balance.

***

In the middle of the night, my pain is animal-like. An animal chomping on the calf of my body. Or I'm in the belly of a whale, slowly being digested by acid, or I'm wandering in the woods as a bear, and my back paw is caught in a trap. Briefly, my eyes close in the dark room illuminated only

by the splash of light coming through the door's window. The bathroom light is also on, in case I rise and fall or lose my way in the night.

I toss and turn in slow-mo. A slow creaking movement from one side to another. Each movement causes pain to shoot across my ass, up my calf—my toes feel like they aren't meant to be attached to my foot.

CODE WHITE CODE WHITE CODE WHITE

7th FLOOR

For a moment, I think it's me. They know about the pain. They know it's little bugs underneath the skin of my calf, my foot, and they are building colonies all over my muscles.

CODE WHITE

***

A. sometimes breaks away from the doctor to talk to me. He sits and talks to me about my pain, gives me tips for weaning off the hydromorphone. I can tell he understands. Later, when he speaks with my mother while I'm at OT, he tells her that there are services that can help her. He speaks from experience, he says, and that something happened to him and it was hard on his mother.

I begin to look for him as I practice walking with my crutches in the halls. When he comes in, sometimes I have visitors. I've put together a colour-coded calendar and scheduled visits so I eat meals with friends. Sometimes, when A. visits, I'm in a telephone meeting with the union. I've gone on leave from teaching, but the union uses their phone conferencing system, nicknamed The Starfish, to call me in. I use it so frequently that they start to call me Starfish.

A. comes in and I'm working on a sweater. He tells me, "You're knitting too? You're doing too much. You need to be resting."

He comes in and I'm in a phone meeting. He promises to come back, and I see him shaking his head as he leaves.

When he returns later, he asks me, "No more visitors today?"

"No more."

"No more work meetings?"

"I only had one…"

"What's your only job here?"

"Resting. Healing."

"Exactly."

"It's just that I need to keep my mind busy." The way he looks at me tells me that he knows that's not why I can't let my work go. That when I wake up in the early mornings to work, jazz music playing through my headphones, it's not only about distracting me from pain. I just can't imagine being someone who lets everything slide when something happens to them. Don't want to be someone who is looked at as irresponsible. I hate that I'm not the one helping anymore. Instead I need help getting food, help walking, help getting out of bed. I need towels brought to me as I finish a shower. I need books brought to me.

My friends visit bright and early in the morning. S. comes each morning at 6 a.m. to work on her novel before she goes to work. She prints my manuscript for me and we put it in a binder. I'm able to go through and underline sentences I hate, but I can't write. I can message people, tell my story, but I catch myself making mistakes the way I never did before. I don't do this at the union—the tasks are shorter in duration, more focused. Political letter writing touches on certain points, step by step. But I've lost my creativity.

When it's time to eventually leave, I can't pack my own things, so C. comes and helps me shove clothes and books into tote bags.

I count up all the things my friends do for me, and I know it isn't fair.

People expect less of me these days. Because I'm healing, but I also know it's because they equate my mobility with ability in general. This makes me furious. I'm the same me—I'm just also learning to walk again, and maybe walking a little differently from now on, feeling pain in waves depending on the day.

A. knows that this is my true injury: the way the world has been set up to fuel anxiety in me if I'm not constantly moving, constantly doing, creating, and serving. And the way he looks directly at this injury causes me to pay attention to it for the first time in my life.

Even though I have a crush on A., since the break-up, I've given up on the true love game. Instead, I've begun to see special people that come into my life as friendships or experiences that are helping me realize the way I should be treated, so that I can stop feeling the pressure to be obedient and produce in order to be worthy or loved. I tell A. often, he—and everything about being here really—is making a difference to me. That who I am is changing, or wants to change at least. The day before

I leave rehab, he sits in the chair across from my bed and I thank him for really seeing me, and he tears up and I do too. I never see him again.

***

It's hard adjusting to life after the hospital. It's like I don't understand certain social things anymore. I have to remind myself. My eyes are off. One eye has a perpetual floater that spikes through my vision. I don't know if it was there before and it's the only way I notice things that have changed.

A colour,

A person moves and I'm drawn to looking at their coffee cup.

I notice that the coffee cup is at the exact level of their crotch and I look away quickly before they think of me as some kind of perv.

This all could be caused by the drug I'm on for my nerve pain, gabapentin. I know that. But when I began to take it, suddenly I was free—I didn't think about the break-up or what people thought of me or the longstanding effects of the accident except for in practical terms. I feel calm, anxiety-free. Perhaps medication was the solution all along.

One thing I haven't been doing is writing. I watch TV. I buy things: shoes, a backpack, books I can't concentrate on long enough to read. When I try to write, none of my words work well together. I come up with the wrong word endings. I labour. I end up with 150 words after a struggle. I quit.

***

Healing means that people doubt your pain. One day you are walking and moving, you do a little wiggle. You go dancing. It feels so good to go dancing again, the cane isn't with you anymore, you are just moving, you are free, you are breathing, how good it is, how good.

Then the next day it's hard to get up. Or it's hard to cross the road, every car turning into you.

Or it's a day where you work, you move, but your whole leg prickles. And you don't dare tell anyone. How can you tell anyone? How can you let anyone know about your pain?

***

I'd originally thought healing would stop after I left the hospital. I thought maybe I would always use a walker or a cane, and then I adjusted my goals to meet me. I can walk. I can walk without a cane. I can walk with no one else around. Life begins to return to its pace.

At a meditation centre, I meet up with two friends. I stow my cane in the locker and meditate in a salt cave. M. helps me keep my balance, holds my hands as I lower into the beanbag chair. After we're done, we're energized, and I tell them I've started to use dating apps. That I'm ready to add someone to my life. I don't tell them I'm lonely. I don't need to. All I've felt is lonely since I've left everyone at the hospital.

"Oh yeah?" says M. "Are you down to fuck?"

I think for a moment, wondering if I'd be okay with penetrative sex after the accident. I haven't tried that with myself yet. "I'm definitely down to have an orgasm at least," I say.

On the apps, one girl tells me the story of how when she and her wife got divorced, they ate sausages to commemorate the occasion. I don't know how to tell her about the accident, how even though I'm healing well, know objectively that I'm healing well, that I'm still sad about it all the time, that I constantly think about the words I could have written in the time lost in the hospital. So I delete the app.

On Instagram, I meet a girl and we chat when I'm lonely at my parents' during Thanksgiving. She messages me immediately the next day, but I'm sore and anxious from the travel and spend a lot of time napping. She sends me a five-paragraph text message asking why I'm ghosting her. I have to tell her about the accident. She texts me even more after that, comparing my pain to her own experiences until I actually do ghost her.

I re-add the app. A man demands to pick me up in his car for a date even though I tell him it doesn't make me feel safe. I stop replying.

Finally, I meet C.C. Re-meet. He already knows about the accident, so I don't have to explain anything. We've known each other for a while through the writing community. He's not the type to pry, but intuitively he knows I need to feel safe, how to make me feel safe. And finally, just as I don't need to carry my cane anymore, we fall in love. After finding an accessible pregnancy centre, C.C. and I become parents-to-be.

I try to write, but it still doesn't come. I stop taking my gabapentin. I still can't write. My brain, once the quickest thing about me, is sludge.

***

My pain has rendered me someone new. I'm different, I feel it in the way my bones are held together by something other than myself. I know what I want, what I feel. All the things I need to be before I'll feel okay with dying, death weighing heavy on my mind. Like I know it always will.

***

Is it even possible to capture an experience in a way other people will understand? What if it's something life changing? What if you were broken apart?

***

When I visit Toronto Rehabilitation Institute for my outpatient physio, I walk around and explore. I do this more now. Rather than seeing spaces as things I pass through from one point to another, I soak objects in. There is an exhibit by an artist who is recovering from a TBI. She takes ceramic bowls, breaks them, and puts them back together again in interesting new shapes. Shattered but whole. Recovery isn't recovery, I realize, but rebirth, rearrangement, being stitched back together in a fragmented order.

I take a card from the artist that shows a partial shot of one of the reassembled ceramic structures. Fragmented even when photographed. I put it over my desk at work. I try to explain to my colleagues what it means to me, but I get choked up and can't. Before I start working each day, I spend a moment with the card.

***

People overestimated the pain when I used the walker, when I was in the wheelchair. When I walked into the room with my cane, people winced. People were thinking that I was in such pain, such pain. How could I bear it?

But pain is pain. It's relative. It fades and it swells. Some days pain takes over and some days it doesn't. It's like being a little sick all the time. That's what it's like.

Or in those old days where anxiety flooded me, and I didn't feel I could move except I did even though the centre of my palms, my feet, my head throbbed. Kept working even though I was so afraid to be near

people, around people, exposed to their rejection and ridicule. The pain in my chest, my muse, forever taunting.

People tell me all the time, it's amazing the way I can walk. That they don't notice any difference. When I go in for an ultrasound for our child, the tech says he's seen my X-rays and he's shocked that I've recovered so well. No one can tell, but then there's the way I feel. *You should see what I look like on the inside,* I want to say. I don't mean my hardware. And who's to say which pain is more real? It's all in the body, isn't it? Bones and nerves and blood and brain.

Elena Bentley

LOSING THE EXCESS

I have always been plus
plus-size, plus-one

nonplussed since breakfast
that morning, over coffee and waffles,
when you spilled your judgement across the table
pointing at my plate, a stack
of pound signs smothered in syrup
each tiny octothorpe echoing
#carbs #calories #fat #failure

I'm tired
of diets, of exercise gadgets, I can't muscle through
another green salad, balsamic vinegar and olive oil on the side
I can't stomach those thin Lulu-wearing women
always clustered in large numbers, flocking
to fitness centres, health food stores, in line at Starbucks eyeing me up
ready to swoop in with some fresh insight:

"eggplant slices make great alternatives for pizza crust"—
I'm embarrassed to eat around you, feel anxious
as I sneak through our door, a snack-armed pirate
bootlegging convenience-store contraband
my body is heavy, a bin overflowing
with garbage I've ingested
insecurity, doubt, your words

tip the scale, if I could
strip off this gluttonous carapace
I wonder, what will be left,
will I wear the black lace lingerie
with the lights on? I'm still thick,
a voluptuous meal, not some fat-free cheat you can stick in
your back pocket, treat yourself to some later

you say, I've let myself go—
I have let myself go too far
carrying your excess weight, I need to lose
the whole hundred and fifty pounds of you
I'm tired
of being left wanting, of postponing my pleasure
weighed down by your standards

I will always be plus
now plus-size, minus one

Jesse Holth

BODIES

It's almost medical, the globs
of seaweed, dark green bottleneck

bulbs and tethers
stuck to the rocks,

that fishy smell—thick, musty,
what lives in the water

exposed. It's the scent
of living things shelled open

heaved upon the shore, or simply
gasping into air

slowly, as the sea retreats
for a while. I can't complain:

even the otter shit smells good
down beneath the logs,

the driftwood housing, dark
corners for them to lie in. Shelters

to protect them from the many
welcome or unwanted visitors

passing by. It smells fresh
too—like ocean, salty sea, dense

with the movement of water
on seabeds. But still the surface

is calm, pale grey, milkglass,
nothing stirring

or alive or so it seems. It's easy
to make the mistake—to think

it's empty. And the sea lion
cuts up to you, just then,

the eagle soaring above, long
wingspan just as shocking

each time as if it were new
again, the black silk feathers

puncture blue, the white surprise
of head and tail flicks

in the sky. Ancient trunks
like hands, reaching out of the dark:

they are stories
from the bottom of the sea. Who knows

how far they've travelled
to meet you.

Tehila Hakimi, translated by Joanna Chen

RELOCATION

1

There were men there, teenagers, adults, even old people, there were children too, maybe grandchildren as well, and in some cases maybe even great-grandchildren, it depends. Everyone waited, standing up. The old ones were sitting, but it was obvious that the others were disgruntled, because the old ones were taking up chairs and benches. A general air of suspicion prevailed there. The old men didn't trust the younger ones, who talked in raised tones, practically shouting, and who laughed incessantly, the devices in their hands vibrating continuously. By comparison the old men held devices that rang, and they answered in really loud voices, mostly making several attempts to do so, repeatedly staring at the screen while squinting and removing their glasses, and then calling out again and again hello hello. The lighting was blinding, that's something I clearly recall, a strong, blinding light that reflected off the white walls and the floor. Some of the old men wore sunglasses, perhaps the adults too, perhaps it's best to say that some of the old men were adults and

some of the adults were old, either way they were no longer young, and perhaps those weren't sunglasses at all but the type of glasses that change colour when entering well-lit or closed spaces and so on and so forth, but as always, a kind of opacity is preserved in these types of lenses. The teenagers were impatient, the way teenagers are supposed to be, perhaps they were waiting for the old ones to go already and vacate the chairs and benches, perhaps they were waiting for them to go, to really go, straight to their graves. The children misbehaved and wouldn't let up, the way children are supposed to misbehave. Women were discernible there, but only with a special effort, they stood, but talked in lower tones. And the hours went by, and we kept waiting, the buzzing didn't stop, the children, the men and the women. If there had been a window and it would have been possible to stand outside and listen, it would have sounded like a Jewish prayer, one that is disturbed by the noise of devices vibrating and shouts of hello hello hello.

2

After a while someone came out to us, he was wearing a uniform and said he was sorry for the delay, that soon they would begin calling people up. They interrupted him right away, someone asked why there were no chairs, another asked to turn up the AC, one old man asked to speak to the person in charge, said he had a disability card and that he's eligible to go to the front of the line in all institutions, you've got a nerve, the old man shouted, whoever heard of such a thing. An elderly woman mumbled something in Russian, a boy yelled at his brother to stop bugging him, ennnnough already you little dopehead, go get yourself a liiiiiiife, he yelled, after that their mother grabbed them both by their shirts with one hand and raised them up, pinned to each other like two plastic bags lifted into the air at the supermarket checkout. One more word, she said, and you can forget about pizza, and anyway you can forget about all the treats I promised, she didn't specify which. Then she said they'd be the death of her, they just stared because no one uses expressions like that anymore, and this is actually my own mom's expression and I just had to write it here.

3

When I was called into the inner room, two out of the five were already there. A man and a woman, dressed casually.

They both smiled and the woman began by saying please, take a seat, would you care for a drink? Hot or cold?

I asked for a glass of water and she gestured to a guy with her finger. I appreciated that. I've always liked people who work in a team and need no more than a small sign with a finger, and boom—a glass of cold water appeared on the table between us.

4

I drank a little water from the glass that was placed in front of me. The woman sitting opposite me smiled and asked, do you know why you're here? I pulled the letter out of my pocket, I told her I'd received notice about an inheritance whose details were confidential and did not appear in the letter, and I was asked to present myself here in the Tel Aviv government centre offices. She continued smiling and said okay. Fine, so now this is what we'll do, I'm going to explain to you in a few minutes who we are, and why we invited you here, after that we'll ask you a few questions, and we'll take it from there. But before we proceed, we'll need you to fill in a form with a number of details and you'll be asked to leave your personal possessions in the next room. The man who was sitting next to her opened another door set in an alcove behind them, the kind of door that opens with a clickety-click, I went in.

5

Inside the inner room that extended out of the other inner room sat two people in casual clothes, they asked me how I was doing, I said great, they requested I hand over my purse and asked if I'm carrying a weapon in the purse. I laughed, I told them I'd been asked that question three times since entering the building, you know, we're in government offices. They smiled, but didn't laugh. Okay, I thought to myself, they probably hear that line a hundred times a day. They opened one of the lockers set against the wall and gave me a key. Then they asked me to go over to the metal detector that stood in the corner of the room, are you wearing a belt, do you have a pacemaker or any other metal object on your person? No, I answered and passed through the metal detector. It didn't beep, you can go back to the room, they told me with a smile. I went back to the room.

6

When I returned to the room there were already five of them, three women and two men of various ages, there was even one man who looked to me of Scandinavian descent, he was gigantic, where on earth did he come from, I thought to myself.

This time they spoke in English, they explained this was because not everyone spoke Hebrew. The woman who had talked to me previously was now sitting at the far right of the table, an open notebook in front of her, the man sitting next to her had one of those big brown files. All the others had tablets, and they were all generally relaxed and smiling. The eldest one in the group, a short, dwarflike man with a mustache, spoke first. He said, from what we understand about you and what we've already gathered from information freely available on social media and other sources, we thought to offer you a deal you might like, we're looking for candidates, both male and female, we think you're a good fit. I smiled, because everyone else was smiling, and I said so actually this has nothing to do with an inheritance. The Scandinavian answered, no, he said, there's no inheritance, at least not in the meanwhile.

I said okay but if this is the beginning of our communication together, there's a question of trust. He said I know, but there are things that in the initial stages we can't talk about outside of this room, and definitely can't send in the mail. I promise that at the end of this meeting you won't be suspicious any longer, you'll be curious about what we're offering you. Okay, I said, I'm listening.

7

On my way out I noticed the waiting room had emptied almost completely, they asked me to think about everything, and told me they'd be in touch regarding the next meeting. All of a sudden the waiting room shrunk, perhaps I'd been in there longer than I'd imagined. The five of them said the next time we meet, we'll provide more details about the program, and how it's carried out. They said it was very important right now not to talk about it to anyone until we've moved forward with the process at the end of which I could decide one way or another. It's not a question of confidentiality, eventually I'll understand that in the interests of a smooth transition, it's advisable not to tell people. They said that if relocation was once a tough decision because of family matters on the one hand and logistic reasons on the other hand—the whole issue of packing, the containers and the waiting period, particularly if it's a distant

continent, the delivery which could take months—here we're talking about relocation that takes about an hour including full accommodation, that's what they said. Everything, all included. No dependency on airlines, no tax issues, no bureaucratic intervention of any kind. They repeated themselves, listen, your life conditions won't be affected, either personally or professionally, not in any aspect. On the contrary, we can upgrade you in every possible way, we'll explain everything later. They emphasized that I'm one of the first in the world to receive such an offer, you need to understand, the woman at the far end with the notepad told me, this is a once in a lifetime opportunity, it's putting yourself at the forefront of the right to choose and simply to relocate yourself from all this.

8

That was Wednesday and for the next two days I didn't leave the house, I wanted to make a decision about the offer. I sat down at the computer and wrote on my Facebook page that my cellphone screen had shattered and that I can't see who's calling me. At the end I wrote: I won't be available until Sunday, all best!

I sent an email to my family telling them I would come for Friday night dinner as usual. I sent an email to my boss telling him I was sick, streptococcus, I wrote him, I've got a bad dose of it. I sent an email to the clinic telling them I was unable to get an appointment online and requesting a doctor's note to cover my sick leave from now up to and including the following Sunday. I opened the fridge and saw I had a few vegetables and some fruit. I took a peach, shut the fridge door, turned on the AC and sat down. I took a sheet of paper and a pen and placed them on the living room table in front of me. I leaned back on the couch and stared at the ceiling for a while, then I stared some more, I don't know how long this went on, the phone was lying on the desk by the computer and I don't have a wall clock, I'm not sure I know anyone who has a wall clock, or a desk clock for that matter. Afterwards I sat down on the couch and began writing sentences, questions, and meditations about the whole business, about the relocation, mostly about decisions relating to my career, it was easier for me to create tables, or lists, to write down the things that were staring me in the face.

At some point the list turned messy, I began drawing lines and arrows between the lines like a flow chart and then it turned into a maze of arrows and sentences, I fell asleep.

9

A week later I arrived at the same waiting room on the same floor of the government centre. I was ten minutes early. I sat and waited for them to call me inside. After a short delay I was called inside, this time one woman was sitting there, dressed casually, and between us stood a circular table.

She introduced herself as Dorit and spoke in sing-song Hebrew, there were moments in which she literally rhymed the ends of her sentences, unfortunately I was unable to trace the textual source, even now I can't remember exactly what it was.

So let's begin, do you have any questions?

Why did you approach me in the first place?

How do you even locate people for your program?

10

Dorit smiled a wide smile, a fat smile, a dimpled smile, like we said in the first meeting, she said, we locate candidates through information at our disposal, digital communication you've chosen to share in the last ten years. We work in collaboration with a company that provides headhunting services, we've assembled a team of professionals, what kind of professionals? I interrupted her midsentence, the interruption didn't bother her at all, she continued with a smile, explaining that they have an open policy, in the present labour market an employee doesn't have to be an IT specialist in order to work at Google or somewhere like that. That's why they try to select men and women according to their talents and motivation to become part of a project and not necessarily according to their professional background, she said. Among other things she explained to me, there's an international team of doctors, sociologists, organizational consultants and professionals from a variety of fields, there's also a novelist, she said, he's actually quite famous, but she can't reveal his name.

11

I returned home. Dorit scheduled me a further meeting for two days' time, she wanted to meet me in the evening hours, I preferred the evening, I didn't have to invent streptococcus again. I began reconstructing the things I'd been told, I tried to make sense of it all, I began writing thoughts and insights about the conversation, after a while I could say one thing for sure, there wasn't a question that didn't receive an answer,

there was no sidestepping of questions, although I might not have liked all the answers, there was not a single question that remained unanswered. That was an important point. I understood with clarity that I had an opportunity here, I had an option, perhaps this is how I should look at things, we were dealing with a redeemable option, given to a few select individuals at the first stage, and for this reason it would be at no cost, because of the experimental nature of the project, the candidates would be part of a group experiment. You're the experiment, I told myself out loud.

12

We met at a café in the Givatayim shopping mall. Both of them smiled as I approached the table.

Funnily enough, I said as soon as I sat down, I suddenly remembered something that happened to me when I was in the army, they smiled and listened, I told them about it. They invited me right here, to the shopping mall in Givatayim, people from the Foreign Ministry, I mean from their operations department, they tried to recruit me, and they did a trick, arranged to meet me on one floor and then called a minute before the meeting and asked me to come to a different floor, what kind of a method is this? Do they teach it somewhere? They were still smiling, so they didn't recruit you? Benjamin asked, no, not yet. But who knows, I was very young, they may have sent me a letter afterwards thank you etc. etc., in the future we may contact you again, I never heard another word from them. Dorit began laughing, she had a kind of thin, brittle laugh that was very different from her usual voice. It would have been really hard to stop her, we didn't try, Benjamin signaled to the waiter, and when he came over, Dorit's laughter stopped dead in its tracks. Dorit began talking, assuming that you want to continue with us, we need to understand which program will best suit you, of course we don't have a defined program, or track, this is a program which we'll build together with you, something that will be entirely new, custom-made, tailored to your requirements as they say, your wishes, your happiness.

13

So, I don't have to resign?

I don't have to do anything? Pack up my apartment? Say goodbye to my parents and friends?

I don't have to say goodbye to anyone?

What will all those people think?

Now they both smiled again, you don't have to do anything you don't want to, you can continue observing your old life, which will be maintained by our algorithms. At a later stage you can stop observing it, if you like. So in fact what you're saying is that as far I'm concerned I can just quit everything and someone else will take care of it all as if I still existed in my old life?

Can I go back to it? Is it possible to return from this relocation?

It depends on you of course, the clauses you'll choose in the contract, you can choose an exit point from the relocation and the conditions for your return. One relocation can be exchanged for another relocation of course.

What are the costs involved, how much money is it going to cost me?

Dorit once again looked on the verge of laughter but this time she stopped herself and said, I understand you have a lot of misgivings, mutual trust still hasn't been established, and it's natural and even essential, let me suggest something, she said and took out a notepad and pen and wrote an address, a telephone number and another number with nine digits and two letters.

At nine tomorrow morning you'll be picked up by a cab from your apartment, this cab will take you to the Sheraton Hotel on the promenade. Go to the front desk and give the concierge this number, she tapped the pen on the page which lay on the desk, the concierge will find a reservation in your name and you'll complete check-in.

A room will be reserved for you, and from here you'll be able to observe yourself existing through our algorithm. I suggest we give it a trial period of three days and three nights. To let you sleep on it a bit.

The only thing you have to be careful about is not to leave the hotel grounds, there's a swimming pool, a spa and a restaurant, anything you need you dial this number, she pointed to the number she had written on the bottom of the page and then handed it to me.

They looked pleased, and so was I, what could be bad in observing myself doing all the usual things I do, only from a five-star hotel on the beach.

Just one last thing, Dorit said, we'd like you to go with Benjamin for half an hour to our offices here on the fourth floor of the shopping mall, where we'll complete the screening for the demo tomorrow at nine thirty in the morning.

14

On the way to the fourth floor we crossed over to the other side of the shopping mall from the ground floor, where we said goodbye to Dorit with a handshake and she smiled again, this time a dry formal smile, but it was fine as far as I was concerned. We kept going together toward the elevators, and when we got there Benjamin pressed the button to call the elevator, we stood there. Suddenly facing the elevator, through the reflection in the metal, he looked somewhat familiar to me, and I tried looking at him unobtrusively, in an effort to remember where I knew him from. Where do I know you from where do I know you from where do I know you. My thoughts were interrupted when after a few moments the elevator reached the ground floor, the metal doors opened and we went inside. Benjamin pressed number four and smiled at me, we both made an effort not to look in the mirror, when the doors opened again he let me exit first and then exited himself and came to stand beside me, he signaled with his hand in the direction of the long hallway and said softly, shall we continue with the assessment?

I smiled. Absolutely, I said.

We entered the hallway, he opened a door and then another door into a large room, at the entrance to the room was a front desk beside which two women and a man waited, the three of them greeted me, come sit down, Benjamin pointed to the chairs by the front desk, I'll let you in right away.

15

Two women in white scrubs stood inside, a doctor and a nurse, that's how they introduced themselves, profession and first name, they asked me to take my shoes off and sit on the bed that stood in the corner of the examination room, the doctor spoke with a barely perceptible American accent and explained that the objective of the examination was to ascertain that I was fit for the three day stay. A scan will be carried out, she said, using a machine that looks like an X-ray machine, just more sophisticated, the iPhone X-ray, she said with seriousness, it's a German invention, certified by the FDA. She asked if I was pregnant, or if I have a medical device or any other type of implant.

The scan was very brief, and when it was over I went back into the reception, Benjamin was sitting there waiting for me.

Are we done? he asked.

I nodded my head.

16

I left the shopping mall alone, and I left my apartment the next morning. A cab waited for me down below, I left the cab in the driveway of the hotel. I went into the hotel, I followed all Dorit's instructions, at the front desk I presented the number she had given me the night before, the concierge tapped out the numbers and letters with nimble fingers on the keyboard, and from the machine beside it a new card was ejected that would open the door to the room reserved for me. Before nine thirty that same morning I had already completed check-in, or perhaps check-out.

In the room that had been reserved for me I observed the sea through large windows. It was unbelievable, paradise. Then I turned on the television. On the TV screen, like on a computer screen, there were two options, the usual OS icon and a second one, with a photo of me and my name in small letters, I hit the icon, welcome, the computer sprung to life the moment I hit the icon, and right away I saw myself, in the car, driving to work, the GPS directed me to turn right in six hundred feet, I turned right, I exited the highway onto the road that leads to the tech centre where I work. It was almost nine thirty, then I went into the parking lot, parked the car and made my way toward the elevator, it was interesting that I could see myself in the elevator as well, perhaps it's not that good for me and I should stop, but I didn't want to stop, not yet, I decided to keep watching until ten o'clock and then go about my business. But then I remembered that at nine thirty I was supposed to go to the weekly staff meeting, which would take about an hour, fine, so perhaps I'll watch until ten thirty and then I'll go about my business.

When I woke up the curtains were still open, the sky had darkened a little, it was dusk, I sat up and on the television I watched myself clocking out as I left the office, I switched off the television.

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

ALHS is a poet and critic from India. Her poems have appeared in *The Willowherb Review*, and as a pagefiftyone press micro-broadside. She lives and writes on the unceded land of the Lək̓ʷəŋən peoples, where she is a student and research assistant at University of Victoria.

Ronaldo Acuna lives in Burnaby, British Columbia. He has worked as a counsellor, support worker, and remedial instructor. In addition to writing, which has been published in such literary magazines as *Ricepaper Magazine*, he has explored various facets of storytelling as a graphics artist and a filmmaker.

Ashleigh A. Allen is a poet, writer, researcher, and educator. She is currently a PhD student in Curriculum and Pedagogy at OISE, University of Toronto.

Debora Anthonypillai is a first-generation immigrant, Sri Lankan Canadian poet. Through writing, she learns more about her culture and family history, processes deep-rooted traumas, and relives precious memories. This piece is a snapshot of Debora's family neighbourhood in Ja-ela, Sri Lanka as the sun comes down.

Elena Bentley is a disabled, Métis/settler poet, writer, editor, and book reviewer living in Saskatchewan. She holds an MA in English from the University of Toronto. Her poetry has been published in various magazines and journals, including *Arc Poetry Magazine* and *The Malahat Review*, and is forthcoming in *Room Magazine*.

Joanna Chen's translations include *Less Like a Dove* (Shearsman Books, 2016), *Frayed Light* (Wesleyan Poetry Series, 2019) and *My Wild Garden* (Random House, 2020). She teaches literary translation at the Helicon School of Poetry and contributes interviews and lyric essays to *The Los Angeles Review of Books*. Read more at www.joannachen.com.

Poonam Dhir is a queer poet, editor, storyteller, Punjabi descendent, and settler currently based in Tiohtiá:ke (Montréal). They are a finalist for the 2021 PEN Canada New Voices Award. You can read their latest piece in *Vallum* 18:1 "Invisibility" and forthcoming in *CV2*. Find Poonam on twitter @pnmdhir.

Antony Fangary is a Poet, Educator, and Artist living in San Francisco. His poetry has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *The Oakland Review*, *New American Writing*, *The Sycamore Review*, *West Branch*, and elsewhere. Antony was Finalist for the 2019 Wabash Poetry Prize, and Runner-up for the 2020 Test Site Poetry Series Book Prize.

Tehila Hakimi is an award-winning Hebrew-language poet and fiction writer. For her first collection of poetry *Mahar Na'avod* (*We'll Work Tomorrow*, Tang'ir, 2014), she received the 2015 Bernstein Prize for Literature. She published a graphic novel, *Ba-mayim* (*In the Water*, 2016), and *Hevrah* (*Company*, Resling, 2018), a hybrid collection of prose. Hakimi is a mechanical engineer by profession.

Jesse Holth is a writer, editor, and poet living in Lekwungen/Songhees and WSÁNEĆ territory (Victoria). Her poems have appeared in *Room*, *Grain*, *CV2*, *Canthius*, and elsewhere. She served as Assistant Poetry Editor at *The Tishman Review*, Editor-in-Residence at *The Puritan*'s Town Crier, and is currently working on two full-length collections.

A graduate of the MFA program at Rutgers University-Camden, **Daniel Kessel** was the recipient of an Interdisciplinary Fellowship for his research on the contemporary queer novel. His writing has appeared in *Bending Genres*, *The Maine Review*, *The Huffington Post*, and other publications. He currently teaches at Rutgers.

Vancouver's sixth poet laureate, **Fiona Tinwei Lam** has authored three poetry collections and a children's book, and collaborated on award-winning poetry videos that have screened internationally. Shortlisted for the City of Vancouver Book Award and thrice selected for BC's Poetry in Transit, her work appears in over 40 anthologies, including *Best Canadian Poetry*.

Camille Lendor is a poet living in Toronto, Ontario. Her work has appeared in *Canadian Literature*, *League of Canadian Poets*, and *Stellium Literature*, among other publications.

Fares Micue is a Spanish fine art photographer born in 1987. She creates poetic images where she talks about self-growth, hope, or empowerment all with a very distinctive use of color and props, creating images that are both rich aesthetically and in meaning.

Janette Platana was born and raised in Saskatchewan. She lives and works in Ontario and Saskatchewan. She holds an MA in English—Public Texts from Trent University. Her short story collection *A Token of*

My Affliction was a Finalist for the Trillium Book Award and the Frank O'Connor International Award.

Judith Pond has published fiction and poetry in a variety of Canadian literary journals, as well as four collections of poetry with Oberon Press, Ottawa. She holds a Masters degree in German literature from Queen's University at Kingston Ontario, and an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

Betsy Struthers has published nine books of poetry—*Still* won the 2004 Pat Lowther Memorial Award—three novels, and a book of short fiction. Her first published poems appeared in *PRISM* 17:2, Fall 1978. A past president of the League of Canadian Poets, she lives in Peterborough, Ontario.

Jess Taylor is a Tkaronto (Toronto) writer and poet. Jess has published two collections of short stories and two chapbooks of poetry. Her work has been nominated for a Lambda Literary Prize, National Magazine Awards, and the Journey Prize. Her short story, "Paul," won the 2013 Gold NMA in fiction.

Born in 1976 in Taiwan, **Sun Tzu-ping** graduated from the Graduate Institute of Creative Writing and English Literature at National Dong Hwa University. He is currently an editor at the *Liberty Times*. Chinese titles by Sun include *Knowing Shadows* (essays), *Sentimentalist* (poetry) and *Male Bodies* (novel), among others.

Nicholas Wong is the author of *Crevasse* (Kaya Press, 2015), the winner of the Lambda Literary Award for Gay Poetry, and *Besiege Me* (Noemi Press, 2021). His translations have appeared in *Ninth Letter, The Georgia Review, Colorado Review, Denver Quarterly, The Cincinnati Review, Poetry Northwest*, and *Black Warrior Review*.

Emma Zimmerman is a Brooklyn, New York–based writer, journalist, and MFA candidate in Creative Nonfiction at NYU. Her writing has appeared in *Taproot Magazine, Runner's World, Trail Runner, Canyon Voices*, and *Away Journal*. She also hosts the Social Sport Podcast on endurance sports and social change. You can find her at emmamzimmerman.com.

vallum MAGAZINE COVER CONTEST 2022

win $500 + publication

on the front cover of *Vallum* issue 19:1

DEADLINE: MARCH 5th

Enter a series of 5 to 10 images

One image from the winning series will appear on the front cover of the magazine and 4 to 8 images will be published within the interior

Visit our website for full details: www.vallummag.com

Artwork by 2021 winner, Antoine Janot

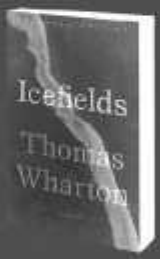
NeWest Press Fall 2021

newestpress.com

rump+flank
CAROL HARVEY STESKI
An exploration of women's bodies through poetry.
$19.95 CDN

RESCUE AT FORT EDMONTON
RITA FEUTL
A reissue of an Alberta Young Adult classic.
$12.95 CDN

RESCUE IN THE ROCKIES
RITA FEUTL
Janey falls through time to Alberta's hidden past.
$12.95 CDN



TENURE
KIERAN EGAN
A drug lord versus academics, what could go wrong?
$21.95 CDN

THE CINE STAR SALON
LEAH RANADA
Family and responsibility in the life of a young Filipino-Canadian.
$21.95 CDN

LAST TIDE
ANDY ZULIANI
On the West Coast, bohemians and bourgeois await the Big One.
$21.95 CDN

ICEFIELDS
LANDMARK EDITION
THOMAS WHARTON
One of our best-loved titles, packaged for a new generation.
$23.95 CDN

PRISM is contemporary writing

Ronaldo Acuna
ALHS
Ashleigh A. Allen
Debora Anthonypillai
Elena Bentley
Joanna Chen
Poonam Dhir
Antony Fangary
Tehila Hakimi
Jesse Holth
Daniel Kessel
Fiona Tinwei Lam
Camille Lendor
Janette Platana
Judith Pond
Betsy Struthers
Jess Taylor
Sun Tzu-ping
Nicholas Wong
Emma Zimmerman

"Everything here is alive is fungus is future
fountain harvest/ I breathe close or not at all and
want your breath with me like fog"

— *Ashleigh A. Allen, "I see three bison before"*

7 72006 86361 2 02

prismmagazine.ca
$12