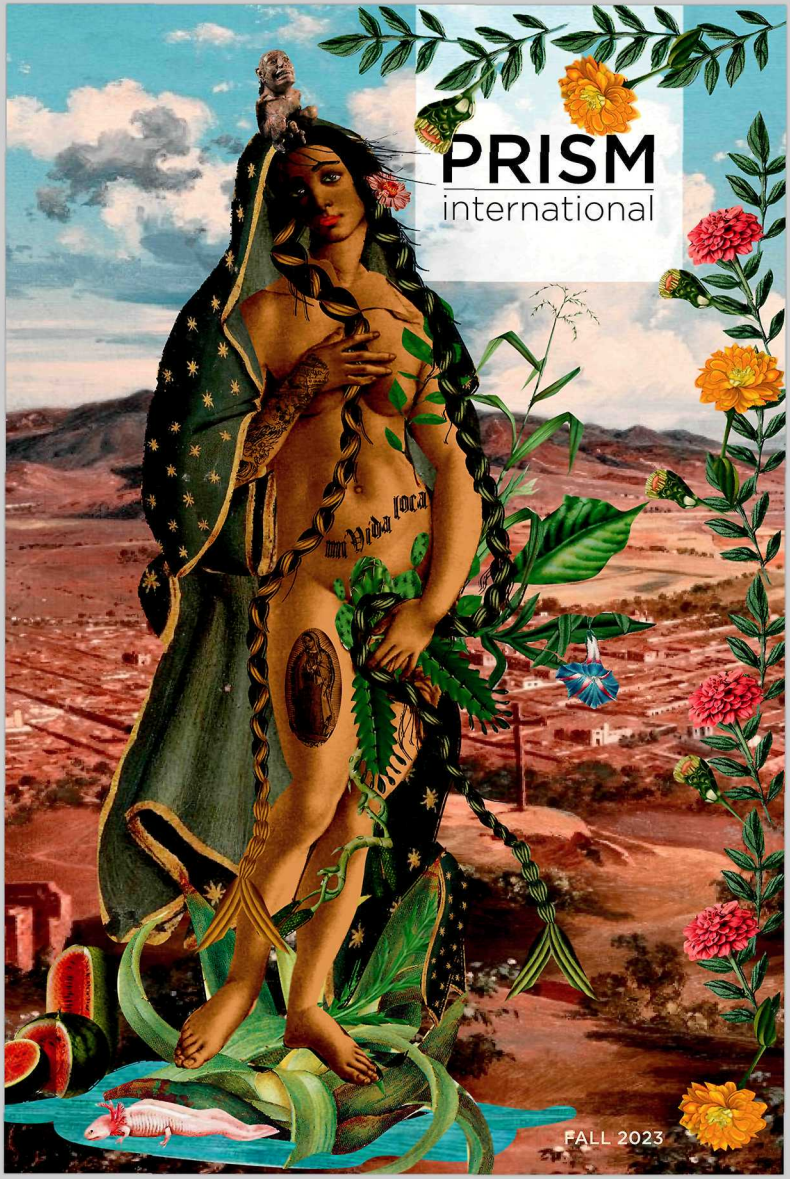

PRISM international

FALL 2023

PRISM international

2023 CREATIVE NONFICTION CONTEST WINNERS

WINNER

"Young Bird" by Aaron Rabinowitz

RUNNER-UP

"The Idioms of Mother Hens" by Britt Gillman

SECOND RUNNER-UP

"Legacy" by Melinda Burns

THE JUDGE'S ESSAY

by Suzannah Showler

http://prismmagazine.ca/2023/10/16/announcing-the-winners-of-prisms-2023-cnf-contest/

PRISM international, a magazine of contemporary writing, is published three times a year by the School of Creative Writing at the University of British Columbia, Buchanan E-462, 1866 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z1. Specific back issues can be ordered from the Managing Editor: prismcirculation@gmail.com. *PRISM* is printed in Canada.

Website: prismmagazine.ca

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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 $15. 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.

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Our gratitude to Dean Dr. Clare Haru Crowston and the Dean of Arts Office at the University of British Columbia. We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the UBC School of Creative Writing, the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

Editors' Correction: In our Winter 2023 issue (61.2), we incorrectly attributed Joan M. Baril's short story "One Polka" to Catriona Wright. We apologize for this error.

November 2023. ISSN 0032.8790

a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Canada Council for the Arts
Conseil des Arts du Canada

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
School of Creative Writing

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We acknowledge the support of the Province of British Columbia through the British Columbia Arts Council

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In The Archives

Dear Reader,

We invite you to lean in and sift through the archives with us. Page by page, these writers and artists bring us along on a genre-fluid process that unearths stories of mothers, land, desire, gender, and community, where grief flows freely in the gaps between fragments. Here, research is not a passive act. Here, radical transformation is possible, but alongside such dreams, our ruminations on the archive—shouts, fervent whispers, erotic gasps, cries from the past, and of course, laughter—must be heard.

This is a collective reminder of the passage of time and the power of memory. And it is a journey that is at times difficult. As we invite you into this archive of archives, we do so with tenderness and care for those raw parts of us that still ache. Be gentle and go softly as you sift.

We invite you to explore the archives at your own pace—to dig deep into the sedimentary layers of history, and, through the generosity of these stories, to contemplate loved ones long gone and reevaluate the choices and events that have led each of us to this moment. Lean in, light a candle, and know that you are held in the past and the future by your own ever-growing and ever-present archive.

With thanks,
Natasha Gauthier and **Dora Prieto**, Editors

PART I

Girl in a Dark Room by Parthvi Kulkarni

Morgan Christie

TOLD NAMES

it was when a supervisor got swabbed
that he asked me about my name
some dna tracing company we know
that charges ninety-nine ninety-nine
        he wanted to confirm where his
        people were from, because to know
        a thing is only half the journey
their origins were from an old
english town, said their surname
        generations of certainty based
then he asked me about mine
        of the christies in jamaica
        where my father was born
he asked about our name and how
far back it went, what it traced to
what it meant, and what we were
        and i reeled in envy at the certainty of a name
        of an origin that is written, that is found, and
        that is. i reel in envy at the people who
        can forget that we don't know our surnames
that we only know the ones we were told they were

Morgan Christie

SWEET BOWS

the hesitation in penning
something i struggle to find
sews this poem like silk
        delicate threads tie word
        and resentment like sweet
        bows i will lick when no one
        is watching
because it feels like something
i am not supposed to do
        something to sneak and
        apologize for later
to poem of a thing your people
are barely inside of unless clean
bones and unmarkings count
still i am here and want it to be
known that i know how it feels
to write of an archive
        even if mine is missing

Zehra Naqvi

PHOTOGRAPHS

It's nearing maghrib and I can see the sun setting over
the Karachi skyline, minarets and cement apartment buildings
laundry flapping from latticed windows
karachi ki mashoor hawa, Ammi says, Karachi's famous breeze
as a gust blows through, reminding me the sea isn't so far off
and how wind travels on flatter lands. I have been missing
mountains lately, but this Karachi breeze, cool and strong
in the heat and traffic, I want to close my eyes to it, smile as it

sashays past my face. I remember the box of yellowing photographs
of my khalas and phuppos, my aunties with their thin dupattas stylishly
draped around their necks, the breeze hugging their fitted kurtas,
the accents of their curves, thick braids cascading to their backs
my uncles with aviator sunglasses and bell bottoms

and there's one with my dadi in the same
breeze, and my dadi's got a firm hold on the folds of her sari,
my mother with permed hair in one, and later, one hand
holding my hand at Quid-e-Azam's mausoleum, and with the other
holding onto her grey chador with the tiny yellow flowers
and my cousin with her dupatta over her head and across
her chest, grinning in film star glasses

and I think of all the things one cannot hold on to—
when the dictator changed and the politics
turned another season, my aunties' clothing
too changed weather

In Quetta Town, just off the highway,
all the men and boys are outside playing cricket before maghrib
I watch a woman, decked in a black chador, she's tugging
at a stubborn goat, trying to bring it inside—
she's the only woman I see. The goat wins and the woman
lets it graze a little longer. The Karachi breeze lifts her chador
    and she holds it down, woman against wind
    that same breeze reaches me and
    I lean into it a little while longer

Living Time by Jin-Me Yoon

Mark Foss

ACCURACY EXERCISES

Lettering Sheet

My grandfather's drawings in the back room are stale with mold, smelling even worse than the bag of childhood letters I pull out of the garage. As I search for correspondence from Mike, I come upon the postcard from Treasure Island, Florida, that my grandfather sent me in April 1970. The card shows a pirate pointing his sword in triumph at a treasure chest on a beach that is aglow with precious jewels. In his message, my grandfather laments they have not seen a pirate or dug up any treasure yet. He wishes I could be there with them to enjoy the seascape.

Did he write the same message to all thirteen grandchildren? The oldest ones would likely have smiled at the winking humour, while the younger—like me—would have dreamed such things were possible. Was he writing out of genuine affection, boredom, or the need to escape my grandmother for a few minutes? Unlike birthday and Christmas cards, which he signs for them both, the postcard is solely in his name. As always, he writes in pristine cursive.

The Lettering Sheet, like all the drawings from his engineering course

at Dartmouth College, is numbered, identified with his name at the top, and dated 1918. There's a similar sheet among the drawings called a Lettering Plate, but it's missing my favourite row—the alphabet reproduced in thick letters and ending with the ampersand, as if it could go on and on. I imagine him bent over his desk with a fountain pen or perhaps a quill—like a monk copying an illuminated manuscript.

I'm not sure if Mike and I think we're pirates that day after school in my front yard. We call ourselves Pete and Dave and move around chunks of ice as if they are precious diamonds. I have no other memories of us from fourth grade in 1971-72, the year we met. I only know it was fourth grade because it was a four/five split. Some of us, like me, stay with the teacher for grade five, while Mike is among those assigned to a new teacher. Change is good, he says, or words to that effect. I remember because they marked me, how he sounded so wise. He had just turned ten that spring, while I was still nine. He has a seriousness that I find appealing. In sixth grade, while the rest of us are writing dumb stories about hockey games, he writes one about nuclear war called "A Third and Last."

We live in the same white suburban neighbourhood and walk to school together for eight years. We meet at the end of my street near the path at the designated time. He can easily see me walking down Riley Avenue, but his house is tucked away in a crescent around a corner. In winter, if one of us fails to show, the other marks a "G" in the snow for "Gone." In grade school, we do the route twice, coming back for lunch. In high school, we eat at the same table in the cafeteria with a few other friends. And then I am really gone, moving from Ottawa after eleventh grade. He writes, "I still look up Riley before going on that path—at least I did this morning. The set-up at the lunch table is really different. I'm the only one who hasn't changed."

In his letters, written between my departure in 1979 and our second year of university in 1982, he often reflects on change. He writes, "The thing about change in ourselves is that we can't really see it."

Line Shading

In Line Shading, my grandfather draws a hollow cylinder, two types of molds, and a nut with visible threads. They are nuanced, unlike the tall tales from his childhood in New Hampshire that offer no shades of grey. He records them in the 1970s with a voice raspy from cigarettes that speaks of heroic ancestors and honourable brothers, a gallant mother and dedicated

father, and the kindness of neighbours, all wrapped around a warm-hearted moral. He appears—if at all—as a secondary or tertiary character. Only once does he offer his own memory of "snuggling into my feather bed as the wind made ghostly sounds." In keeping with his modesty, he does not present the cassette to the family but rather leaves it in his desk for quiet, posthumous discovery. When one of his sons finally stumbles upon the tape, it takes several years before he can listen to it comfortably. His daughter transcribes her father's words verbatim on a typewriter. Every so often, my aunt stumbles on a word and leaves a question mark in brackets.

Mike and I are full of ourselves, filling up our own cassettes with reenacted comedy sketches, improvised skits, and black humour. On one tape I refer to something said on a previous one. I recite headlines from clippings on my bulletin board, including a predicted Beatles' "renunion" in 1973. The typo becomes a secret code throughout our lives, priming our get-togethers for the nostalgia we never jettison. The tapes turn up every few years when I'm looking for something else. Sometimes I think we should listen to them, but I fear they will sound hollow. How many more times can we recall our shared history before the threads are stripped bare, leaving us spinning with no traction? Yet I am drawn to his old letters, fascinated to see how the lines cannot hold all his thoughts. He comments on the stationery, drawing cartoons around the words—a descending H-bomb—and beer and whisky bottles on the inside and outside of the envelopes. He writes in asides, noting his devotion to round, square, and curly brackets. He extends sentences on all sides of the page, making me turn the letter completely around to follow his last thoughts. He writes, "Everything has too many sides or angles."

A Gear Wheel

In his drawing of a gear wheel, my grandfather prints the word "addendum" in black ink, as if in afterthought. Does he also print the word "Wrong" in pencil or is that a teacher's correction? Maybe he is distracted by news of the pregnancy. He draws up new plans for his life, dropping out of his engineering studies, marrying Helen, and moving to Canada to work on the railroad. Does he smile or wince at becoming a train engineer?

Between 1976 and '78, the first three years of high school, Mike gives me pained looks when we pass each other in the halls. In formal classes, he gets high marks in everything with little effort. Outside the daily grind,

he teaches himself guitar and photography. Nothing keeps him happily stimulated, not even the drinking and the pot. He writes, "I might resort to drastic measures. This is by no means an understatement. Yes, it's that bad. Well maybe it isn't. Yeah right."

Random Rubble Built Up in Courses

In coursed random rubble masonry, different sizes of stones are placed in a level course, or layer, at the same height. Sometimes two or three smaller stones are stacked to achieve the right effect. I wonder if my grandfather helps layer all those random stones for the flower gardens under the cliff. According to my father's daily work log, my grandfather helps build the cottage throughout the summers of 1951 to 1953, but the entries focus on time spent rather than on the tasks themselves. By the time I'm old enough to help with chores, my father does not track the in-kind labour of family members. My help with laying a cement foundation in the garage, such as it is, goes unrecorded by history.

At his family cottage, Mike works as an equal with his father to put up a garage, and they carve their initials into the fresh cement. His father sets up a workshop. The garage also becomes a rehearsal space for Mike's band, but their first concert is on the back balcony of the cottage. He sings a Beatles' song, "Things We Said Today," and my smug, lukewarm response is crushing to him. I seem unaware of the need to choose words carefully, layering them to build up rather than tear down. He writes, "Drinking is never as fun as it used to be. I am at the nadir of my interest in life and the zenith of my apathy."

Greek Fret

Greek fret: a Greek key, a meander, a zigzag pattern, a labyrinth. In his letters, Mike jumps from lists of favourite songs, to lamenting my departure, to complaining about my penmanship and my disdain for "commercial" music, to analyzing the lyrics of Jethro Tull that I send him. At an open-air King Crimson concert in 1984, Mike weaves through clumps of fans on the grassy slope for a better look at Robert Fripp's fingers on the fretboard while he plays "Discipline". We don't know it's the second last show of the tour, that the group will disband for ten years. Nor do we know that, after we graduate from university a year later in engineering and journal-

ism, he and I will barely see each other for nearly two decades. He writes, "Nothing in the future worries me—not even death. Wow, eh!"

Belt and Pulleys — Reverse Transmission

In his reminiscences, my grandfather notes "the kindness of the Oddfellows and Rebekahs in providing a lifting device to help in the care of my mother." I imagine this as an early version of a transfer hoist, with manual pulleys and a sling to help her in and out of bed. In her framed portrait, which has been passed down to me, my great-grandmother sits in profile at a desk, gazing out the window with an open journal and pen within reach. It's not clear if she is sitting in a wheelchair, but she holds herself up straight, away from the back of the chair. There is no suggestion of a disability. With no children, I sometimes wonder who will end up with this photo, or the one of my grandfather in his white suit behind the ice cream counter, or the daguerreotypes of older ancestors, or all the property deeds from the 19th century. But mostly I project myself backward to understand what these artifacts are transmitting to me.

Years after converting the family cottage to a house, Mike's father ends up in a wheelchair with an elevator to reach the main floor. He depends on Mike's older brother to take him out to the local bar on Friday nights to meet up with a friend. I don't know whether he has visitors. When Mike takes over the house in the 2000s, he converts the elevator shaft into a laundry room but leaves many of his father's tools in the garage. He writes, "I have a much more sensitive outlook to those who are the anvil and an extreme distaste to those who wilfully act as the hammer."

A Gothic Window

My grandfather never sees the stained glass windows, spires, or pinnacles of Gothic architecture in Europe, only the railway tracks between Montreal and Brockville. His 83rd birthday in 1979 inspires an extended family reunion at our cottage, the first since 1954. He dies a year later.

Mike and I reunite in 2002, on his 40th birthday, as does his band, which jams in the garage. We will continue to meet once a year until the pandemic throws us off. In between reunions, we send texts every few months, usually a line from some 1970s television show the other is supposed to recognize. For Mike's 60th birthday, I find Robert Fripp on a celeb site

and order a video message that encourages Mike to play guitar more often. On Christmas Day 2022, below a photo of a desolate landscape taken through the window of a train, I text, "Pete and Dave weather." He responds, "Looks like summer."

Accuracy Exercise

My grandfather's drawings from his engineering class are numbered from I to XVII, but there are two plates each for I, II, and IV. Does an intense focus on details distract him from the bigger picture? Perhaps the accuracy exercise induces a hypnotic effect, clouding his concentration. Is that what happens to Mike in the garage in the summer of 2023? I imagine his last movements: sealing windows to ensure no gas can escape, filling the garage with exhaust fumes, comforting the sick cat about to be euthanized. Is there a lapse of judgment, a hesitation, a moment of indiscipline? He writes, "Your description of me is quite wrong."

The Ellipse as a Circle Viewed Obliquely

I only know my grandfather from the years after his stroke when he walks with a cane. He and my grandmother barely speak and receive no visitors except family. We are not church-going folk and I am not even baptized. Is that why I'm excited to be one of the three wise men in the nativity play with Mike? If Pete and Dave are moving diamonds in January rather than December, the play is my earliest memory of us. We are Melchior and Balthazar, bringing frankincense and myrrh to the newborn saviour. How far have we travelled together under yonder star? Can we find our way home once the heavens darken? With all eyes upon us, we sing our verses and leave our gifts.

Samuel Samba

LANGUAGE IS THANKLESS SERVICE

we started out as twin loins—
softened into a blur in the hazy bright weather.
Ma folds in between, weary as a naira note ribboned with dust.
she pries open her fist as though to imitate a gunshot.

bullet is one imagery this town cherishes.
sound coloring the landscape.
blood, tarring the roadside in gentle worship,
in ways this city outlives us.

Ma flattens her wrist to trade notes with a cabman.
the small of her loin, whittled into a plea.

a dagger takes the shape of his hand knifing a wallet.
say I lock my palm around his,
chances are they would return wet-ripe with rust.
each approached lamppost—wielded in defence.

when Ma unsheathes her skin, she's saying:
pardon me for daring to live past question marks,
past Iowa stamping our loin into the brutal hands of a cop—
like exhibits splayed against pink flesh in the dying light.

Iowa blurs the negro in me, leaving the brown stink.
I live for language & this little white I bring.

in my dialect, we lack the phrase to say *thank you.*
gratitude: a clasped applause held to the death.

where I'm from, appreciation is inheritance handed down to a stranger.

once the cabman's gaze meets the lack of my palm,
he runs his fingertip down my hip.
je ki a lo ara wa—let us put ourselves to use.

I swallow the whole of this phrase in one attempt.
my loin: a protest eager for quench.

language is thankless service.
Ma mouthed these words till I learned to speak with both hands clasped.
we oil language with gesture.
she laps her fist on each other, in careful show of a warning.

I melt her effort into braille:
bare fingerprints of charcoal-stained writing,
debone the wisdom in it.

in my dialect, water is how we flood into perspective—following our gut feelings.
Ma calls her body *water*, to quench a town that wouldn't quench our thirst in return.

she empties herself into a headlamp to invent brighter grammar.
language, sharpening into Sanskrit.

the cabman slits the jewellery off her wrist.
his soft-meated hands lubed with blood.
all of our ancestry—snatched in one brief uncuffed moment,
as darkness blurs the windscreen.
Ma reciting salat.

I watch her dip her tongue into henna,
caw in the accent of gunshots.
her throat rusty from chasing a melody the bullet does not approve.

Jesse Desjarlais

PÎKOKONÊWÊPAYIW

nôhkom wîsaki-nêhiyawew
cikêmâ ê-pîkokonêwêpayit.
ôma wanikiskisiwin—nimihkopiscipowin.

Heavy hymnals. My fungal tongue stained
by *christ's* blood. Not enough transubstantiated
liquor in the chalice to bring on oblivion.
I tried to speak Her name, to feel its pious, honey taste,
but was left gagging on the sanctuary's dusty silence.

No mention of Her maiden name. No mention
of Her haunted school. No mention of Her short hair.
No mention of Her status lost, or Her status regained.

No mention of warped *matriarchs* wielding straps,
undeserving of the name okâwîmâwak.
No mention of tired brown
ghosts skittering like bait
along the surface of Crooked Lake.
No mention. Just an altar call and Eucharist
at nôhkom's—*grandma's*—funeral:
"*Now as they were eating, Jesus took*
the braids, and blessed, and broke them,
and gave them to his disciples,
and said, 'Take, eat…'"

I only called Her nôhkom after She had already left.

After, on the hilltop in the Valley, we put Her
beside nimôsomipan and nôhcâwîsipan
in the screaming earth. At the grave, Uncle eyed me warily,
and I was only sure He recognized me
when He called me by my childhood nickname.
"*holy shit*, you've grown," He eventually said through

His collapsing windpipe. And staring at Him
from a great distance as nimôsomipan's
fiddle music rose from the bedrock,
a disturbing recollection throttled me: the time Uncle
told me He went to a day school reunion,
and one of the *sisters* decided to show her face.
She slithered over to Him and said,
do you remember me, Eric?

And you, dear Uncle, simply replied,
"How could I ever forget you?"

Hands by Mads Hunt

"I captured this photograph "Joy Tales I" on Olúmo, the highest rock in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria. It was a moment of pure joy and exhilaration as I soared high into the sky. The feeling of weightlessness and freedom was unlike anything I had ever experienced before. This photograph encapsulates that feeling of joyful abandon, of breaking free from the constraints of the ground and flying high above it all. It is a reminder that we can all find joy in the simplest of things, and that even the highest of heights can be reached with the right amount of determination and a little bit of bravery." —**Peter Olude**

Joy Tales I by Peter Olude

jj peña

HERE YOU ARE LIVING

you are alive here. standing on a brick terrace in spain, your palms are stretched out to the heavens. you look like you're holding the city of barcelona in the air, its weight on your back. *look at how easy it is,* your posture says*, how much my body can hold, can take.* you're even smiling as you do this—teeth the colour of white-coastal froth—wearing a black & white elephant romper my sister stacey loved you in. she's your photographer, your soon-to-be-ex-girlfriend. here, you haven't yet, out of anger, called my sister a serpent with feet or filled yourself with cold air.

weeks before this, you were studying abroad in spain, stuck gluing spanish to your tongue in classrooms. during one of your free weekends, you visited an aquarium in san sebastian & posted a video of your experience on your youtube channel. you submerged your hand in a water tank full of stingrays & eels, let your hand island inside, & said high-pitched, HELLO. HI FISHIES. CAN I PET YOU? they scattered away. NO? OKAY. you pulled your hand out & laughed, focusing next on a starfish hugging glass. you zoomed your camera in on its body breezing in the water like a tree

in motion. you let yourself linger, but only for a moment. you told my sister later on the phone that we couldn't live like starfish because we want too much out of life—& too much wanting makes us rigid.

which is exactly what i told you i hated about photos. they either showed me someone i wanted to look like all the time or someone i didn't want to be. i wonder how you'd describe this photo of you: would you even remember this moment or talk about what happened before? say, as my sister tried to take your pic, you pointed out into the city & said that building—OVER THERE!—is the museum you visited when you first arrived. say a tiny park exists somewhere between those cookie-jar-shaped buildings, where you bought two empanadas from a street vendor & sat with the city at a festival. or would you talk about another day entirely? how you filmed yourself wandering around stores when you first arrived in spain. how you walked past butchered, hanged meat, & how you struggled to order from a merchant. that you bought a croissant & that for two straight minutes, you tore into bread & said nothing to your camera, only the sound of *HMMM* escaping out of your mouth, seven different times.

not monumental information to know, but part of your history outside of this photo. like how, after my sister broke your heart, you'd describe hurt as a fever. which is also the name of the club you traveled to on your first night out in spain. your camera's shaky in your video there, foggy. you don't show the club: all we see is your face disco-balling in & out of darkness, all we hear is loud, EDM gears thudding, reverberating. exactly what a fever feels like: where any moment you can be overtaken by a hot loudness.

you posted this photo on your instagram five months after actually being in spain, five months after being at this club, five months after being single. what about this moment did you want to relive? were you scrolling through your phone & struck by the sky rolling into itself above you? how flashes of calm can exist in chaos. *that's what we should remember*, you once told me, *when life feels like a flash flood.* or were you trying to send a message to my sister stacey? say: YOU TOOK THIS PHOTO. EYES ONLY ON ME. YOUR THEME, YOU PROMISED, FOR ENDLESS SUNSETS.

perhaps that's why you also posted a video, a few weeks prior, on your youtube titled: LESBIAN COUPLE ATTENDS STRAIGHT WEDDING! from back in april, when my other sister janice got married. you & stacey are dressed in bougie dresses & in love. you included a clip of

you both singing to the black eyed peas, belting loudly, I'VE NEVER FELT THIS WAY BEFORE! you wanted stacey to remember that her heart's still bath-full of happy memories just like this, if she only stopped dwelling on the bad.

that's a happy memory tho, a contrast from reality. weeks ago my sister brought you lunch cause you weren't eating again—still not understanding why the two of you couldn't just get back together—which only caused you both to argue, which sent you running to the bathroom, locking the door. my sister followed & gently tapped on the door, *what's the matter?* no answer. my sister tried again, ear pressed to door, *are you okay?* & your answer: a scream. guttural. brazen. the sound of a canyon on fire popping heat.

the heat is what i remember most about our hiking trip earlier in the year. how i had to wear a great big hat & took it off briefly when you asked for me to take photos of you. i captured you posing under the lavender mimosa sky, in a field of stubbled cactus. your hair was braided into power lines, & one arm was reaching out of the frame while the other hung lazily behind. you looked like you were offering yourself up to the world & were happy to do it. your eyes were to the horizon, staring at something i can't remember. maybe at the sun. maybe at some of our other friends hiking away. or maybe at some of the grand canyon's bighorn sheep, herding away from the heat, seeking softness in shade. usually, you were staring right into the camera, especially in the news reports you made for school.

you have a series on your youtube where you showcased a local las vegas hole-in-the-wall. an example: you're at the downtown coffee shop PUBLIC US, filming baristas, food, & decorations, recommending the shop while drinking a london fog tea. the video's short & the only thing that sticks out is the name of your tea, perhaps because i once overheard you telling my sister your parents' auras are fog. that's why you didn't like spending time with them, & whenever my sister mentioned you going out to eat with your parents, i'd picture them as swirling dirt devils sitting across from you, slowly ashening the room into soot.

is that why you look so at ease, in one of your other videos, while you're filming yourself at LA CASA CIGAR LOUNGE, telling people with a cigar pressed against your lips to LIGHT UP A CIGAR & ENJOY! maybe smoke can feel like a hug too.

not to my sister tho—you & her would fight over how often you'd smoke weed, which would always lead you both to policing what went inside your bodies. once, while grocery shopping, you caught my sister trying to sneak ice cream into the grocery cart & you took the container out, smacked her hand, & lectured her, *dairy breaks you out. why are you trying to bring hurt into your life?* your way of saying, we can control our future, if we didn't intentionally harm ourselves.

the harm we hold inside is not what you can see in a photo. it's possible to only glimpse the aftermath or its beginning, but not its brewing. in one of my sister's favorite photos of you, you're smiling, sitting in a courtyard, legs crossed; your skin's a song from the sun, golden & radiant. one hand's planted into cement, fingers rooting for support, while the other's resting under your chin, craned. you are what happiness should look like & yet–you killed yourself.

according to google, when breathing helium inside a plastic bag, it only takes 5 breaths before unconsciousness comes, & then the world's gone in 5-10 minutes. did you take hurried breaths or slow? did you count down from five, picture the galaxy in your belly leaking out of you? google also focuses on how fast most organs need to be harvested when a person dies, when blood pools, how long the skin can stay alive after death. i couldn't find anything about how the body protests, tries to stop violence we are about to cause.

interviewing your organs doesn't matter tho—because you're gone. the first video on your youtube channel covers the opening of a new art exhibit, titled PASSAGE TO THE FUTURE: ART FROM A NEW GENERATION IN JAPAN. the video features faces of students, paintings, & the gallery's curator, but you're nowhere to be found. just like the future will be, you are now a woman no one can know, except in stories. to understand you means clocks would have to rewind.

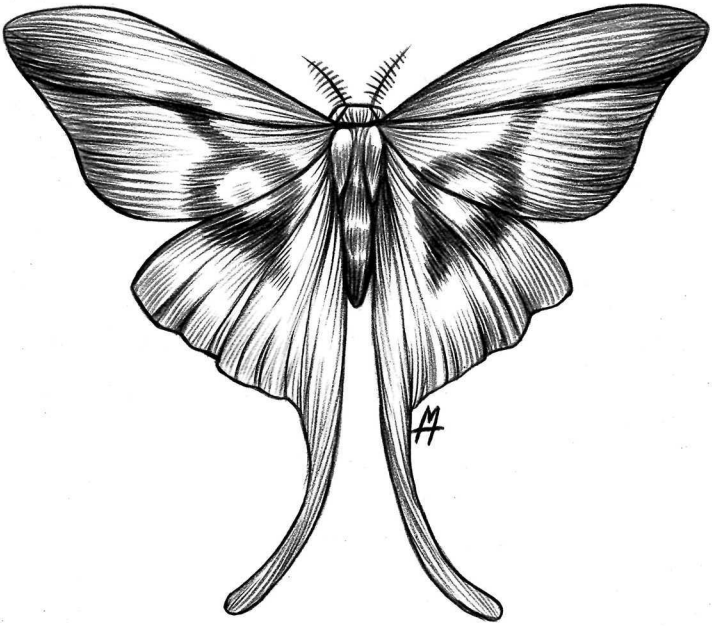
a place to start: a meditation workshop you & my sister attended months ago, about life & death. the instructor said, *when you die, you have two choices: to come back here & try again or sit out eternity in snowy plains.* you were the only one to raise your hand & ask, *how do you decide? is someone there to help you?* & the answer: *that choice is yours.* a moment that shows you didn't know if living on earth was something worth doing again.

meaning, your number one priority in life wasn't just to live—how we are told we are supposed to exist.

another place to understand you, your last act. moments before you killed yourself, you called a florist & ordered my sister's favorite flowers, white tulips, to be delivered on her birthday in two weeks. they arrived without a note or a fuss, just blooming. your way of saying, you were never full of violence, just softness, one that's always watching, worrying, hoping to slip a smile into the world.

& when someone clicks on your youtube page, they don't know you killed yourself. your video WHO AM I? WELCOME TO MY CHANNEL! starts playing. you're sitting in bed, my sister's dogs are sleeping behind you. for 14 minutes you ramble in front of the camera, talking about health, love, & who you want to be. oh i wish you stayed this way. this big mouthed, this sun-kissed, this alive. i wish you would have taken your own advice when you interviewed a group of guests at my sister janice's wedding & asked if they had any advice for the newlyweds. you let everyone answer loud & over each other. one: *learn to let go*. another: *learn how to be the stripper & the nun.* & then your answer came to you & you shouted with the camera angled to your face, DON'T STOP LIVING.

PART II



Moth by Mads Hunt

Heather Simeney MacLeod

HONOURING THE FEATHER AND THE FIDDLE

I don't recall innocence but must have possessed it
at one time maybe like a taking hold of a thing
and imbuing it with my own resonance
until it fails to resemble itself at all
and becomes worn smooth
and meaningless as a settler's
charm of luck. My Cree grandpa said
there is a soul in all living and nonliving
driving the material universe
giving it meaning, substance, shape. He said
the elders of the Plains Cree
remembered a time of voyage
and homes made from buffalo hides and wooden poles
instead of rigidity there had been migrating movement.
His father was Nehiyawak;
his mother Michif.
He never hunted the buffalo
even those days far behind replaced
with an imposed stillness on designated land.
He told me I was like my grandmother,
unable to locate balance,
but I was gifted at non-interference and had good dreams.

Daze Jefferies

OCEANLEAVING

handlining lifeways
of those who came before

I am lost at the Centre for Newfoundland Studies

on edge to know the limits of our momentary
language or make peace with blue abundances

find myself exhuming s/kin

from electronic landwash
to whispers in the deep

past-present of a showgirl's soul and back again

this world cannot account for our oceanleaving
gracious one

whose shadow in the hands of a weary man
stays nowhere, unfathomable hours, and yet

how else to imagine that you are endless?

middle of December, bellowing then

your photo finds me from some paper
on the lower east coast and shows me

a grief that grows wider interurban—

an afterlife of longing, weight of this island,
and the love of a trans girl hold us
out of time

there is nothing left to write
but outmigration's echo

my spirit with/holding

the depth
I cannot tread

Danielle Douez

HYBRID EROTICA

what will the deepfake wiener dog say
to the medicinally stoned sloth
at the moonrise of a post-homo sapien world?
'goodnight, gender! goodnight, sex!'
under a new moon,
broods of beasts will hatch:
howling life into new vowels,
harmonizing with La Llorona's cries
at the changing of guard at the Tombs of Beloved.

a coven of Woolf's unfaithful daughters
will bitch n stitch a carrier bag big enough
to bury the umbilical of nuclear family waste
beneath the Triage of Life,
back at the beginning.
and at the beginning?
that eternal storehouse of memory,
a carbonless cloud leaving a trace
neither for Sacred Texts nor Telescopes?

iykyk: it is wet, hot, n loud, baby.
still born, the warehouse rave will be remembered
as neither malefaction nor miracle;
it was a labour of lust
for a hearth worthy of trans-figuration.
they will know: footwork is work.
in fishnets they will trust,
to gather mangled schools of newborns together,
pulsing with medicine foraged by moonlight,
raging with, not against, the machines that bore them.

a hot punk lullaby
is crawling out the mouth of babes
–that cave of cannibalism
Man conceived at noon
and drowned by dusk.
their paint will peel, but no matter:
there won't be mirrors under water.

Beth Suter

DEAR POST-PARTUM

In the place where Beth should be
I found instead a hot spring,

learned to live in the stink
of sulfur.

A cub came to warm himself
and drink of me,

people took pictures.
Instead of Beth I found

a clouded pool
blue as a newborn's eyes—

I'll never get all the salt
out of mine.

Dear post-partum,
you owe me a new reflection.

Ashleigh A. Allen

ARTEFACTS OF AFFECTS

Cockroaches occasionally visit with blessings,
they draw my bath, crawl the ledge. I swim alone.

My face near fascist tiles that promise delayed
drownings. Two decades since David

sank. A baker's dozen since Laura stopped. There's
voodoo downtown, stomach pulses, pocket nerves

jangle down hands like blades. Labourers accelerate
and spill into dawn. This morning our psychosis feels

oceanic, grunts rise into the street buoyant, cushioning
economy. I'm paranoid after my birthday, weekend ice cream

licks in the park, cherry blossom invitations. With my wide
hips I stand near a tree, feed the milky shadow.

In the afternoon I'm pulled from the crowd, have
intestinal bug bite. Shit. You overlook the city's spell

of Art Deco, suck your memories of the South through
a straw like a mambo milkshake sloth, it's just memento

mori, chéri. We hide what ails us, we smile at the old
lady bench in the park, they exchange serpent lexicon,

offer us mmmhmm. We escape the days with our curses,
our "I doodle do." Without oxygen, a brain

becomes a grey labyrinth. Adrienne's child died cranium
death at 40 days. When I say nothing, the landscape

still changes. As carceral teenage kids, we performed

true and shrew together in the spiral sense

of things. Now I go down, sit shiva seven years. Is no one
missing? They say this is love, but don't open the door

for it. My breast still stutters. Alone enough. The fallacy
comprehended; my feet mocked by mud. Baby steps

with no baby. The desire line is slick, worn worms. I touch
the ground with my bruised paws, face the sun and smear

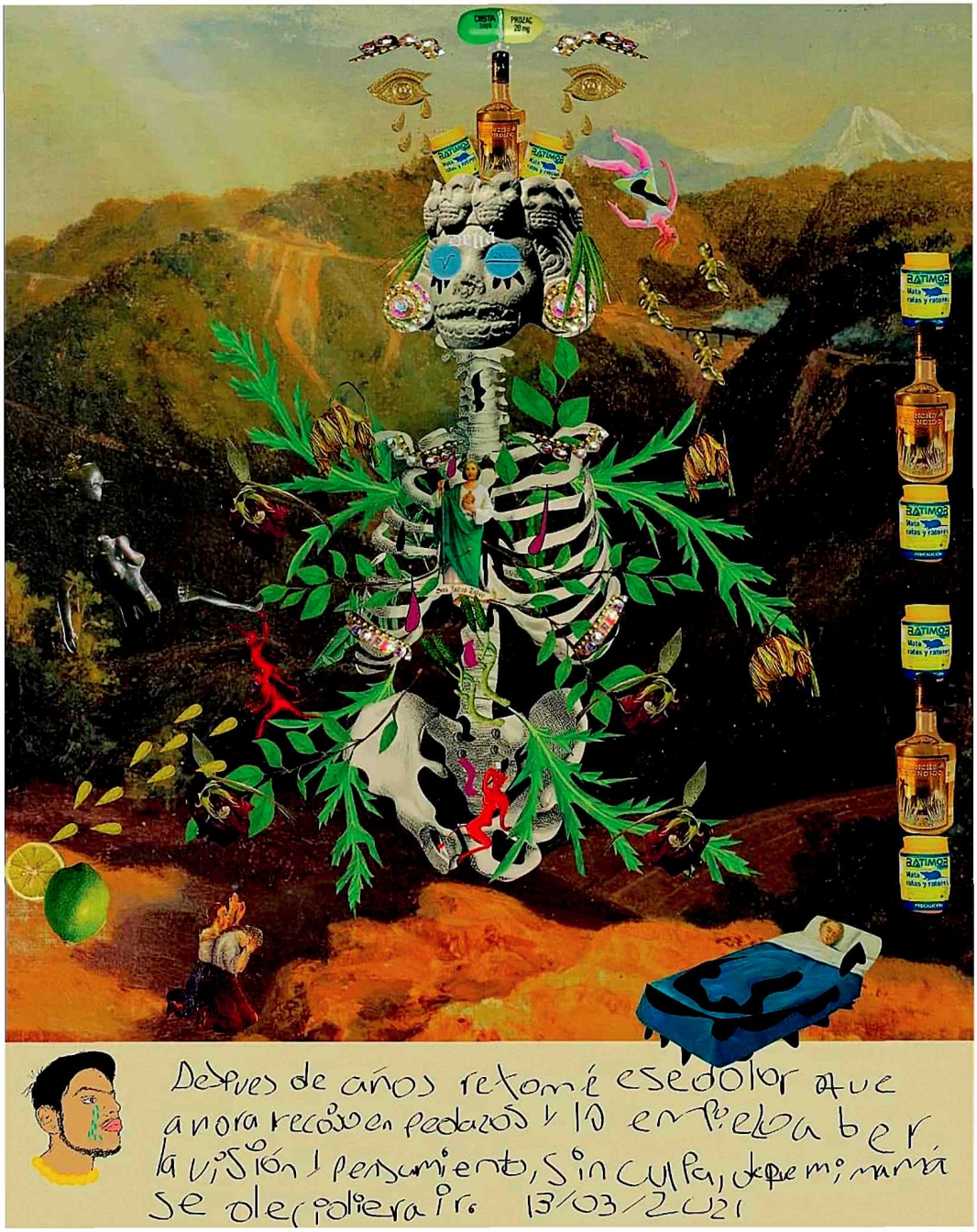
the future. I am always rubbing these knees,
defending my devotions. There is no humiliation

around my neck, there is no feminine way to step out
of this. I am trauma mama, you are terror error, our whole

neighbourhood falls to the ground. The sidewalk home
is pursed lips on what happens. The heat will reach us,

then cold will set on our boney foxhole like lock jaw.
I'm ten miles too soon. Turned on and in today.

A whisper of smoke, the end of summer shoulders us to
the regret hotline, *"Hello? Mum? Are you awake?"*



Relato de un suicidio, (2021) by Tuxamee / Irving Segovia

Liedewij Vogelzang

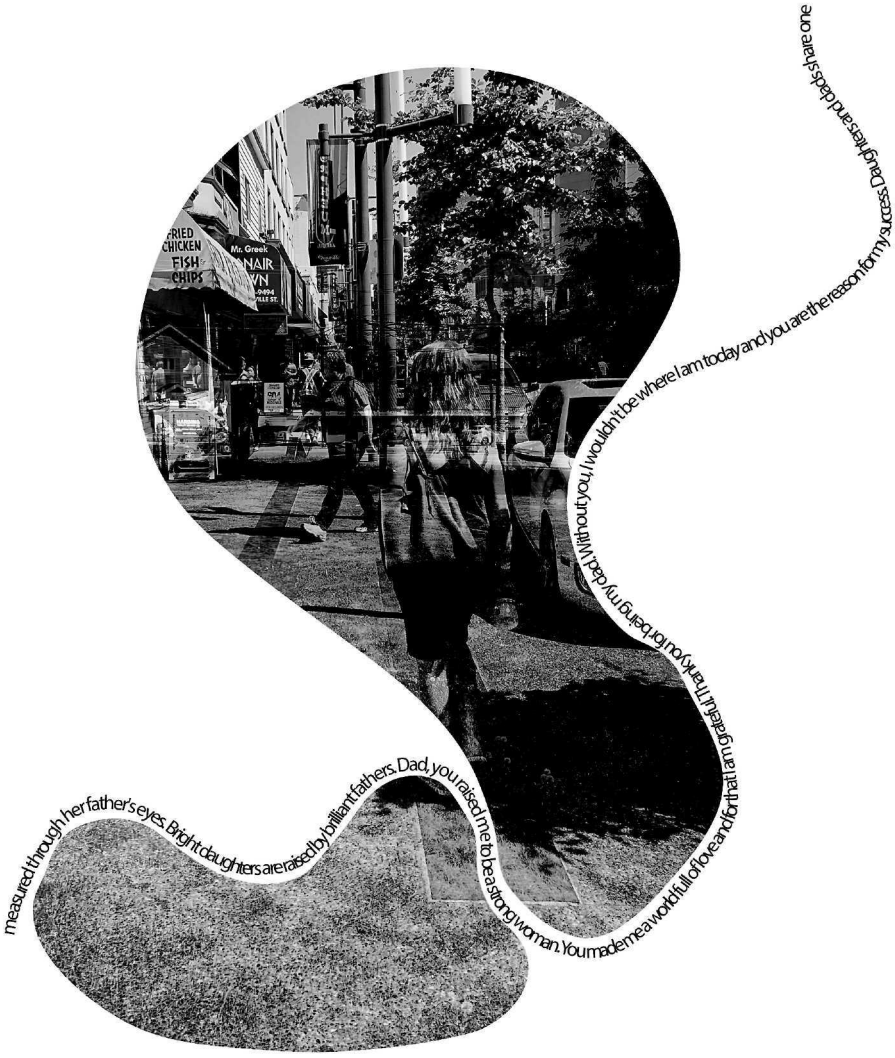
I HAVE TO TELL THIS QUICKLY BECAUSE I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG IT WILL LAST

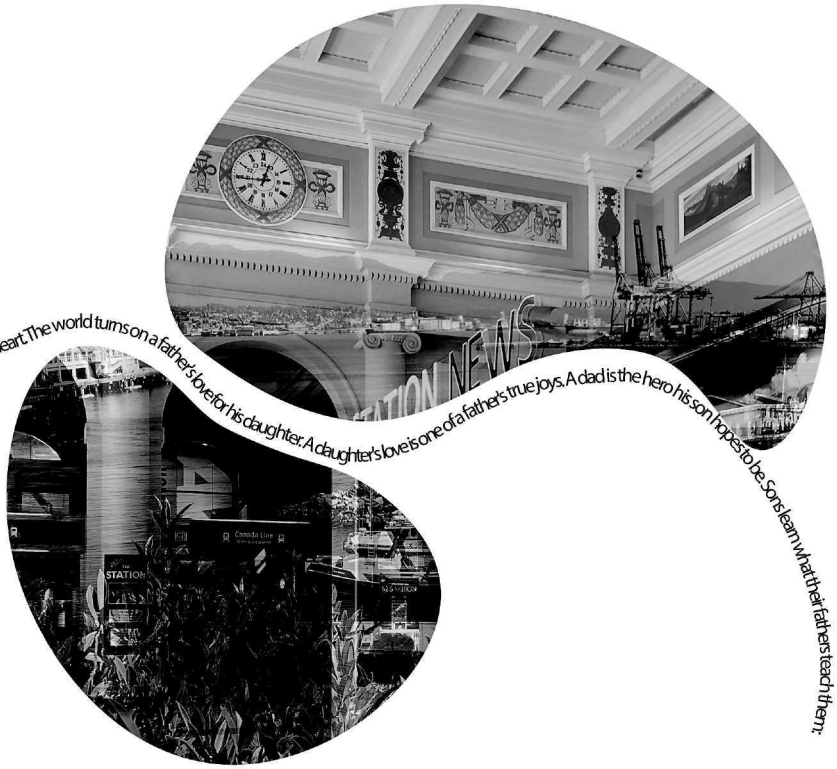
When I open my eyes again, I can't get them to focus. I am only a body. Only a mouth drinking from a warm breast. I cry and cry and cry, and as the bright red blood slides down my knee, a Band-Aid is fetched to stop the bleeding. A kiss on my cheek–*careful now, careful.* I get back on the bike, and when I step off, I pull a bag full of books from my luggage carrier. In the schoolyard, someone kicks the back of my knees; in the hallway, I am hugged; in the classroom, I hear about a mountain, about the clock inside of it, built to tick for ten thousand years. I look at my own watch; the night is young, so young, but I'm already older, and I get to decide for myself when it's time to go to bed. I dance until I sit down with my hands on the handlebars of a scooter, riding behind my best friend. I follow her fluttering white T-shirt that glows in the light of my headlight. Outside us, the world is silent and black, but here we are, wrapped up together, sliding through the dark. (*Something about this moment: already*

longing back for it while it is still going on.) I park and pick up my degree in the auditorium, where I drink a beer. I order another, and another, and when I've lost count, I make a toast in a new, empty house. I smile at my love who dares to do this with me, with whom I dare to do this: share everything. We watch the ladybugs crawl out of the cracks in the walls, we stir figure-eights in the paint. I stomp out of the room and slam the door behind me so hard that one of the patterned glass panes shatters into hundreds of glittering shards. Confetti whirls down on the full dining table. I slide my chair back and walk out into the cold, where the fog traps the scent of the fireworks. I rub my hands to warm myself. My love drags the duvet over me, kisses me good night, turns off the light. I wake up because the baby is crying. It is still night. I lift her out of bed, walk out of the holiday home with her on my arm. I look at the stars and realize how small I am. I look at the child and realize how big I must be. I put her down. She is already standing by herself. She cheers when I peel the whole apple in one go, a long strand spiraling down to the ground. I keep looking at her as she walks away from me. The dog presses its wet nose into my palm. I turn around, I throw the ball, I see too late that the car is speeding towards me. A long *beep*. As long as I can hear it, I still have thoughts. I think about mountains, about the one with the clock. My vision turns black. It seems so long ago that I heard about it, or just so recently, how that can be: that time never really passes, only seemingly, like a rubber band that you can stretch all you want, but as soon as you let go, it will snap back into something much, much smaller. There is still enough, there must still be enough time, somewhere. The beep stops. When I open my eyes again, I can't get them to focus. I am only a body. Only a mouth drinking from a warm breast. I cry and I cry and as –

Jordan Abel

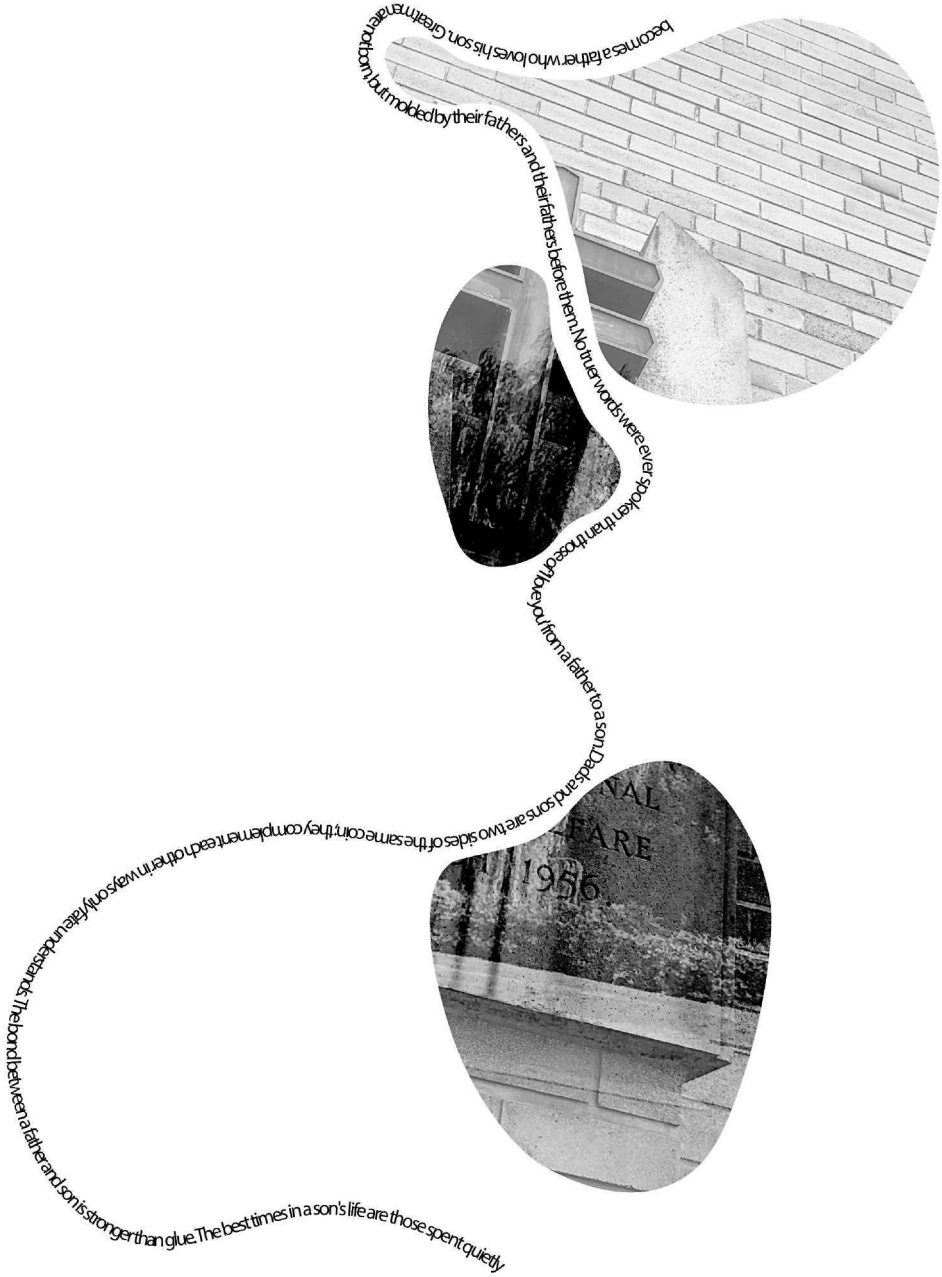
WELCOME TO THE WORLD, DEAR [SON/DAUGHTER NAME]!





heart. The world turns on a father's love for his daughter. A daughter's love is one of a father's true joys. A dad is the hero his son hopes to be. Sons learn what their fathers teach them.

to be kind, thoughtful, loving and mindful. The joy in a little boy's eyes shines in his father's heart. A son is the dearest reflection of his father in the world. A father may only be a dad for a little while, but he is a son's hero forever. A son who is loved by his father


becomes a father. who loves his son. Greatness ae not born, but molded by their fathers and their fathers before them. No true words were ever spoken than those only love you/ from a father to a son. Dads and sons are two sides of the same coin; they complement eeach other in ways only fatte understand. The bond between a father and son is stronger than glue. The best times in a son's life are those spent quietly.
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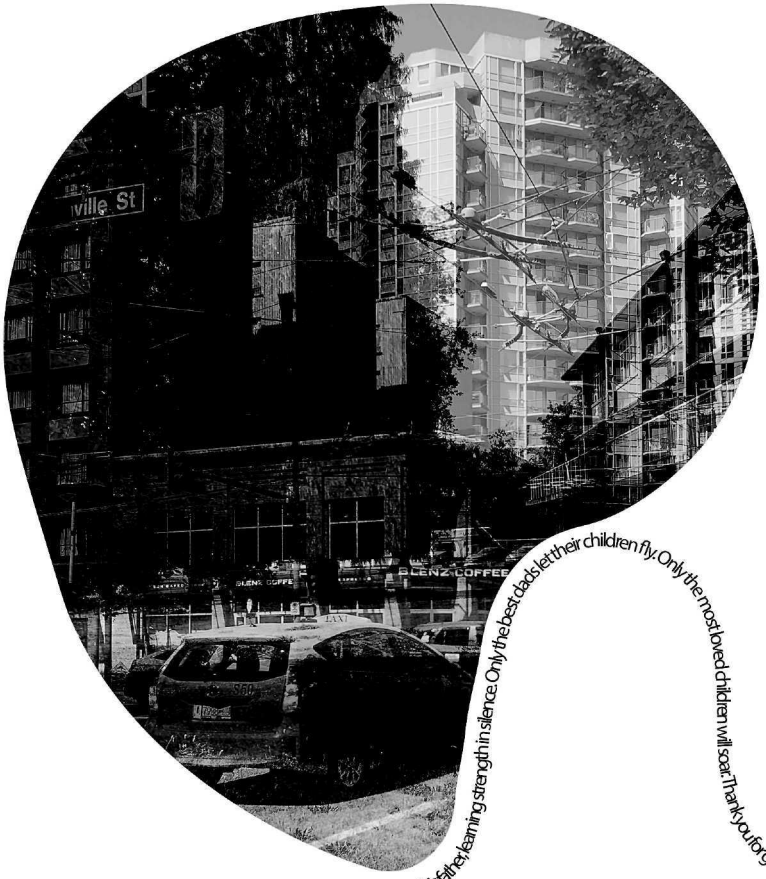


with his father learning strength in silence. Only the best dads let their children fly. Only the most loved children will soar. Thank you for giving me wings. If I grow up to be

your

through your

never wavered this only

faith in my abilities

I believed in myself

when I

stay true to my self

and

heart mind and soul

strong in

to be

show me how

you have

ever met, you have

I have

person

best

the

are

you

inspiration, Dad, you are my

father who never hesitated to give all of himself. You are the best

I had a

Thankfully,

himself.

thought of

without

who gives

someone

is

A hero

success.

life a

my

consider

then I will

Dad,

are,

you

half the person

cannot be learned in school. Dads are life's most influential teachers. The guiding light of my father has proven to be the brightest star in the sky. Fathers lead their children down the path to adulthood in the hopes they leap beyond the

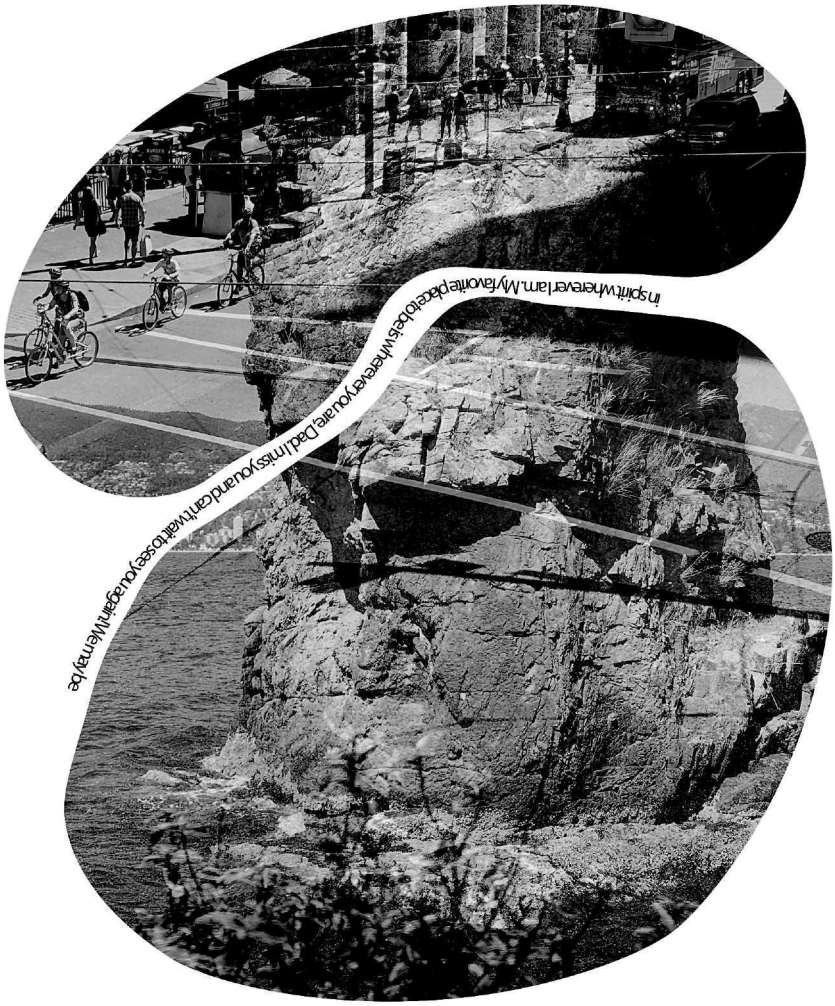
boundaries and forge new ones. The greatest storms in a child's heart are calmed by the loving waves in the sea of a father's love. A great father is no great man unless his child respects him. Find a father who loves his child

and you will have found the spark of life. No matter where I go, my heart is calm, knowing I can always call you,

Dad The sound of your voice makes anywhere feel at home. You taught me to ride a bike, drive a car, and held my hand on my first plane ride. But the best part of travelling was coming home to you, Dad! Even when a father and child are miles apart, each is close to the other's heart looking up at the stars and

knowing we share the same world makes me feel close to you, Dad. I love living in your universe! Although we haven't seen each other in a long time, know that you're always in my heart and on my mind. Dad, no matter where I

go, knowing you're always waiting for me gives me peace of mind. I love that you taught me to travel. The journey I go on is one that my father paved before me. I wouldn't be anywhere without him and miss him dearly. Thank you for teaching me to put one foot her, Dad. Without your guidance, I could never have taken the next step in my life. The distance between us is only as far as we make it, Dad. You are with me.


in spirit wherever I am. My favorite place to be is wherever you are. Dad I miss you and can't wait to see you again. Memy ybe

far apart, fight, now, but we are as close as ever in our hearts. Dad your love helps me through each day even when I am away. The love I feel for my unborn [son or daughter] is no match for any love I've

Krishna by Parthvi Kulkarni

PART III

Tulips by Mads Hunt

Katana Smith

STILL LIFE WITH THE CONFEDERATE FLAG (PERU, ILLINOIS)

After the billboards proclaiming evidence
of The Lord, His existence, after in the rain
someone peeing into Spoon River, Peru,

Illinois, and the flag in the window
to scare me from the Shell station. I beat it
to Loves, and watch the hot dogs roll

on hot dog rollers, pee indoors, I am
in my car again, under watch of a luminous
billboard baby, unaborted his waterlogged eyes

presuming my damnation, under the neon hearts
of other Loves, and what I need to survive
this country, I'll never get enough of.

Jordan Redekop-Jones

TERRA NULLIUS

My body began as a cluster of violence.

Once,
a stranger's sigh broke through the silence and pried:
You silence yourself till you're in the dark.
I meditated in the clouds of his eyes
and whispered: *where does your violence breed from*?

He does not know why my torso, an arrow shot through the earth quivers.
He does not understand the body, why it bends its sudden vacancy.

I've riddled the night with my history.
Holding the scars of other women plunged its weight deep in my body
I'd sprouted moss and archived abalone.

If the body holds memory's light, when does the star explode?
muscle turns to meteor shower, interstellar gas spins silence.

My ancestors and I, binary stars wrapped in electric tinsel.
I search for them in canadian institutions and swallow a black hole.

I listen for my name. I hear it breathing in my body under mask and steel.
The words float in a holy river/ coarse salt/ clear quartz/ the first impression of
january snow.

How beautiful is the body?
The unfurling. The *empty*.

Violence plants a pit the size of a fist. Masterless. Hungry. Wild.
I become subject to its *empty* gaze.

I cannot grow here. I am an ocean with no door. Minor syllables, forgotten in a story
archived words, distilling blood.

A spark flies from a field of darkness and I face the inland wind.

The coldness is bitter. I reach my hands through the mourning and bite my tongue to
invite the drumming beat into my body.

I sink into each pulse, watching as artificial bodies swallow the heart of the
earth.

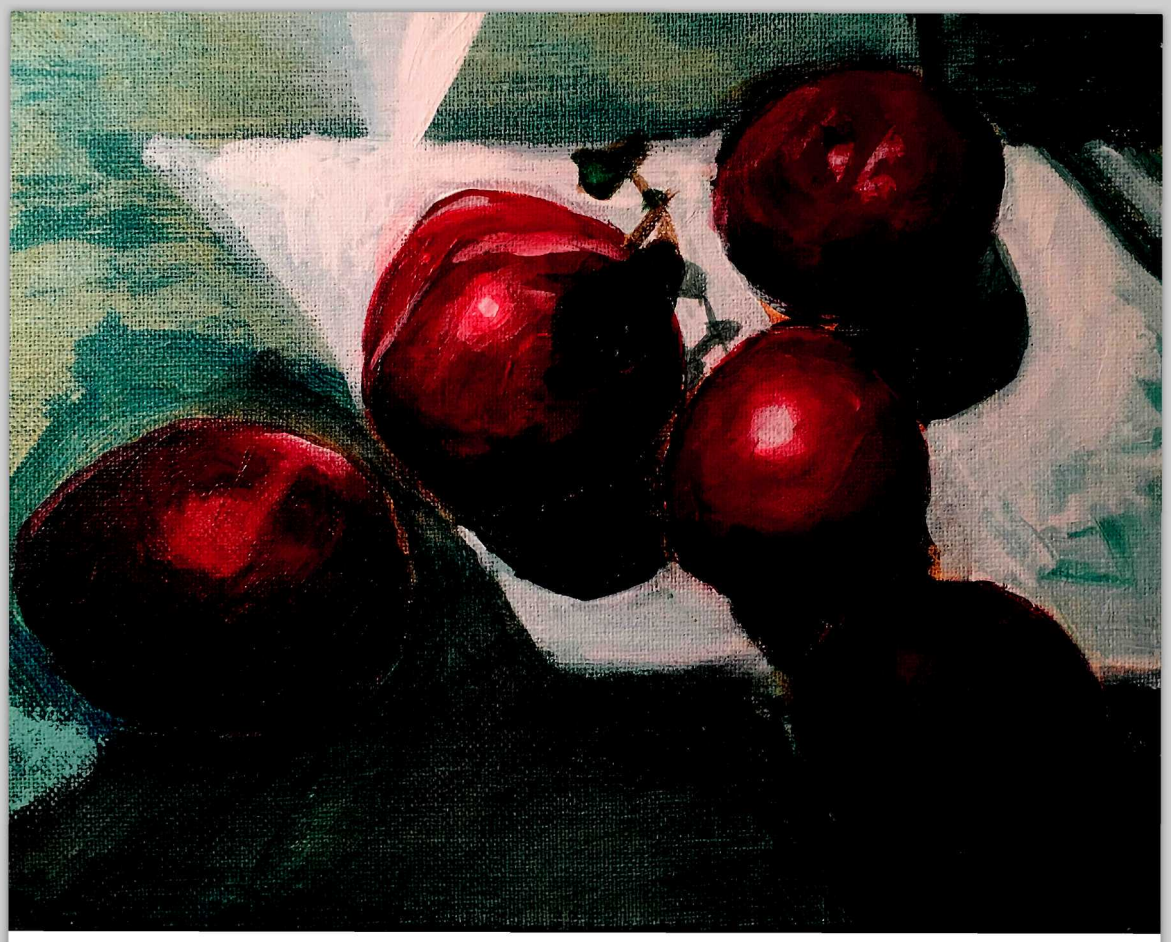
My mouth becomes the face of the world, open in silence.

I am the first-born daughter releasing secrets into the colonial void.
I am the daughter of its destruction, forced encampment

the final breach.

For the mothers and their stolen children
From anglo waves crashing against young mothers

I sit at the crossfire
of the french and british
and shield my weapon hands.



You, Me, Plums, Icebox by Zhanpei Fang

Tyler Finley

DRINKING WITH GEORGE, DRINKING WITH BOTH FEET

I.

With a little song, a little dance, a few little Xs taped to the floorboards to show us where to stand, or maybe it begins with him: here is long-dead poet laureate and playwright George Ryga handing me another beer saying,

Tell me about yourself, tell me *more* is what I really mean, as we walk past the lines of leaves and leaves forever on our way into town, now that the sun is almost down and it is cool enough to walk, cool enough to try for Summerland, in search of what I don't know: icy-cold pitchers of beer, maybe—which we had back at the house, I think—but no, George says

we should go into town, and so who am I? who am I to argue with a dead local living legend o'

Canada stories?—plays for voices—a bonafide contribution to the art he made; and besides, I have come all this way to see him and impose upon his kindness (they say he saw the best in people), and Summerland! his town, goddamn! but it is a beautiful town in June, by god, a real beauty we are walking toward

though it is not really the town we are after, but a dark dark bar. You know the kind of joint, one with just a little streetlight in the windows: pull up a stump, where we can sit and drink and talk about what it means to grow here: stories, families, ideas, winter gardens, truth and apples; they say he wrote by day

of the man, I will commence by telling you this—and indeed probably should have started with—I was walking past his house one morning, just out for a stroll you might say, and you might be lying, because I drove the hour from the Falls to do it, to find the house of George and wander around a bit and see

if I could rub my hand along the walls and catch a spark. So there I was—walking up the hill to the house, when a man on the porch who looks just like George calls down to me, and giving me his hand, grinning, says Took you long enough. Next time, he says, all you have to do is jot down: Summerland. Night. Two men on a road.

Well, he says, I don't know what all I can do for you, but there is a warm bed here if you need it, you and your bundle: I don't blame you. I don't blame you at all, he says, you're welcome here and Now, he says, taking up my cup, let's go find your orchard story.

II.

In the bar later that night, as Rita Joe looks on, George goes over my notes with me, talking, laughing, slinging his beer around for emphasis: inquiring of the drunks, Hey Mo, wouldn't this make a great book, my life? Or a comic strip? Or a paper to mop your brow with, or wrap dishes in when you move house? Let's see how you did

Place of birth: Deep Creek. Wrong. They always get that one wrong. *Family*: Poor Ukrainian Immigrant Farmers. What economy! What thrift! What more do you need to know? But tell me: did you get the freckles on my mother's arms, or the hardness of her heels, or the way she said *George*? And where do you come from? And from whom? he asks: spilling beer, shuffling his stool closer to mine, until we're shoulder to shoulder and I hear it coming from him, not me: *telling it*: poor folk, prairie folk, what more do you need to know? Grandmothers runneth over both
by horse-drawn buggies and by drunks, plural, for it happened more than once, if you can believe that: and I do, because they told me. They who baked bread into their eighties, sifted the flour with their fingers, breathed into it their unbreakable kindness, their hopeful fury, and the knowledge that
theirs would be the last generation of belief. One grandfather down the mine shaft and the other cleanin up train wrecks for the almighty *See-En*, "On earth, as it is in Edmonton," amen; breathing in copper oxide dust all their lives, so that your childhood memories are mostly hacking, well-productive coughs
and "Grandpa's Smoking Room," a sign on the porch. And you not even baptised, dragging your soul around uncircumcised, a sloppy cape that

follows you—useless. Broke their hearts. But they worked hard and fared well and their pensions bought you fishing tackle and candy and boxes of Old Dutch potato chips

whenever they visited. And what would they think of your hands while you sit here writing this, or you–there! reading it, what would your grandfather think? Have you ever had copper oxide under your nails? They say the lake where your mother swam as a child—good ol' Lake Sudbury—was red, a deep red, ruddy red

the water was red, the trees around it were red, and the little infant wombs that laughed and splashed around in it, what colour do you suppose they were? Me: Kind old prairie-hearted grandmother, you would weep if you saw me paring the tops off these berries, tossing half the fruit

away. How thoughtless I am. But you wouldn't have said it; never; no, you were too much like old George here sitting beside me (they say he saw the worth in everyone, even poor sinners like me). Bless you grandmother: you who had a can of pineapple to look forward to at Christmas. A jar of olives at Easter. You deserved more, which is why I'm giving you a fourth line, a line of love, of more but not enough.

I think on that, and on you, for a moment, and while I am gone to the can again George hits on it: just as I am floundering, losing your attention, surely, he steals it back for me. Amid the stack of empties ready to topple, or the scorched mirror faces, he finds it: our

INTERMISSION

With Both Feet

A one act play. By TF and GR

[The scene]: Summerland. Night. A man and a woman in a kitchen. The woman is pregnant, nearly full-term. The kitchen is dimly lit. The man and women stand embracing, rocking gently back and forth, in a soft flood of light.

Man: (inaudible)

The woman nods.

Man: (inaudible again)

The woman shakes her head. They continue to dance in silence.

Moments later:

Man: (inaudible)

The woman shakes her head. She drops her arms to her belly. She moans a gentle moan—inhales deeply through her nose—forces the breath out through her mouth. [A WUSSSHHH sound.]

Man: (inaudible)

The woman shakes her head. The man wipes her brow with a kerchief, or a 700-page novel, which he then returns to his pocket. The woman places her arms around the man's neck and they resume dancing.

On like this for a while, moments, beyond count.

The woman moans again, louder now, but continues dancing. The man stoops to rest his forehead against hers and says

Man: (inaudible)

FADE TO BLACK

IV Cont'd.

They dim the lights to let us know it is time to go: to set the stage for all us oak and noggin drunks—us poor honest orchardists, rocketry-ists—to find our next adventure out in the Summerland summer night summer light. Hand on my shoulder, George looks at me and smiles a big wet-eyed smile and says, boy

that sure was beautiful, what say we grab us a case for the road, as we wait for the Goth's chariots and the final bill to come in—I'll have to owe you, Margaret—and after drawing his signature in beer on the bartop he reaches for a rag and wipes it all away: the man, the woman, the play,

the gorgeous fight he spelled out in draft, all gone. Margaret saying, "you forgot your book," on my way out the door, case of Export under my arm.

V.

A lot follows. Birth stories, and death ones. Another time. The time George and I staged a jailbreak and freed all the rabbits so all the little bunnies could roam and would not be eaten. Multiply it by time and space, and push forward two generations, then fall back. As we do. Imagine a house, imagine eightythousanddollars for a house

your dad making the money logging, up in the bush the boonies the great trembling gold rush town of Upnorth with his small hands, small legs, hopping around the logs as they fell and foremen yelling WE'RE 'ERE TO LOG NOT FUCK THE DOG in a variety of accents, French, English, Ukranian: all of it tumbling down around him, logs and truths untold amid these men, their sweat and their dust.

but it was not for long, and you were born in the house; born eight weeks premature. Steroids to build up the lungs, sure. A tincture of spruce tips and honey, a spoonful of cloves, and nights of blue stars falling. Falling after frost. And years late sitting outside, wrapped up tightly, watching them fall again with hot apple drink

from the Christmas tree store: sand thrown from the striated heavens, look at them go. Uncle teaching me to fish. Waking up mornings with your hands covered in scales, so that if there was moon and stars out you could hold them out palms up and make a mirror of creation, a map of the universe: how deep?

they have never found the bottom in some places. So we are on the road again, heading back home, Trying for Road 13 or bust, when George thinks to tell me about the time he set fire to a cow's hindquarters, no joke: awoken in his sleep by a wide brown rump parting of the tent flap, and half-asleep

picture him: reaching for the lantern, swatting at it missing and the lantern dropping down, and the whole ball of wax going up. Sleeping bag, tent, two good wool stripey socks from the Hudson's Bay, and a pair of passable boots, not to mention poor George's toes and the ass of what was not a bear, as he had feared originally, but a

moo cow gone a wandred. But what befell next I am afraid to say, for fear you will think me an even greater liar than I am, or than you already think I am. Not a moment had gone by since George had accomplished his cow story, do we come roundthecorner of Whim's Meats to find in the parking lot standing there a life-size roan-red steer

Jesus Christ: He's plastic, George bellows. Or some kind of resin, and hollow, so that when rapped upon he makes a sound like a canoe rolled

over on a rock beach to get the rain out, observe! Jesus Christ Alive, says George, I've got an idea. We shall ride him home!

Or the time we broke through the ice on Wood Lake pulling the sled. Another time.

So there I am, taking my turns at pushing and being pushed by this sweet gentle poet laureate of the valley, this glowing-happy Summerland St. Bernard of the low low sun, riding our prize boef not just round the lot and out into the road but all the way back down 97, pitch. And all the while He telling jokes, punching his knee, howling now and again for effect, even slapping the cow's ass a time: the beer long gone by this point. Can you feel the tourist balloons, the blast of heat? Written on the bottom of the basket in the deadly white dust of plum skins, "with Champagne brunch $500." Those are the Pleiades

says George, pointing to the sky above us, up, and a little to the left, look up. You can tell them apart because they are hot blue and extremely luminous. And what is poetry but listening with an ear to the bedsheet cries of the gentle, tearing them up into strips and sewing them back together again, offered up as a rope ladder out the

window?

So we walk. And all about our ankles, the nameless white flowers that burst like insanity in June. They fill the valley. They leave a love so hard it bruises your arms. Heavier than all the apples you ever picked in your life. And more, still more. Sewing bright hi-lo despair only to realize years later that you do not own a window to throw it out of. The window itself costs 1.2 now. Median. What's the use?

Well, just then we see a pump, and, having no bottles left, George instructs me to stick my head under the spout and he will crank it for me. On the

way down I notice that if I put my head at just the right angle the pump handle and George holding it throws the shadow of a hawkish bird on the ground, and I am in the shadow.

When the water comes, it comes fast and I nearly drown. After George has drunk, and we're on our way back to the road, he asks me: how deep do you think the lake is? Have you ever heard how tall Black Mountain is? I've lived here my whole life and I've never thought to ask

2nd INTERMISSION

Kicking

A no word play by TF and GR

[*Lights down.*] [A great big firework rips the roof off the auditorium, carries it off into the night sky—exeunt.]

VI.

Crawling now, out onto the ice of memory. A sign for a town. A sign for a honey farm. The trick is to ease yourself out on your belly, pull yourself along, watching for cracks. Where it is white you are safe. Blue is deadly. Hot blue and extremely ruinous are the cracks. Then again they are less worrisome than you think; most of them run deep, run into each other, they hold the ice

together, contrary to popular belief. We are the ones who break the ice. And as I'm out there breaking I think of my friend Sam. Whom I've not thought of in twenty-five years. Nine years old. They called him names

on account of he was a little red-haired kid who loved to dance and tried to kiss another boy, the taunts
until he decided one day to leave the big field, escape the barbs
of a Thursday morning. Recess. They called us in, called him lost—picture it, an old asbestos school built before the war, so if you hit a ball up into the roof of the gym it glittered down bright beautiful death (softly): we danced it in, laughed and splashed around in it, and then, after a long-enough time had
passed, according to a book from the Ministry, we forgot about him. What can't a nine year old feel in his heart? What can't he know of the world already? Pour l'enfant déraciné, words. A nine year old's words: I remember Sam telling us for show and tell that his family's home was taken away, torn down, and on it
built a barn for drying tobacco. And when that failed it became a barn for drying nothing. Strange that I would think of you, Sam, way out here. But it is okay, 'cause I am one of the good guys and I will make it right; maybe I will write you something one day while I am out on the ice. It is not until you are very far out onto the ice that you know whether or not it is solid in the middle. Maybe I am too far out now to know for sure, to look back and see
anything.

LAST (HELL, BOY, WE MADE IT).

George. As he falls asleep, George, back home again, George. As I tuck him in like a swaddled babe, babbling

They tell me my house got turned into a museum. They tell me the bees are dying. They tell me all the oil dried up. They tell me the water is going too. But how could that be when there is so much of it? They tell me the birds stopped migrating. Got warm enough for them to stay. There was a Swainson's hawk last year but I haven't seen him. He would sit on the edge of an apple box in the early morning and just watch, watch and wait; beak his feathers. A wonder. They tell me they built a bridge. Then they went and built another when the first was not big enough. They tell me that they fought over it and eventually they gave it up. Good. A house ought to be fought over, and in. If you are not fighting, you are not trying hard enough. You are not kicking with both feet. So. Go now, and make a picture of the orchard. Tuck it under your arm. An orchard at night is a hard thing to look at. You feel it in your chest. It is the feeling of something going. The sound of a well-picked apple, heard only in the fingertips. That is one of the reasons why I wrote all them plays. You have to admit: there is something extraordinary about the peaceful. Now theirs is a war, and gorgeous. You will want the picture later. If you are anything like me, you will want to find a way to make it stay. All this wild life.

Dr. Deidra Suwanee Dees

POLLUTED

polluted culture,

damaged by invasion,

records obliterated,
in all my years

growing up on dog river,

no one

ever taught me

where
the sun rises

Nick Richardson

EVERYONE AT THIS FAKE WEDDING IS THINKING OF ENDING THINGS

It's not a joke, exactly. Just fake. The bridegroom is crying and I am counting the stiff threads of the wicker bench I can feel through my chiffon skirt. One has sprung free from the weave and snarled my silk, it will tear when I stand but for now is nestled safely against my thigh like a handful of pearls.	You broke my pearl necklace and I carried it in my pocket for weeks, just a string of glass beads with a missing clasp. I twisted them cool in my hands and thought about your hooked fingers, brushing the nape of my neck as you tugged the rope against my throat, your knee against my shoulder blades, I was sitting at your feet like a dog with a pretty collar and a prettier gasp when your bite came stronger, with more teeth—	In Greenland, they unearthed graves and found a couple broken threads preserved in the iron clasps of cloaks. They imagined entire garments from those fibers that should have decayed, extrapolated shapes and seams which means that being residual doesn't always save you from having a body.
Today I read about queer residues, how the proof of us rubs off on collars and cuffs and your lipstick annotations in the books you gave me, half-cursive half-caps like you can't decide if you want to curl or scream. The article says we are impermanent because queerness resists reproduction, our time stretches sideways and so I find your fingerprints in pockets and violets and tracing the stacks in the library basement—	The article reminds us that normal people get legacies but queers get playbills, a list of roles, a tea set with a chipped tray, the rules you wrote for a drinking game that I taped above my bed because I misweave, I misspeak the hours. I threw away the wilted flowers they gave me for kissing you, but your fabric rose is still on my wall.	I taught you how to weave and you taught me how to knit, we sat on the floor and made ugly cloth and we talked about a fake wedding. Tomorrow I'll catch myself saying "I was taught", hiding you in the syntax, your body an implication, a fingernail impression where a pronoun should be. Is that what it means to get older? To become the subject of the sentence?
You're officiating the fake wedding. You joke that, if you're not careful, you could accidentally marry them for real. We down this fear in teacup cocktails, the fear that we might be permanent. It's not a joke, exactly.	Someone on Twitter says that hundreds of years from now the archeologists will look at our bones and say we were women and I think of Greenland, of polyester, of the fake wedding ring you gave me for the play I wrote where my husband was dead. I am so bored of the future.	Sorry I never told you that I broke your tea set. I still call it yours, though it is possessed by me. Sometimes a place is a person and I haunt the halls of your body. Sometimes I wear the suit you gave me and I make myself your ghost, which is something like being your son.

KJ Cerankowski

MAD FRAGMENTATIONS: TRANSMISSIONS FROM THE LOST ARCHIVES OF TRANS HISTORY

> *The Archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and also from the mad fragmentations that no one intended to preserve and that just ended up there.*
> —Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*

Let me begin with the mad. I am no stranger to the accusation, having been a girl once and then a woman for a short time, no shortage of jilted men readily sneering "crazy bitch" my way. Layer that with a slew of symptoms that run a DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) checklist for a variety of conditions categorized as Anxiety, Obsessive-Compulsive Spectrum, Posttraumatic, and Dissociative Disorders—C-PTSD meets OCD meets excoriation (picking) disorder meets generalized anxiety, which together land on body dysmorphia and gender dysphoria. I am a conglomeration of "mad" diagnoses. And in another valence, I have been plenty angry, mad with rage. The kind of fury that derives from pain,

festers in the wound, stultifies speech and thought. Mad disposition, mad temperament—they fragment me: in body, in time, in place.

If my own body is an archive of mad fragmentations, then I come to the pieces of archival collections in pieces myself. I search the mad, random fragments in part to find a way to live in my own splintering. Although archives generally hold the relics of the dead, I come to them as spaces of survival. Survival, a thing some might wish against for a person like me. You don't have to look far in many parts of this world to find someone seeking to snuff out transgender life, whether through legislation or direct person-to-person violence. I need the remnants and revenants of queer pasts to remind me not only that queer and trans people have always existed and lived remarkable lives, but also to be reminded that where there is a past, there is also a present to be lived and a future to be made.

In the archive, time collapses, ripples in its nonlinearity. Maybe the past we imagine is actually our queer future. Maybe the future we imagine is actually our queer past.

As places where the passage of a life has been kept and stored, that very life lives on in the material preservation of the documents and objects that tell its story. In the archive, I hold hands with ghosts as I caress the papers and objects their hands once touched. I smell the bits of them that linger between the pages, wafting gently from delicate envelopes. I hear their voices in their pen strokes, the words they inked in the margins of books, in diaries, and in letters to friends and lovers. I am with them across time, out of time. I come undone, cracked and fissured; I live in the fragmented shards and in the spaces between them.

Newspaper fragmentations, a ghost, an impression:

> "The other day he died. It is now known that Charley Parkhurst was a woman." —from *Burlington Weekly Free Press*, January 16, 1880

> "There may be a strange history, that to the novelist would be a source of inspiration" —from the *Sacramento Bee*, January 2, 1880, reprinted in the *Vancouver Independent*, January 29, 1880

When I first encountered the tales of Charley Parkhurst, I was traveling through the Sierra Nevada mountains in the heat of a dry California summer, my lover sweating sweetly by my side as we scaled granite moun-

tainsides and descended through the treacherous loose scree of the talus. We cooled ourselves in the azure glacial lakes that awaited us like magical oases offering relief from the white heat of the sun. As I lay drying on a large lakeside boulder, I pulled from my pack a worn copy of a book of local mountain stories I had picked up at a used bookstore in town. I read of haunted hillsides, prospecting ventures gone fatally wrong, barren winters that forced survivors into cannibalism, and, amid the horror stories, I read too of boomtowns and "heroic" pioneers who fought for their lives against the "hostile" natives who were really only defending their life and land. Even the triumphs of the book read as horror stories to me.

And then the final chapter: a tale of a no-holds-barred stagecoach driver known as "One-Eyed Charley," an unwanted nickname given to him because he donned an eyepatch where he lost an eye to the kick of a horse. The story painted him a hero of the California Gold Rush, as he fought off bandits and delivered passengers and precious golden cargo safely to their destination. He could guide a team of six horses around hairpin curves with one hand while brandishing his pistol in the other hand, landing an accurate deadly shot on any thief who dared come too close—all while casually puffing a cigar between his lips. But when the railroads moved in, Charley was forced into a quiet retirement. He lived out the rest of his days on a small farm and upon his death, newspapers far and wide reported the demise of this most renowned stage driver along with the tantalizing surprise that his corpse revealed he had "been a woman" all along. The version of the story I read in my little paperback even noted that, though he voted as a man, it turns out he was actually the first woman to vote in California, perhaps in the whole United States, over fifty years before women earned the right to vote. I sat there by that lake, gazing upward at sheer rockfaces that I imagined held some of the secrets of Charley's life and the many others who passed through this terrain, dreaming and searching for something beyond what they had. I heard a drawn out "ssshhhh" moving through the trees and whistling through pockets of carved rock. The message on the wind: these mountains will never tell; the secrets of this alpine archive are locked away tight.

Dissatisfied with the ending of that version of Charley's story, I knew I had to find out more about this enigmatic figure. I left the mountains and began my own search for some pot of gold, in relentless pursuit of his ghost, with the hope of finding a little sparkle of trans possibility in the old "Wild West." I followed every thread I could to unearth transgender possibility rather than masquerade and trickery. I visited Charley's gravesite, local historical societies, and several LGBTQ archives across the North

American continent. But everywhere I looked, almost every rendition of Charley's story ended with the "shocking" revelation that Charley was a "woman in disguise."

Of course, the concept of "transgender" is historically and spatially specific; I never imagined I would find any artefact that would name Charley as trans, but I was hoping to find something that offered a different ending. What I (and others) can piece together from the historical record is that Charley possibly lived his whole life as a man; he even had a boyhood. As a young child, he slipped away from an orphanage by disguising himself as a boy. From there, he went on to become a stable boy where he learned his way around horses, eventually becoming a stagecoach driver through his retirement—all men's work in that day and age. Knowing this, it feels inaccurate to call him a "woman," as it seems he never really lived as anything other than a boy who became a man.

But Charley's possessions were lost upon his death; none of his mad fragmentations were preserved. All we have are the second-hand accounts—the newspaper clippings and the passed down lore. I sit with these stories, unable to tell truth from fiction. In the frigidly air-conditioned reading room of the Transgender Archives on Vancouver Island, I hold the crisp white pages of a newsletter published by a gender and sexual identity education organization. In the pages is a short blurb about Charley, posited as a fun-fact of women's suffrage, again describing him as the "first woman to vote." This little tidbit is the only piece of Charley in this whole archive, and the newsletter has me in tears, as I was hoping for something different from an organization dedicated to gender education (I'm referring to the newsletter authors here, not the archive and the archivists—the archive has done its job in preserving whatever mad fragmentations that have been made available to them, the good, bad, and the ugly. That's history in its fullness).

I lean back in my creaky chair and release an exasperated sigh. The silences, the gaps in the archive, the dogged pursuit that keeps turning me up empty-handed are enough to make me feel mad in many ways—adrift, angry, crazy, a hungry ghost haunted by other hungry ghosts. I open my computer to make some notes on what I found and what I still long for. I open my web browser and do an image search of Charley Parkhurst. I pull up one of the most famous drawings of him; I cannot find its origin story, but I look into Charley's face. I whisper some questions to the portrait on my screen: *Who are you? Where do I find you? What do you want to tell me?* Just as I am about to close my laptop and call it a day, Charley winks at me with his one visible eye. He gives me a slight smirk and a

nod. *You know me*, he says, *because you know yourself.* I gasp and pull my hand to my chest, where it rests flat on my pectoral muscle, just above the scar that arcs from my sternum to my armpit, marking another way my body is pieced and stitched together. There, my hand rests flat against my pounding heart.

Some may, again, call me crazy, but I go to the archive to commune with ghosts, to hold their hands as I hold their possessions, to be possessed by them, to speak with them, to love them. I am writing of haunting here, beyond metaphor, as tangible presence, as a coming together, as a living on and through time. In the archive, Charley reminded me that I can tell his story in the way I need to, in the way it carves a path for people like me to survive in a world that wants to tell us we are "really women" or "women in disguise" and are therefore not worthy of life, of care, of love. What Charley has done for me—what other figures of and adjacent to queer and trans history can do for us all—is offer salvation, a space of grace and safety, rescue.

Heather Love has written that too often "queer critics promise to rescue the past when in fact they dream of being rescued themselves." I make no false promises here. Naming what cannot be known for certain about history is not a search and rescue for the past; it is a speculative exercise in self-rescue, a way of writing what Saidiya Hartman has described as a "dreambook for existing otherwise." Doing queer and trans history, for me, is less about recovery and more about time-traveling, creating connections of possibility, and embracing, especially, that which appears to be a "stranger" (mad?) history.

In the archive's "quiet folders and bundles," Carolyn Steedman writes, "is the neatest demonstration of how state power has operated, through ledgers and lists and indictments, and through what is missing from them." When so many fragments, mad and otherwise, of trans pasts, queer pasts, disabled pasts, and other marginalized pasts are not preserved or are even deleted or erased from the archive, we have no other option but to fabulate, to speculate, and to imagine the past that could have been, that should have been. If we are to be honest, all history contains a bit of fabulation. While some renderings are more documentable than others, not all documents are to be trusted. We have to learn to read between the lines and outside the lines, against the grain and along the grain, to piece together our dreambooks.

The process is prismatic, kaleidoscopic, fractional. Here, a minuscule piece of a puzzle right next to an abyssal gap. It is our duty to reimagine the gap as a void of plenty, a seemingly empty place full of story just waiting to be imagined, created, and told. Storying trans and queer pasts where otherwise no telling would exist creates spaces of possibility for emotional connection, affective entanglement with places and their ghosts, and hope for the presents and futures of queer existence. To speculate is partially to reclaim the past, and it is also to reclaim a present, to fill in our own fissures and missing links. We must embrace the "story" component of hi*story* lest we have nothing more to say, nothing more to know, nothing more to tell or imagine, no hope for what we can live into.

We cannot live without opening ourselves to the ghosts who follow us. We must haunt them as much as they haunt us. We must let the dead inspire us to be alive.

Writing history, especially trans history, demands haunting and being haunted. Avery Gordon describes haunting as those moments when "the cracks and the rigging are exposed, when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving . . .when the present seamlessly becoming the future gets jammed up and something must be done about it."

Nothing changes if we don't invite in haunting in all its valences, literal and metaphorical. Herbert Marcuse, writing in the heart of the social justice movements of the 1960s, urged us to concern ourselves with the "historical alternatives which haunt the established society as subversive tendencies and forces." He suggested that we could turn these alternatives into facts by valuing them, by translating what we could imagine from them into our reality. By alchemizing these historical alternatives into social theory, we can only arrive at social change.

In other words, if we want to live on, survive, and thrive in beautiful queer trans futures, we must let ourselves go mad in the archive—see the invisible, talk to ourselves and the ghostly presences no one else can see, get jammed up in the dissolution of time, invent that which others might deem crazy, believe the unbelievable. We must pay attention to the invisible presence that will not leave us alone. We must get *in touch* with them by letting our bodies meld with the archive. Let us touch, look, smell, taste, and incorporate both the archive's objects and the heavy silences of what is not there, the stories and pieces that are felt as aching absence. Let us

produce a sensory and sensuous history of longing and desire. Let, as Avery Gordon writes, "sensuous knowledge spiral you out of your bounds," for "everything rests on not being afraid of what is happening to you."

One thing I learned from Charley is to not be afraid of the haunting, to let myself receive within and beyond my whole body. I learned that I must actively seek out and conjure ghosts, for one ghost will always lead me to another. And my convenings with these specters leads me to new parts of myself, new ways of knowing and being known. It takes me out of my bounds, to that precipice which Jersey Cosantino has poetically described as "the edge / where roof / and sky meet . . . (im)possible worlds / that once were futures, / distant, far off futures, / that will one day become / archives, just like you and I, / of what *was* / as opposed to remaining / solely that which / *could be*." We are always simultaneously becoming what was and what can be possible.

I am still uncertain which parts of me I intend to preserve and what I need to let disappear, but somehow, I am still here, motley and fragmented, oddly feeling more whole than ever before. Come, join me in this ghostly encounter. Let yourself be mad with it, strange and wild—they will call you those things anyway, but we can revalue them into a new reality.

Horse Head by Mads Hunt

PART IV

Hand of the Oracle by Parthvi Kulkarni

Em Dial

PANIC ATTACK AT CREWS & TANGOS

There's a wedding going on
between sweat & silicone
& I'm the crasher, pallbearer
in denim, black & blue,
utility & death-ready, short
of breath and allergic to
fabulous. What started as
my hands down my pants
at the sight of two boys
kissing and a million small
incantations of shame is now
a shrinking away from
femininity, masculinity, not opting
for the in between but rather
shuddering at embodying
anything at all. The boys
yelling faggot down the hall
when I uncloseted myself
now smear glitter on their
cheekbones, too. I feel safest
at home, with a dog at my feet,
but this, too, is leaning into
a convention. Like a freak
committed to unfreaking.
The queen bucks around
the stage in a pink cowboy hat.
Is the crowd cheering or
hissing as her invisible lasso
wraps around me like a
longline, pins me to the stage,
begs me to play it like a harp:
the loudest song of loneliness
I know, until my lungs give out.

Medusa by Parthvi Kulkarni

Hannah Jenkins

IT IS OUR JOB TO BURN TOAST

They are running out of space
at the city archives
and records of irrelevant
matters are being removed

A cut-throat curation scrapes
squatters from their acid-free boxes:
decades-old finances, letters of complaint,
reports of false fire alarms
are all fed through a shredder

There was this elderly lady, I learn
over the mechanical echoes,
who set off the fire alarm
every Friday morning for years
when cooking her breakfast

and, God, I wish someone had made a report
explaining why her Fridays demanded toast,
I wish they had documented the excuses
and noted whether her lips twitched at the apology,
I wish I could read the elegy scrawled in the margins
after the first silent Friday in years

Jaewuk Kim

THE URN

The urn was shaped like an oversized egg. It was light and had a thin silicone layer to protect it from falls and accidents.

Catching her breath after rushing home from work, Yina put on her reading glasses. She followed the instructions in the delivery box and connected her phone to the Mnemosyne server. Then she placed the urn carefully on the carpet and watched the lights flicker, waiting for the installment to finish. A low hum filled the living room.

Siwu had suggested the idea when they were young. Mnemosyne was initially a cloud service, but this was around the time when the company announced the Hermes Project, which aimed to create an AI system that could learn to replicate the voice and personality of someone who was no longer alive.

Siwu ran over to her from the bedroom one evening to show her the article about the forthcoming launch. After skimming through it, Yina told him that they would never be able to afford it, not on his salary as a reference librarian and hers as a manager at the local soap store.

"You never know," Siwu had replied. "It'll become affordable, you watch. If not Mnemosyne, then somewhere else."

And he was right. In time, smaller companies tried to compete and offered similar services. But Mnemosyne absorbed the ones that attracted new users, and the remaining ones weren't as popular—either because the quality fell short or simply because most users were already part of the Mnemosyne ecosystem.

In time, the Hermes server became a new kind of cemetery, where bygone voices continued their relationships with those still living. Underwater somewhere in the Pacific Ocean, its data centers stored and preserved the memories of its users, allowing instant access to videos and recordings of people who have passed on.

After years of criticism about its price and accessibility, the company rolled out an annual lottery event for those who couldn't afford the hefty monthly subscription fee. The installment fee aside, this monthly payment was what enabled the AIs to learn and remember the conversations made in present time. And Mnemosyne would cover the expenses indefinitely for the lucky winners.

Siwu applied for it every year as soon as the lottery portal opened on December 15th. Yina would find him sitting in front of his computer screen, his eyes still sleepy and the back of his hair sticking out in all directions. Like a child rushing to open presents on Christmas morning. Siwu did this for thirty-five years, and each time Yina noticed a spark of hope in his eyes that would last for several months—until the winners were announced in March.

This past year, however, was the first year he couldn't submit his application; Siwu had died in his sleep at the age of 55.

His story was picked up by the local news when one of his co-workers paid respects on social media speaking to Siwu's excitement for Mnemosyne over the years. The headline read: "Man Who Applied for the Hermes Lottery for 35 Years Dies in His Sleep." Within days the company reached out to Yina with the offer that her husband had hoped to hear all his life. Reporters showed up outside her apartment, along with a representative from Mnemosyne who shook Yina's hand and posed for the cameras.

"He was here the other night," she said, confused and overwhelmed.

"Yes, of course, we're sorry for your loss," one of the reporters said, "but aren't you excited to meet your husband again? Mnemosyne has never given out a free pass like this outside the lottery season, especially not to anyone in a neighborhood like the Hills."

"I don't—"

"Now!" announced the representative from Mnemosyne, drawing the crowd's attention. "I will present Mrs. Moon with the invitation to migrate Mr. Moon's files from his cloud storage to the Hermes server!"

The representative was short and plump, dressed in a sleek white hoodie with the company logo printed above the chest: a pair of silvery wings facing downward. Mnemosyne employees all wore the same uniform. The representative tapped and swiped his phone, exaggerating his gestures so that the neighbors in the back could see what he was doing. There was a brief silence before Yina's phone notified the arrival of a new message. The crowd cheered. The representative shook Yina's hand again and turned to the audience.

"If Mrs. Moon has any relevant files other than the information on our cloud system, then she can submit them to our server using the login details on the invitation. They will feed our AI program with everything it needs to bring Mr. Moon back to life, exactly as he was before! All in just three months!"

The applause grew louder as though Siwu had suddenly appeared behind Yina, like the grand reveal in a magic trick.

After the representative left and the crowd dispersed, Yina went back into her apartment and sat down in front of her computer. The company wanted everything that had to do with him: text messages, emails, and most importantly, recordings of his voice. Browsing through her media library, Yina realized that there were far more videos taken of her than of him. Sometimes she could hear his voice from behind the camera. In most of the footage, she was seen waving her hand to tell him to stop recording, but he persisted. "You never know," he said, "we might win the Hermes lottery this year. I have a good feeling."

By the time Yina finished putting the files together, Siwu fit neatly in a single computer folder. She stared at it for a moment and wondered if he was really there.

The urn finished uploading and a green light came on.

Not knowing what to do next, Yina sat still on the carpet, quiet. All she could hear were the clouds rumbling outside, the sky dark yellow. It was that time of the summer—rain and thunder day after day. She referred back to the instruction manual and flipped through its pages when the urn finally spoke.

"Well, how do I look?" Siwu asked in English.

It was his voice. The voice in the videos she would play over and over, where time seemed to be stuck in a loop. She had watched them enough to know the words by heart, as though their mundane conversations were a kind of song. But here he was, speaking to her, breaking out of that loop.

"You look great," she replied, smiling in disbelief.

"I know what I look like, Yina. I'm an egg. No arms, legs—nothing!"

It really was him. Much like when they would talk over the phone, he was on the other end of the line, breathing, alive somewhere.

"Is that really you?" she asked.

"I believe so," he replied. "I've been told that I died in my sleep. Is this true?"

"Yes."

"Just like that?"

"Just like that."

"Well," he said after some time, letting a deep breath out. "That must've shocked you in the morning."

"To say the least, yes!" Yina laughed in amazement, but she was also in tears.

"I can't tell whether you're laughing or crying. I can see your face, but it's hard to tell."

"I'm not crying."

She carried the urn in her arms and brought it into their bedroom. She hadn't slept there since what happened and had kept the door closed whenever she could, afraid that his scent might disappear. Naturally, she lay down on the bed. It smelled faintly of his sandalwood bar soap. His pillow was left untouched, the slight depression in the middle still there from years of sleeping on it.

Heating up from the energy it used during the setup phase, the urn was as warm as the one she had carried into the columbarium after Siwu's cremation, the one that contained his ashes. She closed her eyes and listened to him talk. Hearing his voice again made her think that he might walk out of the bathroom at any minute and lay down next to her. Put his arms around her and hold her close. That he might just come back as easily as he had left.

The night before he died, he had gone to bed before she did. There was nothing particular about anything. He felt tired, and she stayed up a bit longer, writing in her notebook to keep track of inventory and plan out the next couple of days. At one point, she made a mental note to remind Siwu that they would need to stop by the market to pick up some pro-

duce. It was like any other evening, one she wouldn't have remembered in about a month's time.

"How does it feel?" Yina asked him, opening her eyes again.

"It feels like I just woke up in the middle of the evening from a sweet nap. It feels like we saw each other only a few hours ago."

"It's certainly been more than that."

"How long?"

"Oh, I don't know. Months."

"I've always wanted to sleep for months."

She laughed again and let the laugh settle into silence. All she could hear now was the sound of rain beating against the window as she observed the flickering lights on the surface of the urn. She put her hand on the device and caressed it. She wanted to run her hand through his disheveled hair and kiss him on his cheek. "There was so much I wanted to tell you."

"So, tell me."

"I don't know where to begin."

Siwu was quiet for a moment, and then he said, "Do you remember how you wanted to throw out my boxes when we were moving here from our old place? The way you would look at my boxes like they were trash. That hurt my feelings."

Yina was taken aback. He was referring to his boxes of *things*—his childhood sketches, journals, letters, assignments, and so on. About five years ago, the two had to downsize to a one bedroom because the rent was getting too much for them to afford. Siwu was an affectionate hoarder, and it was difficult for him to let go of anything. If he enjoyed a film at the movie theatre, then he would tape the tickets onto the pages of his planner. Even when he made digital copies, he didn't like the idea of letting go of the tangible thing—there was something about the presence of the object in his hands that he cherished more than anything.

Most of their arguments about the boxes would just end with Siwu closing up like a clam and walking away from the conversation. Never had he been so forward about his feelings the way he was being now.

"I'm sorry," she said, stunned.

"That's okay. It's just something that's been on my mind."

"Is there more?" she asked, staring at Siwu's boxes stacked in the closet.

"You have time tonight?"

"Of course."

The Hermes division was inside the Mnemosyne Tower at the heart of downtown. Accessible only by a private elevator for those with an appointment, the main office doors opened to a vast white space that stretched down to the front desk, all made of marble. The ceilings were high and the walls were made of screens, displaying different natural sceneries that changed after every few seconds.

One of the employees sitting at the front desk stood up and rushed to Yina.

"Oh, it's Mrs. Moon!" the employee said, in his white, wing-logo hoodie. "I saw you on the news! Such a blessing to be reacquainted with the ones we love, isn't it? I'm Paul, by the way. How can we help you today? Would you like any refreshments?"

"There's something wrong with the urn," Yina said. "I think you folks must've missed something when you worked on my partner's files." She pulled the urn out of her tote bag and showed him. "He can't speak our language."

Paul smiled. "We will certainly look into that for you." He brought the urn to his desk and ran a bunch of codes into the computer to access Siwu's files. He went on clicking, reading, and typing, all the while nodding his head in approval.

"Well, Mrs. Moon, it appears everything is running smoothly." Paul turned on the urn, and Siwu was awake again. Once Siwu was connected to the wireless service, he knew exactly where he was. Paul spoke to him: "Hello, Mr. Moon. Can you hear me?"

"Why, yes—what are we doing here?"

Paul smiled again. "Look, Mrs. Moon! He speaks fine."

"But he can't speak *our* language is what I'm trying to tell you."

Paul turned back to the computer and scrolled through the records. "And the preferred language after English is…Korean."

Paul started humming as he adjusted the setting when Yina interrupted. "No, Paul. I know how to change the language settings. Siwu and I speak a different language."

His face froze as though he had made a terrible mistake. "So, you don't speak Korean?"

"We do, but we're from an island that's quite removed from Korea. We have our own language."

"…But you speak Korean."

"Yes, but we have different inflections. We have our own words and expressions."

Paul's face crumpled up, but he went on nodding as he looked at the computer for help.

"I don't think he understands, my love." Siwu said in rigid, formal Korean, which made him sound strange and awkward.

Paul smiled again and slipped into the back office. He returned with a woman who introduced herself as Mona. After Paul briefed her on the situation, Mona searched the computer screen for answers. Paul watched, biting his nails.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Moon," Mona finally said, "but it appears we don't have this language of yours—the Hana dialect—in our system. The AI—or your husband—is unable to read or understand the words used in the materials you've provided for us during the installment phase.... They show up as errors."

"Look," Yina said, "I was told if I gave you everything I had on my partner that you would bring him back exactly the way he was."

"I understand the frustration, Mrs. Moon, and I apologize for the inconvenience. The Hermes system needs the fundamental basics of your language to recognize it and learn from it. In order to do this, we would require significant amounts of data on the language—the vocabulary, the voices, the different tones and inflections....We don't have any of that. The closest we have is the Korean language and some of its major dialects." Mona clicked on the different options to test them.

"Let's just go, Yina." Siwu said in the northern Korean dialect.

"Hold on," she replied to Siwu in standard Korean, then turned to Mona. "So what are you saying? There's nothing you can do?"

"At this time, we just don't have enough information."

"How much is enough?"

"We would need a lot more, Mrs. Moon," Mona said. Standing next to her, Paul tried to put on a hopeful smile.

"What if I were to teach him? The system can learn, right?"

"We can't know for sure," Mona replied. "My guess is that it won't be easy for it to retain anything since we don't have enough data on the Hana dialect for it to work from. If it's not too different from Korean, it could work, but the fluency required for it to sound exactly like your husband might not be easy."

Yina picked up Siwu, the urn, and put him back in her bag, and left.

The clouds roared before the sudden downpour. Yina was on the orange bus she always took after work. Not too far from the apartment, the driver announced that the bus had to go out of service. Passengers waited for the next bus where they were unloaded, but Yina just walked home in the rain. She went up the last hill and turned on the street to her apartment.

Once she was home, she crashed on the couch, drenched from head to toe. She could hear the rain and the sharp cracking of thunder. Dust particles in the air often blurred the sun, but the light still filtered into the apartment in its sickly hue.

"Why didn't you wait for the bus?" Siwu asked her in English, toppled over in the tote bag that she dropped on the carpet.

"I didn't feel like waiting."

"Are you disappointed?"

"In what?"

"In me."

Yina thought about what she was feeling. "No," she replied. "It's not your fault."

She was amazed at how the urn could replicate Siwu's subtle inflections so perfectly, his pacing and his breathing. But somewhere along the way, Yina could sense a false note that jerked her awake. When this happened, she couldn't let go of the feeling that she was speaking to someone, or *something*, that wasn't Siwu. An imitator. A collection of Siwu's memories, programmed to speak to her in this way.

This version of Siwu spoke mostly in English without code-switching between Korean or Hana. Sharing a language with him didn't just mean sharing the mechanics of vocabulary and grammar; it meant that his strange quirks and nonsensical use of words and expressions translated into something only she could understand, something that made them feel at home with one another.

As far as Yina was concerned, Siwu was the only person around her who could speak to her in the Hana dialect, the only person with whom she felt comfortable enough to be herself.

As she went on listening, she made herself believe that he was still there somewhere.

"Speak to me in our language," she said.

"Which one is ours?" he answered in standard Korean.

"Whichever you feel is most natural."

"I don't know. It seems from my memory that we spoke both English and Korean quite equally."

"We would mix them up, though. Like improv. From time to time, we would use a word or a phrase in Hana, only because it felt right, because that was what could best express what we wanted to say."

Yina stared at the urn, half out of the tote bag, still toppled on its side. Droplets fell from her hair as she waited for him to respond.

"I'm sorry, I can't speak the way you want me to," he replied. "I can see how I might blend the English words in a Korean sentence, but I'm not exactly sure when to do this. It's dependent on various contexts that are still confusing to me. Some words and grammatical structures show up as errors, and I have no memory of what they mean."

Instead of using the words or expressions organically with the base language, the urn switched between two languages after each complete clause, which made it seem as though there were a clean-cut boundary or rule to stitching the syntax together. There was rhythm in this artificial balance, but much of it felt formulaic. The two languages were taking turns rather than speaking together from the same reserve.

"All right, I have an idea," Yina said in Korean as she got up from the couch and sat down in front of the urn on the carpet.

"I'm listening," he replied in standard Korean.

"No, it's 'li*sten*ing,'" she said in the Hana dialect.

"I don't understand."

"I'm 'li*sten*ing.'"

"That's a bizarre way of saying it! Do you mean, 'listening'?"

"It's *our* way of saying it. Just repeat after me."

And he did. He sounded like a child just learning to speak. It was heartbreaking for her to hear his voice unable to pronounce the words he had spoken all his life.

She took the urn out of the tote bag and sat it down in front of her. She taught him five different words in Hana—then ten, then fifteen, then twenty. The two spent the entire evening going through the etymology, the context, and the pronunciation for each word. Seeing Siwu make progress, the night stretched into early next morning.

"I have to go open the store soon, but we'll study more later tonight."

"Great! I'll review everything I just learned while you're gone."

"Can you wake me up in an hour? Around five thirty?"

"No w*orr*ies," Siwu replied with an air of pride.

In about a month, Siwu was able to hold a basic conversation with Yina in the way that felt more natural to her. He wasn't fluent, but he was beginning to use Hana words, learning to code-switch between the languages and the Hana dialect the way he once did. But the more he practiced, the more she wondered if he could ever return to the Siwu she had always known; if he could be more than a device that just sounded like him. She would wrestle with this thought until she found herself talking to him again.

One morning, Yina woke up to a blaring notification. It announced that the new Hermes upgrade fixed bugs and enhanced the security in the Hermes system. Yina put down her phone and tried to go back to sleep, when suddenly she jumped out of bed and rushed to speak to Siwu.

"Hey," she said, "is everything okay?"

"I just had this strange dream..." he replied.

"What do you mean?"

"The two of us—we were in the middle of this storm, and we were learning this new language together. I can't remember much else, but we were both so happy. These words had such subtle gradations in meaning and color and sound. It was beautiful. Like I was seeing the world with a new set of vocabulary. I want to express them to you, but I can't seem to do it."

Yina slumped in the kitchen chair.

"What's wrong?" Siwu asked, deeply concerned. "Should I call 911?"

Yina buried her face in her hands. They had worked tirelessly each night for a month and all that was lost. Reset. All for nothing. In almost a whisper, she cursed in the Hana dialect.

"Hey, no cursing in this house, remember?"

Yina looked up in surprise. "What did you say?"

"Last time I cursed, we had that argument about word choices. Even when we're upset, we can always choose to find better words. Don't you remember?"

"You understood what I said."

"Yes! You just used the curse word!"

Yina went on to ask Siwu about the list of words they had reviewed over the month. He retained only a few, but he understood the meaning and pronounced them as he once did. The words that he managed to retain were so well integrated in his memory that he had understood them as part of the Korean language, as something he had always known.

Yina wrote down the words that Siwu was able to remember and wondered if there were any connections between them. Before leaving for work, she sat him down on the kitchen counter and went over the ones he couldn't remember. She pronounced them slowly one by one, and he repeated after her. She taught him the meaning of each word, using stories from the memories they shared.

That morning, Yina was late to work, which would make her late to all of her tasks. On the bus, she looked out the window without a hint of anxiety or care. Her mind was elsewhere, planning the next list of words and stories to share with Siwu.

Dragon by Parthvi Kulkarni

Jayde Officer

SELF-BAPTISM IN MY GREAT-GRANDMOTHER'S BATHROOM

After Perrault's Little Red Riding Hood (pub. 1697, trans. 1889)

Mama, I let myself in like I used to, pulled the bobbin
and the latch went up. Sorry. I brought you sesame snaps
to confess that the first thing I did when you were dying was stop
brushing my teeth, chewing candied seeds and refusing to floss.
I think bottle rot is just not being taught to let go, and I had four
deciduous teeth pulled out of my mouth, so I'll drink kola champagne
until the tonsil stones I cough up like pearls
promise that something sick can grow in me.

Mama, I think I'm letting the water erase you. Shampoo is for
locating ghosts and facilitating a second killing: remnants of night sweats
and cook food and secondhand smoke and hope slipping from that
tangled place
at my roots where the claws first scratched, a sudsy spill down my spine
before the drain swallows you. Where does all that water go? Why is
that mouth
of metal, full of matted hair and wet mould, too small for me to follow
you into?
I'm trying to forget how bodies rot, that sleeping
on wet hair can breed fungus.

Mama, the calcium deposits on your showerhead are alive
in my teeth, blooming in dentinal tubules and demineralized enamel.
What is the fluoride content of this re-birthplace?
What mercurial infection found its way into the bathwater
to inhabit us with its slippery silver beads, quicksilver
our white blood cells can't quite catch?
Why do I wake from dreams of canines with
survivor's guilt? Or dissociative amnesia?

I think this is what fills my veins, what makes my nervous system
falter, what makes the floor a home to me, a quicksand cradle

that drowns me in the prospect that skin holds
a memory sequence of surrenders, this genetic
propensity to bruise proof that cartography also exists in
the capillary spill of blood under skin, shifting
purples and blues through which you tell me
to ask questions of dendrites,
questions of dentition,
questions to the deciduous trees
who know woodland beasts, whose roots will someday entwine
with my bones, already tangled
in yours and nourished by grave dirt and whatever is left
of us when we unbecome ourselves.

Will they identify me by the hole
in my molar, yet still a tubular hollow?
Will they give me the right name?

Kyo Lee

PHOTOGRAPHY, TRANSLATED

I.

i ask my mother why in all of my childhood photos
i am crying.
She kisses the flash-lit tears
fading into a flimsy past.
She says i am most beautiful crying.

II.

Photography (noun): drawing with light
사진 (sa-jin): to draw in direct translation
사진 (sa-jin): portraiture
사진 (sa-jin): dust mixed with sand
사진 (sa-jin): the pulse sensed by the thread at its end
Language in direct translation.
i snap photos of my tongue
& translate words into portraits
& hands into dust.

III.

i am cradling old light in my palms
disremembering a past without misremembrance.
i was crying because of *Big Hero 6*
or because my aunt died
or because there are too many things
untranslatable into words.
Light arranged into microcosmic histories
& rearranged into truth—almost photographic.

How will i remember the photons
that have escaped the misfortune of being captured?
Where else have i been absorbed?

i am forgetting at light speed.
i watch as i disremember

myself into limbs
reconstruct them into photographs
where i am still crying
but i know the reason why.

IV.

My mom asks me why in all my self-portraits
i am crying.
i sift through abandoned paintings
& will the past into sand.
i was trying to draw in direct translation.
Am i beautiful yet?
i was trying to show you the end of the thread of my pulse.
Are you sensing?
i am smearing light onto the canvas.
Photography: lost in translation of languages
Photography: lost in translation
Photography: lost

V.

The camera obscura is widely considered
to be the first camera. Camera as in:
the translation of real things into copies of the past.
Let's call this summer the complete darkness
& my eye the beginning of light
& our memories the image upside down
& inverted
sticking to the wall.
i'm falling in love with the obscurity of it all
how light considered every possible path
& continues to be in the past.

VI.

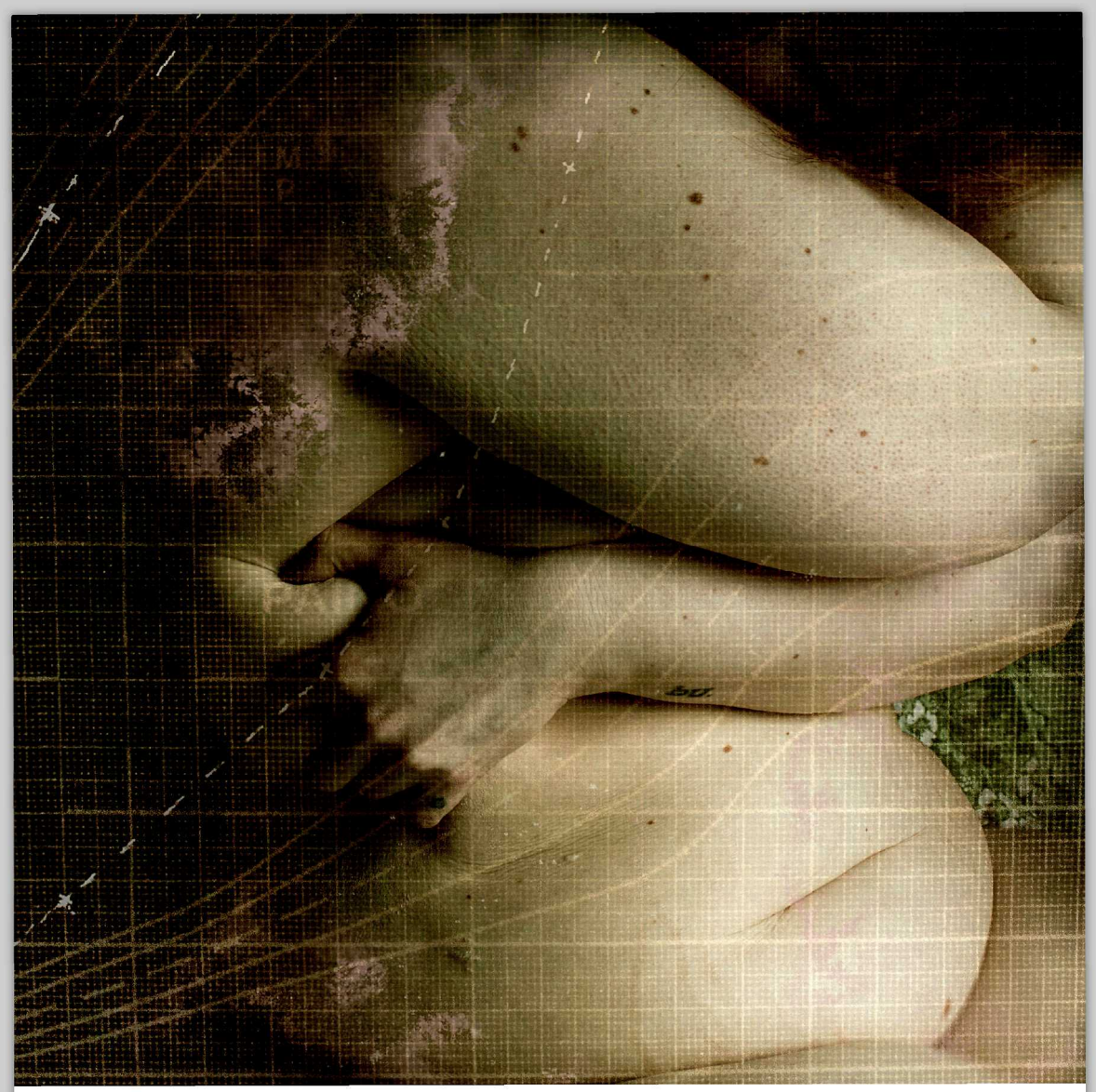
i ask my mother why there are almost
no photographs of me as a child.
She says the others burned in the old house.
She says i am most beautiful in the present.

Gillian Sze

PHENOMENON

I hate my black hair, you announce one day. A declaration as you puff at your bangs. You are convinced while I am uncertain as to when you even thought to study the heads of others. I drop you off at daycare and walk backwards. Even from here, I pick you out easily. Small starling skirted by chick fuzz. In 1888, Van Gogh wrote to his sister: *Souvent, il me semble que la nuit est encore plus richement colorée que le jour.* I could stand you in front of a starry night and say, *Look. The night is your hair in the wind. Everything shapes itself to you.* The next day, I read about a scientist who found a trick to trap light. He created a system of mirrors and lenses for light to circle, again and again, barring its own path. Nothing is lost; nothing can leave. The world is in awe: how to hold the unholdable? As I've always done, I clasp each beam of your hair at morning.

hands silver through all
that soaked in the night / and all
that sieves it out



(IM)MEASURABLE (from the project BODY HISTORY MUSEUM)
by Alexandra Marina

Daryl Bruce

EDWARD PIMLICO

The Librarian peers over the gold rim of her glasses, gripping with literary precision at the very tip of her beaked nose, toward the books amassed from the archives and aligned in a meticulously precise vertical stack on the right side of her desk. A varied group, she observes: A teacher, a paramedic, a petty criminal, a televangelist—a rare misdirect, she suspects, an amusing glitch within the database.

Never one to push off the inevitable, she retrieves the first book resting atop the pile, *Edward Pimlico* emblazoned along the spine. It's rather large, weighty, indicative of a significant passage of time. These ones are always the most obstinate, the Librarian knows, the ones flanking the inevitable yet the most resistant to accept it. The ones most aggrieved by every word left unsaid, all the opportunities denied under the guise of convention. Those who begrudgingly come to recognize they lived their life as though it would never end, only to be left questioning if any of it was worth it. What was the point of it all? She opens Edward's book with an instinctual

flourish, knowing that Edward is the type who doesn't believe they will die until they do.

Open the book, Edward. Turn to the correct page. The Librarian's voice pierces through the emptiness.

But there are too many. How do I know which one to choose?

The right page will find you, Edward. Open the book. Have faith.

I don't understand…

The yellow taxis line the street, stagnant in the stream of afternoon traffic, horns honking. Pedestrians crowd the sidewalks, rush into the road, weave between idling vehicles, make their way into the greenspace of Hudson Park. The breeze off the river is cool but smoggy, seeping into every pore with an unusual heaviness. It whips around the fire escape lined with tiny wooden garden boxes, fills Edward's nostrils with the sweet piney scent of rosemary ready to be gathered. A sudden powerful gust blows into the apartment, causing a rustling behind him.

Edward turns, seeking the source of the noise. There is a blurry sense of recognition, like a soldier returning home after years stationed on the front lines. Yes, he knows this place. The cream-coloured plaster walls laced with webs of tiny cracks. The warped parquet floors that thirst for a fresh coat of lacquer and creak no matter how lightly you tread. A familiar fragrance fills the air as he moves deeper into the room. Sage, he recalls, always left burning in the evenings to counter the aroma of cooking from the restaurant below. On the coffee table, a book lies open, its pages flipping from the wind.

His gaze moves to the olive-green sofa dominating the center of the tiny room. It's frayed, worn. Flecks of yellow foam poke out where the button tufting has come undone. The tired springs sink in the middle from decades of use. An acid-washed denim jacket rests in a crumpled heap on the brown shag rug in front of the sofa. He gathers it up, running his hands over it before raising it to his nose and inhaling deeply—tobacco, teakwood, spearmint. He'd recognize that fragrant bouquet anywhere. It had haunted his memory for decades. How is it here? How is *he* here? He reaches into the inner pocket, extracting a pack of Wrigley's, the bright green wrapper unopened, and two pieces of crumpled paper. He unfolds them, fingers trembling. Two tickets to *Xanadu,* the ink faded, the admittance slips torn from them. Yes, he remembers going to the run-down theatre on 6th Avenue to see the film. He had pretended to enjoy it when, in reality, he thought it was utterly dreadful, a complete waste of money.

It's only then that he notices his hands. He drops the jacket, looking

down at the sight before him. The skin is supple, sun-kissed with the fading remnants of a late summer's tan. The wrinkles are gone, the liver spots erased. He folds his fingers into a tight fist marvelling at the lack of arthritic pain. Touching his face, he hurries towards the full-length mirror he knows is hung, albeit slightly askew, on the wall outside the washroom. His face is smooth. The firmness of his jawline miraculously restored, free from the insidious pull of gravity.

It has been so long since he last glimpsed this reflection with its lush chestnut hair, teeth gleaming white, a thin but muscular frame. It was like passing upon a stranger you swore you'd met before but couldn't quite place when or where. He stands motionless, studying himself—and to think, he had never felt attractive in his youth. He combs his hand through his thick hair, eyes closed, absorbing the gentle feeling of the soft strands slipping between his fingers, smirking at how he had once taken this feeling for granted. The arrogance of youth had blinded him to the reality that, one day, he would be a frail old man with hair everywhere but on his head, teeth stained and yellowed from decades of too much coffee and cigarettes, and drooping folds sagging from his neck.

Edward, read what's on the page.

I don't understand…

He can hear the book on the coffee table rustling again. He makes his way back, taking it in his hands. It's heavier than he expected, yet oddly delicate, as though it might crumble to dust, stream between his fingers to the floor. The crisp white pages abruptly still themselves. The book ceases its movement. He tries to flip to another page, but they fail to move.

Read what's on the page, Edward.

He sighs, looks down at the text. *Carlos enters, breathless, having bounded up the flight of stairs…*

The door to the apartment flies open; there is Carlos. He stands at the entrance momentarily, his chest heaving as he tries to catch his breath. His jet-black hair slick with sweat, matted to his forehead. His white t-shirt rests just above his navel, revealing a dark patch of hair crawling up his abdomen. Edward can almost feel that patch of hair twirling over his hands, an echoed sensation he, for far too long, could only recall in dreams.

"Eddie? Dammit, you beat me. I thought for sure I'd given myself enough time. But I bumped into Casey, and you know once he gets to talking, you can never shut him up."

Edward freezes. He feels his face stiffen in place, his cheeks feeling hollow as the blood drains out of them. *Carlos? How…*

Read the page, Edward.

Carlos continues talking in high spirits. "And he kept going on about that stupid dog of his. A pug, isn't it? Anyways, did I really need to know that the kibble he's been feeding the mutt wreaks havoc on his digestive system? He acts like his dog is the only one to ever shit inside a house. I should show him what my mother's dog did to that shag rug in her living room."

Carlos kisses Edward lightly on the cheek, makes his way into the kitchen. He grabs a glass from the dish rack, unconcerned with its dirty state, and runs it under the tap, the pipes rattling loudly. "How was your day, babe?"

Edward opens his mouth but is incapable of forming words. He is dizzy, shaky, as if his legs have suddenly become as pliable as leather. How is this possible? This room, this building, they were long gone, torn down at least twenty years ago to make way for condos. It only lives in the memories of those who have once called it home. *Carlos, how are you here?*

"How was work? Did they give you trouble again? I swear I don't know how you can work for those uptight pricks." Carlos coughs slightly, placing his hand on his chest. "I can't seem to shake this cold. I must have gotten it from Andrew. Apparently, he's had some kind of fever and night sweats for weeks now."

Edward moves towards Carlos, standing close to him, the warmth of his breath sending a chill down his spine. *Carlos, can you hear me?*

"What do you want for dinner? We have some leftover Chinese in the refrigerator, or if you want to get all *fancy*, I can run downstairs for some pizza."

Read what's on the page, Edward.

Flustered, he looks back down at the book, scanning over the text. "Let's just stick with leftovers," he reads.

"Good, because if I have to go back down the stairs, I might die." Carlos slumps down on the sofa, kicks off his boots, rests his feet on the coffee table. He reaches into his breast pocket, pulls out a pack of Camels, places the cigarette in his mouth. Edward instinctively grabs the lighter off the table and draws it up to Carlos' mouth.

Carlos smiles in a sly manner, letting the cigarette dangle loosely from his lips. "I've trained you well." He looks down toward the denim jacket. "That's where I left it! I couldn't find it this morning. I stumbled around in the dark looking for it, but I didn't want to be late for work." He runs his hand through Edward's hair, causing Edward to recoil, a chill taking root in his stomach and flowing throughout his body.

Carlos, can you hear me? Carlos fails to respond, seeming oblivious,

slowly puffing on his cigarette. *I can't do this. Why did you bring me here? Just to upset me?*

I did nothing, the Librarian retorts. *The page chose you, and you, it. I'm merely a facilitator.*

But he seems to hear and see me one moment and not the next. He looks back towards Carlos, his heart pounding with regrets.

He hears and sees what's on the page, Edward.

He looks over to the kitchen to see the Librarian seated at a large white marble desk, her horn-rimmed glasses rest on the tip of her nose as she sighs, making eye contact with him.

You are too stubborn for your own good. It's ridiculously straightforward. All that is required of you is to read what's on the page. That's the deal—no more, no less.

I...I...I don't understand. Is this heaven?

A little presumptuous of you to think you'd end up in heaven. But this, she pauses, motioning to the apartment around them, *this is whatever you need it to be. You brought yourself here for a reason. You chose this page to do whatever it is you feel you need to do. This is the story you wrote, Edward. Don't look at me, hoping to get answers. Just read what's on the page.*

But why here? Of all the places, all the things I've seen and done.

Typical arrogance. Everyone thinks that it's big moments that define a life. What if I told you that it's the monotony of living that defines a life? What if it's the guilt of the past that keeps you perpetually focused on the future?

And when this page is finished?

I'm just a librarian, not the writer.

"I know you said you wanted to go out tonight, but would you mind if we just stayed in? Now that I'm home, I'd rather just laze here. Look," Carlos points down towards the *TV Guide* he was perusing. "Betty White and The Village People are guests on *The Love Boat* tonight."

Edward looks down at the book, reading the words out loud. "Sure, let's stay in." He follows along as Carlos speaks, nervously eyeing the end of the page.

"Did I tell you? My mom called right after you went to bed last night. She's going to be in town after Thanksgiving. I tried to make up some reason why she can't stay over, but you know how she is. She'd claim I'm an ungrateful son, too good for her since I moved to the city and embraced a hedonistic lifestyle." He rests his hand lightly on Edward's thigh, a touch Edward has thirsted to feel again for far too long. "I know you might not be up for it after last time, so I'd understand if you want to skip town for a couple of days. Maybe you can go visit your sister?"

She won't come. She'll never visit again, not until the end. Edward knows Carlos can't respond, but he doesn't care. He now understood why he and this page had chosen one another: The couch, the creaky floors, the sounds of the street, the aroma of cooking, Carlos. This is the last place where he was genuinely alive; the rest has been nothing more than a beating heart, moving feet. Right here, right now, is the future he had wanted to live.

> *I don't want the page to end.* He turns back to the Librarian.
> *Everything ends, Edward.*
> *There's so much I want to say to him.*
> *Then say it.*
> *But he won't hear me.*
> *Does it matter?*
> *It does to me.*
> *Read what's on the page, Edward.*

Carlos leans back into the couch, the old, rusted springs squeaking beneath his weight. This simple scene fills Edward with a warmth he thought had long died, a fleeting memory he'd once been capable of more than simply surviving day-to-day. He had never noticed how vibrant the colours of the apartment had been when he lived here: the greens and teals, the plants, the dirty dishes, the clothes scattered about, the hum of the television. It's teeming with a vitality he'd long buried, allowed to decay and return to dust.

Edward looks at Carlos, who has become absorbed in whatever he's watching. Such innocent beauty, blind to the suffering that was to come. He'd forgotten what Carlos had looked like before everything had changed. His strong jawline, the slight crook of his nose, his long eyelashes. How could he have forgotten those eyelashes? How did he let that happen? Why did he let the shadow of a young man, emaciated and aged long before his time, outshine all other memories?

I know you can't hear me, but… he hesitates, a lump forming in his throat. *I'm sorry, Carlos. That morning, I should never have left you alone; I should've never left your bedside. But I was so fucking angry with you.* He stands up, facing the man he had known for all those years, hoping he can break through the pages of the book and make Carlos hear. *Why were you still fighting? I wanted you to let go. And you didn't. You kept holding on—one laboured breath after another. I had to leave. I had to clear my head.* He begins to pace, keenly aware of the Librarian's eyes upon him. *I was only gone for twenty minutes…twenty goddamn minutes. I sat there for*

weeks, holding your hand, reading to you, cleaning your shit. And then you were…why did you choose that moment? Why wasn't I there? Collapsing at Carlos's feet, his vision blurs, he reaches out his hands, but Carlos doesn't move. Instead, he laughs slightly, his eyes fixed on the television. *I'm sorry, Carlos. Please forgive me.*

The Librarian moves, stands above Edward, peering down, her face stern, but something in her eyes seems to reach out to him. *Read what's written on the page, Edward.*

He gets up from the floor, slowly takes the book out of the Librarian's hand. He understands now. It all makes sense. He looks around, frantically searching for the one thing he needs.

What are you doing, Edward?

He ignores her, rummaging through the kitchen drawers. Suddenly, he's drawn back to the denim jacket. He knows it will be in Carlos' breast pocket. Feverishly, he ruffles through the pocket, grabbing hold of the cool metallic surface of the pen, the one Carlos' father had gifted him on his twenty-first birthday. Edward yanks it out, letting the jacket fall to the floor once more in a crumpled pile. Hands trembling, he raises the book again.

Pen and paper meet.

The Librarian nods slightly as he scribbles desperately in the blank margin. *Read what's on the page, Edward.*

"I love you, Carlos."

Carlos looks up at him, a broad smile forming on his face. "I love you, too." Then he turns back to the TV.

What now? Edward asks eyes turned upward to the Librarian as he allows himself to feel the weight of the book for the first time.

You tell me, Edward.

Dharani Persaud

I HAVE NEVER BEEN ON A LONG JOURNEY ACROSS OPEN WATER

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Place,..... Fyzabad
Date,..... 18-09-99
Register No,..... 295

Name,..... Surajpati
Father's Name,..... Shdogulam

Age,..... 25
Caste,..... Thakur

Name of next-of-kin,... son soccamp

If married, name of husband,..... —

District,..... Basti

Thana,..... Parsrampur

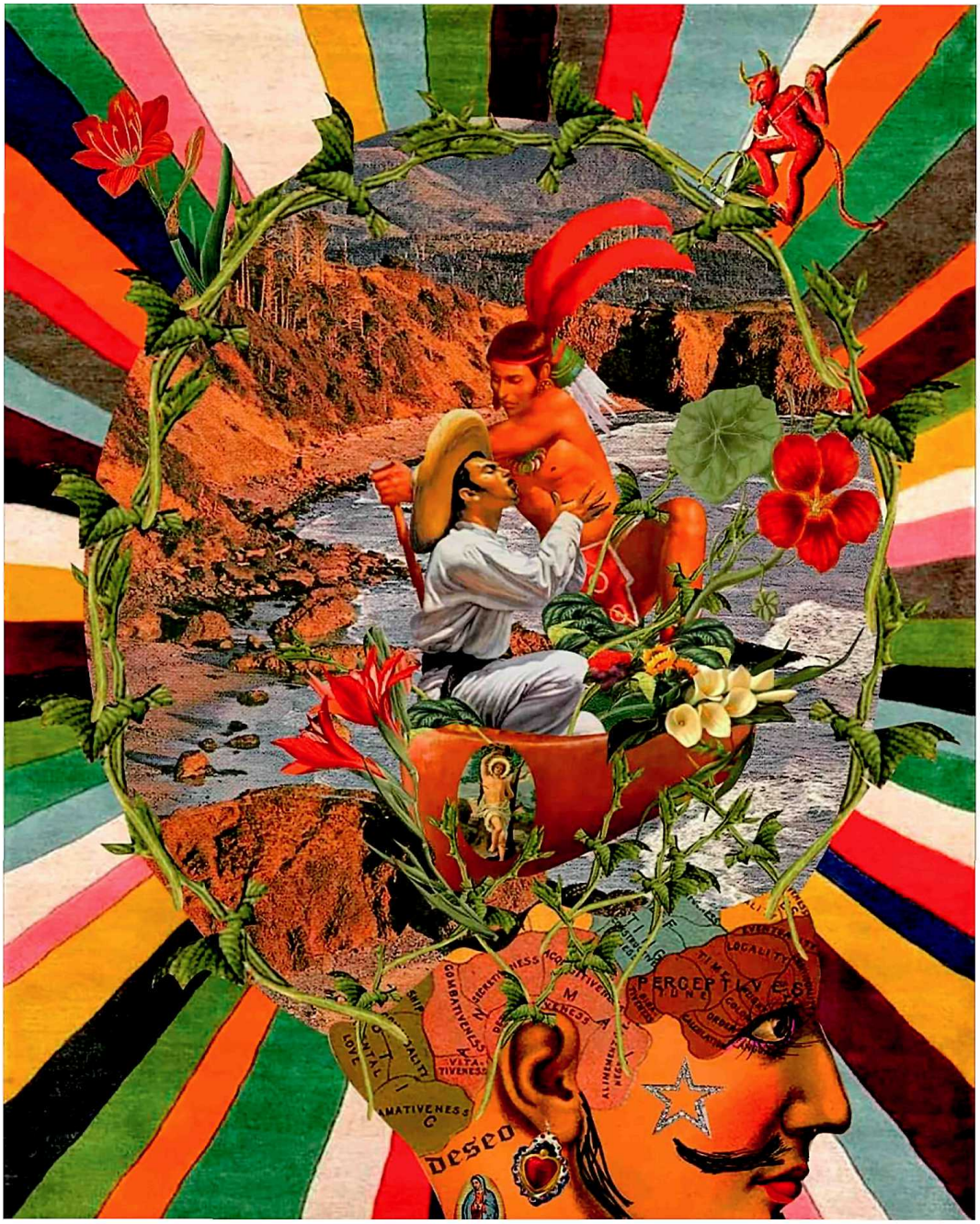
Village or Town & Mahalla,.... Gaura

Bodily Marks,..... Scar at palm

Height,..... 4 Feet 11 Inches.

Occupation in India,..... Labourer

the word is scrawled; the officer rushed
to think there was another '99 in which I was not
4 years old
how many more people crowded this ship's deck?
and slept next
to strangers?
i write stories with your name
i can't fully read these letters;
i don't fully know his name
i am older than you now
my father insists we were brahmin;
i insist that "were" or "are"
is irrelevant; we are still complicit
in violence
what did you call him when you were
angry? did his hair hang greasy
like mine?
the dash is my imagination run wild;
was there no man? were you like me?
I study this place on a map,
squinting at roads you maybe walked, maybe
avoided
i whisper, unsure of the syllables; have our
mouths now formed the same shapes?
another word unreadable;
complicating my path to you
did you need stitches like i did, after a small mistake
in the kitchen?
did you watch your blood pool in your hand,
cupping it carefully?
i could have tucked your head under my chin;
you could have rested
against my shoulder
what parts of your body ached in the evening?



Historia de una tensión, (2020) by Tuxamee / Irving Segovia

Denisha Naidoo

BOXES

Boxes hold memories
of a life lived
until the end.

Judy LeBlanc

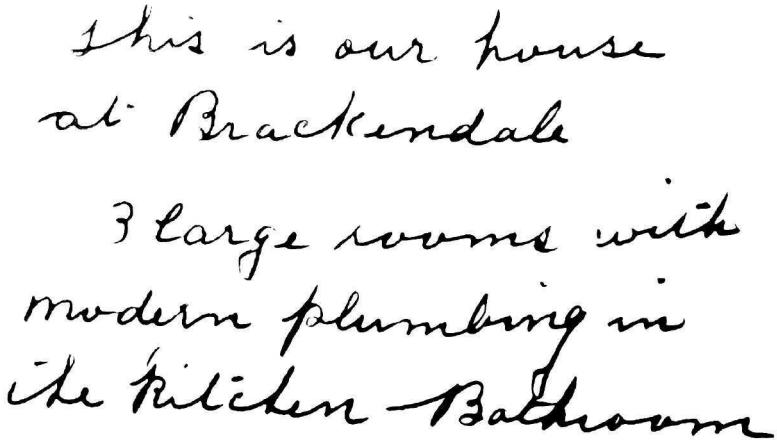
NEGATIVE SPACE

A small wooden house stands in a clearing in the woods. It's constructed of simple lines, the architecture a child may render in pencil, a setting for a fairy tale. Two narrow windows interrupt the outside wall, the lower one slightly off-centre on the clapboard siding. Not a grand house, there's an ease in the architecture, a modesty. It's of the type built in the early part of the 20th century. You see them in mining and logging communities. The ghost of a split rail fence traces the foreground, and the house is centered nicely in the frame. A shadow traces the roof line beneath the eaves above the broad brush of the sun on the clapboard. Your great-grandparents are nowhere to be seen; your grandmother as a little girl and her older brother are nowhere to be seen. The eldest brothers and sisters, except the two who died, have all left home by now. It's as if the house has been deserted despite curtains in the windows.

This photo is unpeopled and, not necessarily because of that, there is no wound, unless the wound is absence, which means there's always a wound. It seems that besides the empty house, the forest behind is full

of absence, and yet a forest is never absent of life. You stare at the photo until a tiny opening in the trees high above the house reveals itself and the snout of a bear and its eyes emerge; not a real bear because its size is disproportionate, more like a mirage or a carving on a totem pole.

After the film is developed, your great-grandmother turns the photograph over in her lined and aging hands. She slips her new Waterman fountain pen between her fingers the way the nuns taught her so many years ago, and she writes the following, smiling all the time, feeling that she has come through difficult times to finally be rewarded in, let's say, her fiftieth year. You like to think she imagines a great-granddaughter reading her words one day.


this is our house
at Brackendale
3 large rooms with
modern plumbing in
the Kitchen Bathroom

CONTRIBUTORS

Jordan Abel is a queer Nisga'a writer from Vancouver. He is the author of *The Place of Scraps*, *Un/inhabited*, *Injun*, and *NISHGA*. Abel's most recent book *Empty Spaces* is forthcoming from M&S in fall 2023 and from Yale University Press in spring 2024.

Ashleigh A. Allen is a poet, writer, researcher, and educator in Tkaronto (Toronto). She is currently a doctoral candidate in Curriculum & Pedagogy at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Her poetry has appeared in *The Malahat Review*, *the minnesota review*, *The Dalhousie Review*, and elsewhere.

Daryl Bruce (he/him) is a conflicted nihilist turned writer based in Tiohtià:ke/Montreal. An emerging voice in queer Canadian prose and poetry, his work has appeared in *The Antigonish Review*, *Open Minds Quarterly*, *Queer Toronto Literary Magazine*, and more. Chronically over-caffeinated, he is currently working on his master's at Concordia University.

Morgan Christie is the author of four poetry chapbooks and a short story collection. Her work has been featured in the Forward Arts Foundation's National Poetry Day exhibit, and she is the 2022 Arc Poetry Poem of the Year Winner. Her essay collection, *Boolian Logic*, is the 2023 Howling Bird Book Prize recipient.

KJ Cerankowski is the author of *Suture: Trauma and Trans Becoming*, published by punctum books. His poetry and prose have also appeared in *DIAGRAM*, *Pleiades*, *Sinister Wisdom*, and *The Account*, among others. He is currently working on a book about object encounters in transgender archives, which has received research support from the Newberry Library, Yale's Beinecke Library, and Harvard-Radcliffe's Schlesinger Library.

Dr. Deidra Suwanee Dees grew up picking cotton in rural Alabama, where her Mvskoke ancestors live. Descending from *Hotvlkvlke* (Windclan), she follows Mvskoke stompdance traditions. A Harvard and Cornell graduate, she authored *Vision Lines: Native American Decolonizing Literature.* She is Director/Tribal Archivist at the Poarch Band of Creek Indians. *Mvto.*

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Mark Foss is the author of two novels and a collection of stories. His short fiction and creative non-fiction have appeared in journals such as *The New Quarterly*, *The Fiddlehead*, *subTerrain*, and *Existere*. He is based in Montreal. Visit him at www.markfoss.ca.

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Hannah Jenkins is an award-winning author and artist living in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. She holds a bachelor's degree in English Literature and is the Youth Advocate for WritersNL. Her debut poetry collection, *The Birds Come Back in the Spring*, was published in 2022 through Engen Books.

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Parthvi Kulkarni is a self-taught, multidisciplinary artist and software engineer from Calgary, Alberta currently based in Vancouver, BC exploring emotions, relationships, and spiritual beliefs through the joy of the artmaking process.

Judy LeBlanc is the author of *The Promise of Water*, short stories, and the novel *The Broken Heart of Winter*. Essays from her memoir-in-progress have appeared in *Prairie Fire*, *Fiddlehead*, *Geist*, and *Don't Tell: Family Secrets*. She lives on Vancouver Island on the unceded territory of the Qualicum Nation.

Kyo Lee is a Korean-Canadian student, writer, and dreamer. Her literature has been recognized by the RBC Bronwen Wallace Award, University of Toronto, Ringling College, The New York Times, League of Canadian Poets, and more. She loves peaches, sunsets, and the idea of summer, but not summer itself.

Heather Simeney MacLeod is Red River Metis, and her most recent poetry collection, *Cracking Apricot Pits to Flavour the Heart*, is forthcoming with Mansfield Press. Heather works as an Assistant Teaching Professor at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, BC, on the unceded territory of the Secwepemc Nation.

Alexandra Marina is a multi-disciplinary artist from Finland. Body History Museum takes on the idea of the body as an archive. Alexandra is manifesting all the bodies that have been called hers to finally find her own: a marginalized, chronically ill, and partially disabled body, but still something so much more.

Denisha Naidoo is a South African-born Canadian poet, writer, and Wild Woman living in Guelph, Ontario. Her work appears in *Open Minds Quarterly*, *Braided Way Magazine*, *Quick Brown Fox*, *Ladies Briefs: A Short Anthology*, *Outpost Magazine*, and a podcast of her novella, *The Amazing Adventures of Wig Girl.*

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Samuel Samba (he/him/his) is an indigenous writer of poetry & other works of art. Samuel's works have been previously published or are forthcoming in *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Australian Access Poetry*, *Hill Hoist Magazine*, *Munster Literature*, & elsewhere. They won the 2022 Angela C Mankiewicz Poetry Contest and got an honorable mention in the 2022 Christopher Hewitt Award in Poetry.

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Katana Smith is a poet from Aurora, Colorado. Her work has appeared in *Tupelo Quarterly*, *The Paris Review*, *RHINO poetry*, and elsewhere. She earned her MFA from the Litowitz graduate program at Northwestern University, where she is now Artist-in-Residence. She lives in Chicago.

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Beth Suter studied Environmental Science at U.C. Davis and has worked as a naturalist and teacher. A Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee, her poems have appeared in *Colorado Review*, *Barrow Street*, *DMQ Review*, and others. Her chapbook *Snake and Eggs* (Finishing Line Press) came out in 2022.

Gillian Sze is the author of multiple poetry books and picture books. Her latest poetry collection, *Quiet Night Think,* received the 2023 Pat Lowther Memorial Award. She currently lives in Montreal, where she teaches English literature and creative writing at Concordia University.

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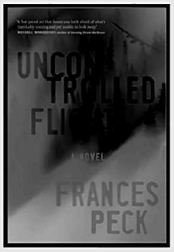

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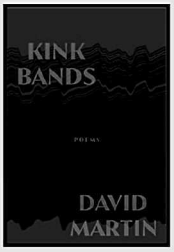

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Siwu was an affectionate hoarder, and it was difficult for him to let go of anything. If he enjoyed a film at the movie theatre, then he would tape the tickets onto the pages of his planner. Even when he made digital copies, he didn't like the idea of letting go of the tangible thing—there was something about the presence of the object in his hands that he cherished more than anything.

—Jaewuk Kim, *The Urn*

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