

GEIST

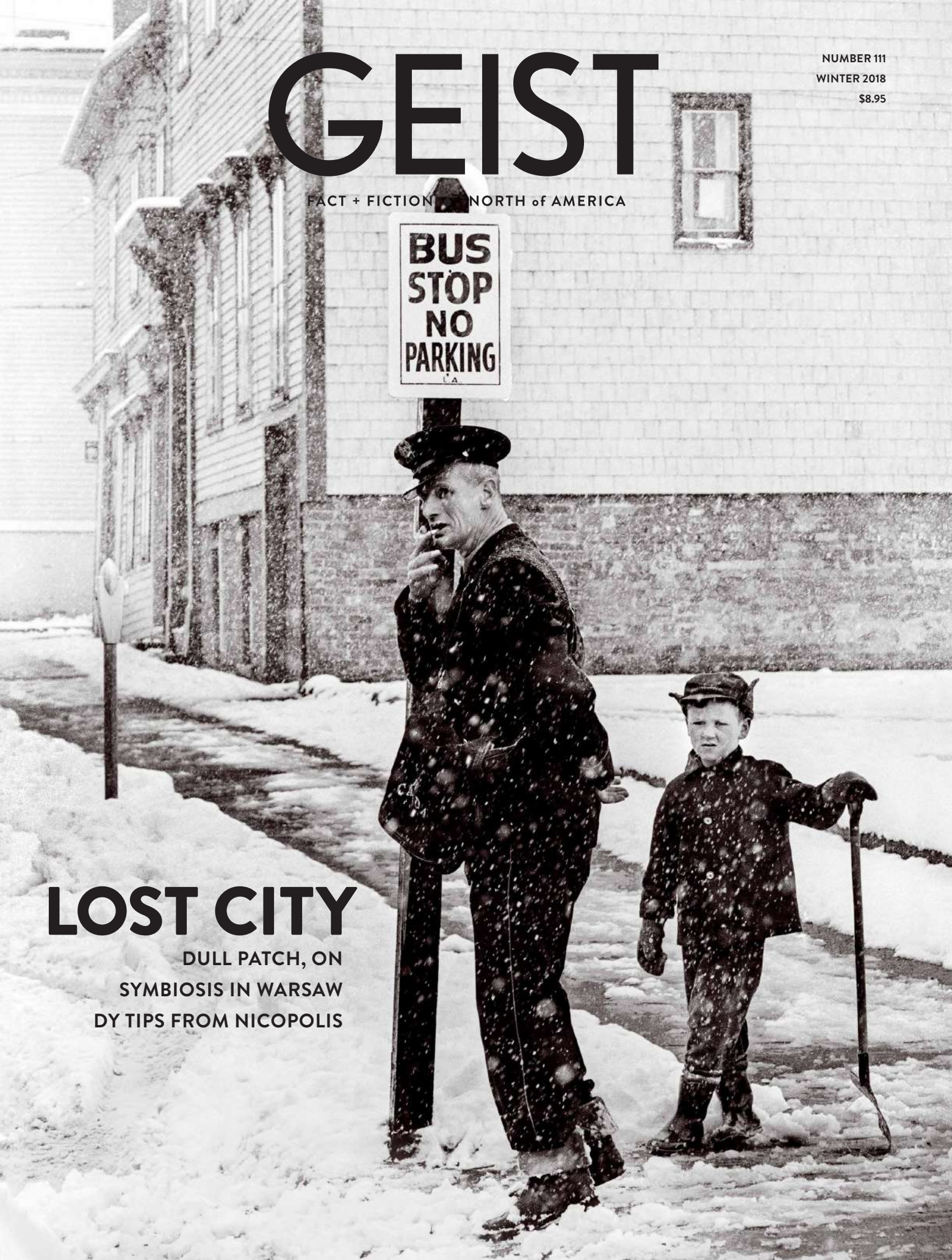
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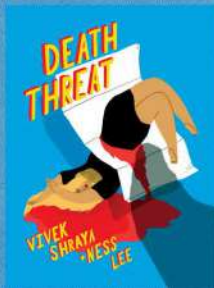
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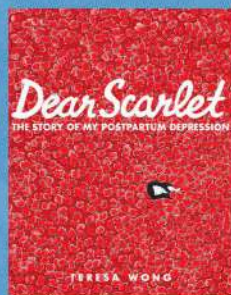


DEATH THREAT

Vivek Shraya & Ness Lee

A dream-like graphic novel that explores the real-life death threat against Shraya after she came out as trans. “I’m so grateful for Vivek’s voice. It feels like a natural for comics.”

—Jillian Tamaki

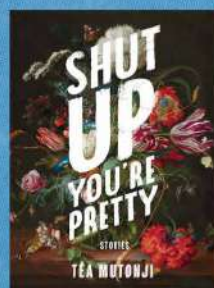


DEAR SCARLET

Teresa Wong

A poignant graphic memoir about postpartum depression and the complexities of motherhood. “*Dear Scarlet* is full of pain, despair, beauty and joy—communicated masterfully in simple, elegant comics.”

—Sarah Leavitt



SHUT UP YOU'RE PRETTY

Téa Mutoñji

The first book published under Vivek Shraya’s VS. Books imprint. “Téa’s characters are painfully and beautifully rendered in these gritty, must-read stories.”

—Catherine Hernandez



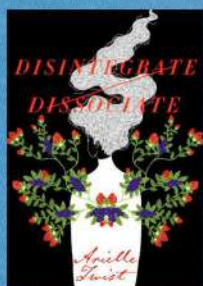
TONGUEBREAKER

Leah Lakshmi

Piepzna-Samarasinha

Leah’s latest poetry collection: about the way we survive, revolt, and thrive in these desperate times. “Leah is a passionate healing cry in the wilderness of interlocking oppressions.”

—Alexis Pauline Gumbs



DISINTEGRATE/ DISSOCIATE

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—Joshua Whitehead

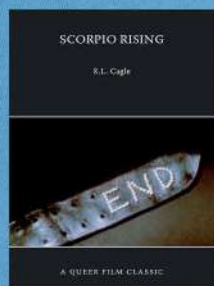


DOUBLE MELANCHOLY

C.E. Gatchalian

A memoir about art and beauty as seen through the lens of a queer brown man. “A work of such psychic intimacy, one has the sense that they’re watching Gatchalian think in real time on the page.”

—Jordan Tannahill



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—Cineaste



THE WOO-WOO

Lindsay Wong

2019 CANADA READS FINALIST: a darkly comedic memoir about a young woman coming of age in an Asian Canadian family haunted by the “woo-woo.”



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GEIST

Volume 27 • Number 111 • Winter 2018



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Ola Szczecinska

*We drink tea that Grandma made
from linden leaves that she picked.
She tells me her war stories.*

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Carla Nappi

*Desire, he said, wants
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So reach for me and
dance me out of death.*

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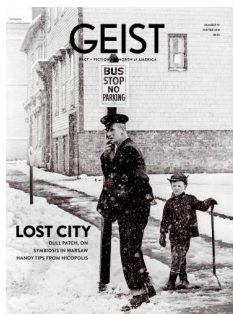
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COVER: *The image on the cover is from The Lost City: Ian MacEachern's Photographs of Saint John. See more of MacEachern's work on pages 18 and 19.*

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MISCELLANY

SAFE PASSAGE

The enigmatic image of the young Korean on the cover of *Geist* No. 110 inspired me to rummage through my old photos. The photo here was taken when my third-grade class was being inducted into the Young Pioneer Organization of Bulgaria under the malevolent gaze of Josef Stalin. Who would have known at the time that this “tomorrow-belongs-to-me” kind of young pioneer would twenty years later make three desperate attempts to flee the country in search of freedom. In 1972 my family and I tried to flee Bulgaria by applying to go as tourists to the Munich Olympics—unsuccessfully. In 1973 we made an attempt



to escape on the Danube River by boarding a barge that was part of a convoy of barges pulled by an Austrian tugboat. We, including our four-year-old son, nearly drowned and our backpacks, with our money and passports, went to the bottom of the river. The Austrian captain declined to take us because of border patrols and the huge fines his company would have to pay if they found us on board. In 1976, after several unsuccessful attempts by my husband to apply for a job in Cuba as a Spanish interpreter for the Bulgarian specialists working there, he was finally approved to work there. During a stopover in Montreal on the way to Havana, together with our seven-year-old son, we asked for political asylum. We carried out these escape attempts against the background of a repressive and paranoid communist regime, which punished severely all those who dared to want to live in freedom. On a snowy winter night on December 25, 1976, at Mirabel Airport in Montreal, we were granted political asylum in Canada. We consider ourselves extremely lucky to be the citizens of a free, democratic and civilized country. We count our blessings every day.

—Irina Florov, Delta, BC

rites and rituals

Thanks to Stephen Osborne for writing “Remember David McFadden” in No. 110. I can't figure out why McFadden mattered so much to me. I attended the funeral at his church this past June. The rites were, peculiarly, both Christian and cultural; unique, in my opinion as a fellow traveller in both spheres. I wanted to keep going back to that odd Anglican-Neo-Byzantine church, and wanted to keep on with my cycling shiva, riding up the street in Toronto's west end, where he'd said he lived, and where, because I didn't know exactly where he lived, I blessed every house I passed. I have continued reading his poems and attending his church, without knowing for certain why I do either. Tonight, as I read my copy of *Geist*, I'm appreciating him all over again and I'm checking the library catalogue for his books: there are five copies, none reserved and none available for lending.

—Alan G., Toronto

STURDY STOCK



Ellis is another of our newest *Geist* readers. From his mother: “Ellis loves *Geist*. It is by far his favourite magazine to peruse/suck. He appreciates a sturdy cover page.”

CAUGHT READING

Geist reader Megan Durnford packed her copy of No. 107 along with her to the Lake District in England.



SECRET HEART

Fascinating writing by Jeff Shucard (“King Zog and the Secret Heart of Albania,” No. 110) about the little-known country of Albania—almost had to look at my atlas to find out where it is. We all know the stories of Schindler, of the Franks, but so little is known of how a small country opened its doors, to great risk, to save so many from the horrors of Hitler and his allies. It’s a story that should be incorporated into all the history books written about the war, yet so many Jews, like myself, know nothing about the wonderful, brave people of Albania.

—Gary N. Luthran, Philadelphia, PA

WRITE TO GEIST

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Chicken at Large

ANNMARIE MACKINNON

What was a lone hen doing in the yard, a few feet from a busy city street?



One Sunday morning this past fall I was out walking my dog when, out of the corner of my eye, I caught a glimpse of a rust-coloured mass huddled in the low, dense hedge that surrounds my next-door neighbour's house. I wasn't wearing my glasses so I had to squint, but I could make out that the mass had feathers and a bright red comb. It was a chicken.

I've lived in my neighbourhood for a few years and didn't know of anyone who kept backyard hens. In my twenty years in Vancouver, the only other time I've even seen a chicken within city limits was at least a decade ago, when a hen that must have escaped the rendering plant near Commercial

Drive was fleeing down Hastings Street. So, what's this hen doing here, huddled in a bush a few steps from a noisy, busy north-south corridor, not anywhere near the rendering plant?

I pulled out my phone and called the SPCA. Surely they'd know what to do.

"I'm afraid we don't deal with things like that," said the woman at the SPCA after I described the situation. "You should call Animal Control."

The dog, who 'til that point had been happily chewing a stick on the neighbour's front lawn, finally clued in that there was another animal in play and lunged toward the chicken, startling her. I reeled in the dog by her leash and took her home, hoping

the chicken wouldn't try to make a break for it in the meantime.

By the time I got back the hen had gone to another neighbour's house and crouched under their hedge. I dialled 311, the City of Vancouver's general phone line, and settled in for the long haul of navigating its perplexing phone tree: Do I want to report a missed garbage pickup? Do I want to find the location of a city park? Do I want to rat out a neighbour for doing something I didn't particularly care for? I stood on the sidewalk trying to press the right buttons on my phone while keeping track of the chicken's whereabouts. I was on hold for many minutes.

Finally, a human answered.

"Hi, this is Ira with the City of Vancouver. How can I help you today?"

"Hi. So, I was out for a walk and found a chicken. I live on a really busy street and I don't think it's safe."

"Uhhhhh... This is a little out of my area of expertise," said Ira. "Let me get my supervisor."

I waited on hold again until a cheerful-sounding woman picked up the line and said, "Hello, this is Veronica. You're calling about a chicken at large?"

I looked down at the hen. Her head was cocked and she peered back at me. I managed to get out, "Yes, I found a hen and I live on a super busy street. I'm just afraid she's going to..."

"Try to cross the road?" said Veronica, before we both cracked up.

We worked out that an Animal Control officer wouldn't be able to come pick up the hen for a while. (The City does not immediately dispatch an officer in instances of chickens at large.) I offered to take the hen to my fenced-in yard to wait.

"I can't really recommend that or offer you any advice on how to pick up a chicken," said Veronica.

When I was a kid in Cape Breton, my family kept hens, along with a few cows, a couple of pigs, a horse and some ponies. “It’s okay,” I told Veronica. “I grew up on a farm. I can get this chicken home.”

The neighbour under whose hedge the chicken was sheltering had by this time come to find out why a random woman was loitering outside her house staring at her shrubbery. She fetched a large basket from inside and together we corralled the hen toward it. I snatched the hen, put her in the basket and walked down the street to my house.

In the yard, I lifted the hen out of the basket and gently placed her on the ground, where she immediately began to scratch and peck and forage. I decided to call her Heather.

Heather looked like a Golden Comet, the kind of hen we kept when I was a kid, a breed known for being friendly, mellow and weather tolerant, and for being good egg producers. Heather also looked like she’d had a rough night. She had no visible injuries, but she was missing most of the feathers that should have covered her behind. Despite that, she seemed content; she dug up and ate worms and pecked at the birdseed I’d sprinkled around.

Observing Heather as she made herself at home in the yard was relaxing and I must have lost track of time, because my boyfriend came looking for me. He was incredulous when I told him I’d just found the hen near the street and decided to take her home, but after a few minutes of watching her scratch around he said, “I could easily build a coop for her today.”

The City of Vancouver permits hens to be kept in yards and has, on its website, a document called “Basic Chicken Care.” It’s not an exhaustive treatise by any means, but for a document produced at the city hall of an urban centre, it’s pretty accurate.

“Chickens can live as long as a dog or cat—up to 14 years or longer.”

“A single chicken is a sad chicken. Plan to have at least 2—they are flock animals and need the companionship of other chickens.”

“Sometimes single birds can thrive with a human friend if they have special needs.”

“Taking a dust bath is the closest thing to heaven for a chicken.”

“Lots of large branches, stumps or platforms provide places to go and things to do and look natural and attractive in the pen.”

My boyfriend and I worked out the logistics of keeping Heather, and perhaps a few hen friends: what kind of coop and predator deterrents we might need, and how we might introduce our hens safely to the dog. Heather scuttled around the yard in ever-widening circles, bobbing her head, occasionally pausing to regard us with one of her beady yellow eyes. A few times she made her way toward us, probably curious.

Just as the urban farm fantasy looked like it could become reality, the Animal Control officer pulled up in a gigantic white truck that could have housed a horse, let alone a three-pound hen. The officer opened the side door and from the truck collected a tiny kennel of the type used to transport cats. He looked uncomfortable as he watched Heather forage. He told me that he’d only handled a hen once, and that he’d had to grab it by the leg—a manoeuvre expressly forbidden by “Basic Chicken Care”! With a look, my boyfriend and I decided it might be best if we handled this. We shepherded the hen toward the open kennel door and, when she was close enough, grabbed her and placed her inside. The officer loaded Heather into the giant truck. I asked what would happen to her.

“I’ll take her to Wildlife Rescue. They’re better able to handle birds than Animal Control. Then we’ll try to find her owners or a new home.”

“What if no one claims her? Would you ever need a foster home for her?”

The officer just looked at me.

“Well, can I follow up and find out what happens?”

The officer told me that I could call the City in a couple of days for an update.

On Tuesday morning I called the City of Vancouver, navigated the phone tree and talked with a staff member, who gave me the mobile phone number for my Animal Control officer. I called and left a message. The officer called back right away. He informed me that the evening prior, Heather (he didn’t use her name) had been transported to a farm in the Fraser Valley to live out the rest of her life. I hope it is “up to 14 years or longer.”

AnnMarie MacKinnon is the publisher of Geist. She lives in Vancouver.

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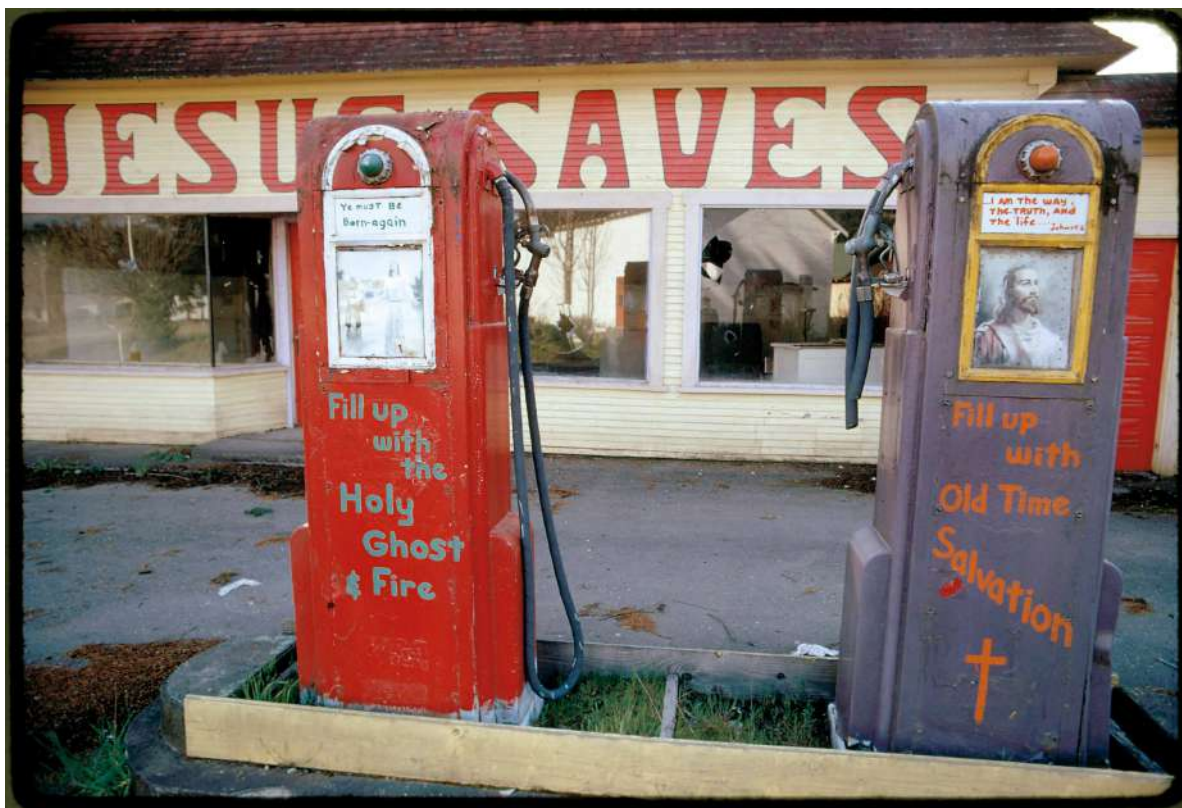


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Laying on Hands

MATT SNELL

Sometimes Pastor Billy whispered, "Sweeter than honeycomb" before he laid on hands; other times he shouted "POWAH!" at the top of his lungs

Halfway between the Ontario towns of Peterborough and Lakefield lies the Selwyn Outreach Centre. It doesn't have the grandeur of a Gothic cathedral but it knows how to command attention. On either side of the entrance footlights illuminate giant signs that read "Jesus Is Lord," and a Christmas-light marquee across the roof spells out "God Is Good." The white stucco walls don't reveal much and the large parking lot beneath a set of Canadian and American flags can give the place an empty look. Twice a year, though, the lot fills up and a sign by the roadside advertises "Miracle Healing Ministries Billy Burke." That's the part that made me pull over.

More accurately, the sign made me pull over, chicken out about going in, and then lurk on the Centre's

website for several months before trying again. When I finally made it inside the building, I wondered what exactly had scared me off the first time because everyone in the lobby looked like anyone else. The crowd skewed toward retirement age with a smattering of bored teenagers. I kept my head down and collected every pamphlet I could find, with titles like "Why Must I Be Baptized in Water?" and "Dies Speaking at a Friend's Funeral (A Great Departure)." I avoided eye contact with the ladies at the merch table and pressed on.

The theatre was large and bright with solid wood rafters, a modern lighting system and a plush red carpet. Two large projection screens hung on either side of the stage, bookending a plexiglass map of the world.

Below that stood a mural of a huge old-growth tree with people's faces painted in the branches. I chose a seat in the middle row toward the back.

The room was about a third full, and I wondered if anyone else was visiting out of pure curiosity. In my head, faith healers were confined to southern gothic novels and the occasional documentary. They weren't supposed to come this far north. Peterborough, a mid-sized Ontario city so unassumingly Canadian it had been used as a bellwether for national voting habits, didn't seem like fertile ground. Indeed when I looked up Billy Burke online I found he was making the trip from Florida. His photos conformed exactly to my expectations of a Floridian faith healer: moustache, white suit, arms raised to heaven. The bio page said he found his calling after surviving a bout of incurable brain cancer at age nine.

"Good evening. Let's stand together and worship our God," said a woman who appeared from backstage, and the crowd rose. A live band had taken up their instruments stage left. The

lyrics for their first number flashed on the projection screens and the anodyne sound of modern praise music pumped from the speakers. Vocal harmonies, provided by several attractive women on either side of a pudgy man in a purple tie, gave it some lift. I may have been projecting but I thought the crowd seemed a bit embarrassed.

The music faded and a local pastor, Brian Mahood, came onstage to warm up the crowd. He explained that while Billy Burke's "Touching Peterborough" event happened twice a year, Pastor Billy touched Toronto ten times a year. There had been a few recent miracles on the circuit, including the sudden recovery of a Cuban preacher from brain cancer, a claim Pastor Brian would have backed up with video evidence if the AV system hadn't gone on the fritz. The screen stayed black and over the speakers came the sound of barking dogs.

Finally Pastor Brian made the introduction we were waiting for. "Another preacher, another pastor, another holy ghost man, he's back on the job!" The music ramped up and Pastor Billy Burke burst from behind the curtain singing "How Great Thou Art" in an off-key warble.

Pastor Billy wore a single-breasted jacket and pointy white loafers with no socks. His patter owed more to modern motivational speakers than the fire-and-brimstone preachers of old.

"Move around the room, greet some people," Pastor Billy urged the crowd after a short preamble. I managed to conclude my first interaction with a smiling old man with just a "Hi, how are you?" but then a dewy-eyed older woman pressed my hand and said, "God bless" and I replied in kind.

By the time I sat back down I felt like I'd abused their sincerity. I was beginning to think I'd made a mistake, but that was before Pastor Billy cured half the terminal illnesses in Peterborough County.

"A year ago I brought my brother-in-law's socks in my pockets and prayed

over them," explained a woman at the front of the stage. She considered this a factor in his speedy recovery from a lung transplant. Returning congregants shared their testimonies from meetings past and members of the audience shouted, "That's right," "Amen" and "Wow" whenever something struck them as particularly righteous. The band played discreetly in the background, and as every story climaxed they launched into an exultant coda.

"Can I have any men that are fifty and under that would be willing to catch?" Pastor Brian asked after several testimonies. Able-bodied attendants were recruited, a line of supplicants formed, and the energy in the room changed palpably.

At the head of the queue was a man named Cecil who had been deaf in one ear since age eighteen. He was now sixty-five. He'd lost his hearing in a drunken accident and had found Jesus in jail. "He came in the cell and sobered me up," he said. "I've been sober ever since. He set me free from grand mal seizures. He raised me from the dead twice."

"Let's add a deaf ear to that list," Pastor Billy said, completely unfazed. He tossed off a brief explanation about the ossicles of the inner ear before seizing the man by the head and shouting "BOOSH!"

Cecil fell into the waiting arms of the attendants. When he had regained himself, Billy snapped his fingers beside Cecil's ear. "You hear that?"

After a pause of several seconds, Cecil said "Yup."

"Give God a shout!" Pastor Billy roared. "Herniated disc, somebody with a herniated disc, herniated. Who is it? Come big guy."

Over the next hour he cured arthritis, back pain, bone spurs, lymphoma, stage four liver cancer, a lipoma, a brain tumour, sleep apnea, atrial fibrillation and more.

The testimonies began with a mystical, outlaw intensity. After a half dozen or so I went numb, until the cumulative

weight of so much agony kicked in again and the cycle repeated itself. Sometimes Pastor Billy was gentle, whispering, "Sweeter than honeycomb" before he laid on hands. Other times he shouted "POWAH!" at the top of his lungs. The element of surprise seemed to be key—he would often choose his moment unpredictably. When the stories were dense and rambling, a healing touch took the power of speech away.

Each healing was punctuated by a lesson but I found it difficult to focus on the contents. There was something stirring in the way Pastor Billy insisted that the blandishments of material culture "may grab you for a season, but they can't hold you." The poetic language was tempered with an explanation of why watching *Batman v Superman* wouldn't feed your soul. He talked about "seed"—financial contributions to his ministry—but the pitch wasn't particularly hard.

The healing moment itself was reliably potent. Some people were better at taking the Spirit than others and a few began to fall before Billy had actually laid on hands. One woman retained the presence of mind to pull her jacket down to cover her belly even in the throes of ecstasy. Others appeared deadly earnest or lay on the ground laughing for some time. When they didn't fall the first time Pastor Billy gave them a second dose.

Sometimes it seemed as if people with chronic health problems just wanted a good evening. Others were casting about for answers. Still others didn't seem to believe in the literal power of the spirit but wanted to receive it on the off-chance it might help. Two hours in, whatever impulse had compelled me to come was satisfied. Then for his next act Pastor Billy made me deeply, profoundly uncomfortable.

"It's labelled communication disorder language impairment," the mother said, before faltering in her explanation. Her daughter stood a few

steps behind her, a thin girl of maybe thirteen, staring intently at the carpet.

Pastor Billy laid hands on the mother and she collapsed into the arms of the attendants. “Your mother’s out of the way now, come on over here,” he said, to laughter and applause. “What’s going on with you? What’s the matter? Are you a smart girl? Can you add? Can you subtract?”

“Not very well,” she said.

“Can you read?” The answer was muffled by a cellphone ringing in the audience. The owner silenced it and Billy picked up where he left off. “When I touch you, there’s new brain cells going to grow. You’re going to feel a little popping in your head—you’re going to get smart tonight.” The girl’s cheeks flushed.

“I’m absolutely upset about this,” Pastor Billy told the crowd. “Why would God do this to a young girl? Because this is a *miracle service*. You have to believe in it.” He went on to speak of a city with streets of gold, a sea of glass and a river of life. We would walk on the new Earth, the way it was when Eden existed. “Petting a great white shark, can you imagine that? Riding a giraffe? Climbing on the back of a bird and just saying, ‘Let’s go for a ride.’ All the stuff you see in some of these animated films now are pieces of heaven about to happen. You don’t have to watch *Harry Potter*. You don’t have to see some of these *Star Wars*—you’ll live it.”

Before I could fully appreciate these prospects, Pastor Billy shouted “POWAH!” and the spirit entered the girl. “Come on, say you believe it,” he bellowed, and the crowd echoed his words. “Did you feel that yet? You felt it pop?”

The attendants helped the girl to her feet and she nodded timidly. “Do you understand this? Her condition’s *over*. You mark my words, you watch her from tonight on, the rapidity, the sharpness, the acceleration in her mind, her thinking, her aptitude. You watch and you remember tonight.”

The mother had recovered from her swoon and Pastor Billy offered some advice on further visits to the Centre before turning back to the girl. “If you could be anything you wanted to be, what would that be?”

“I’m studying to be an esthetician,” she said.

“A what? I’ve never heard of such a thing. What is it?” Pastor Billy either couldn’t understand her speech impediment or refused to believe the girl really wanted to be an esthetician. He asked her to repeat it three times before giving up. “What about number two?”

The crowd treated it like a punchline. Pastor Billy seemed to anticipate this and added, “No, because that’s what she wanted to be before she had this. She has new brain cells. She’s going to have an aptitude that’s going to take her way beyond where she was. Sometimes you settle for where you are instead of letting your dream pull you out of where you are.” He led the congregation in a chant on this theme before asking, “Is there something you’d like to do that you thought was way out there, beyond you? What would it be? Do you know?”

“I’m not very good at... being in front of all the crowd...” Her manner of speaking made it hard to tell, but the girl sounded on the verge of tears. Backed into a corner she came out with, “I think Jesus wants me to sing.”

For just a moment, the possibility she would burst forth with a melody sweet and clear hung in the air, and you could almost hear the intake of breath as the audience leaned in. Instead what followed was an excruciating five minutes as Pastor Billy tried to squeeze a song out of her. In this at least he wasn’t being insensitive—it was hard to tell whether letting the girl sit down would be more painful than coaxing her to sing out. After finding out her favourite song and singer he said, “I don’t want to let go of this.” It was a fair reading of the room, though he followed it with “The fish is right by the boat.” Asking

the key so the band could jam along also seemed like a tactical error.

The girl herself clearly wanted to sing. She coaxed out a syllable or two. She picked another tune to try. Several times she returned to the beginning of the verse, then put her head down and flushed as the audience clapped encouragingly. She managed a faltering, barely audible bar of music before Billy gently told her that was enough for today.

The meeting resumed its rhythm. At one point Pastor Brian brought Pastor Billy a yellow slip of paper that led to Billy conducting his healings in double time. Over a rising musical crescendo, he laid hands on the queue of people who didn’t have time for the full feature. I’d had enough. When I’d arrived I’d scolded myself: it was silly to be afraid of a missionary faith. Being welcoming, after all, was part of their *modus operandi*. It was anything but inclusive, though, to claim the girl’s difference would be erased as a result of this meeting. Sitting in the audience carried an uncomfortable note of complicity.

When Pastor Billy had left the stage Pastor Brian took the mic again for some final words. “Now remember, Pastor Billy has prayed over people, but the atmosphere is God’s miracle power. If you were in line, God was working on you while you were standing in line. Whatever you came for, say ‘Thank you, Lord, I’ve received it’ and walk out thanking the Lord, thanking the Lord...”

I walked out to my car mostly confused.

A week after seeing Billy Burke I ask for an appointment with Brian Mahood, describing myself as a non-Christian writer who’d been reflecting on last Tuesday’s meeting. I thought it might be a hard sell, but Mahood’s offer to see me is quick and friendly.

He leads me across the stage where the miracles took place. We look back

at the empty seats, more than enough to accommodate the three-hundred-member congregation, and I remark on the special aura. Pastor Brian admits that one of the functions faith healings serve is to act as a kind of spiritual loss leader, getting the curious in the door.

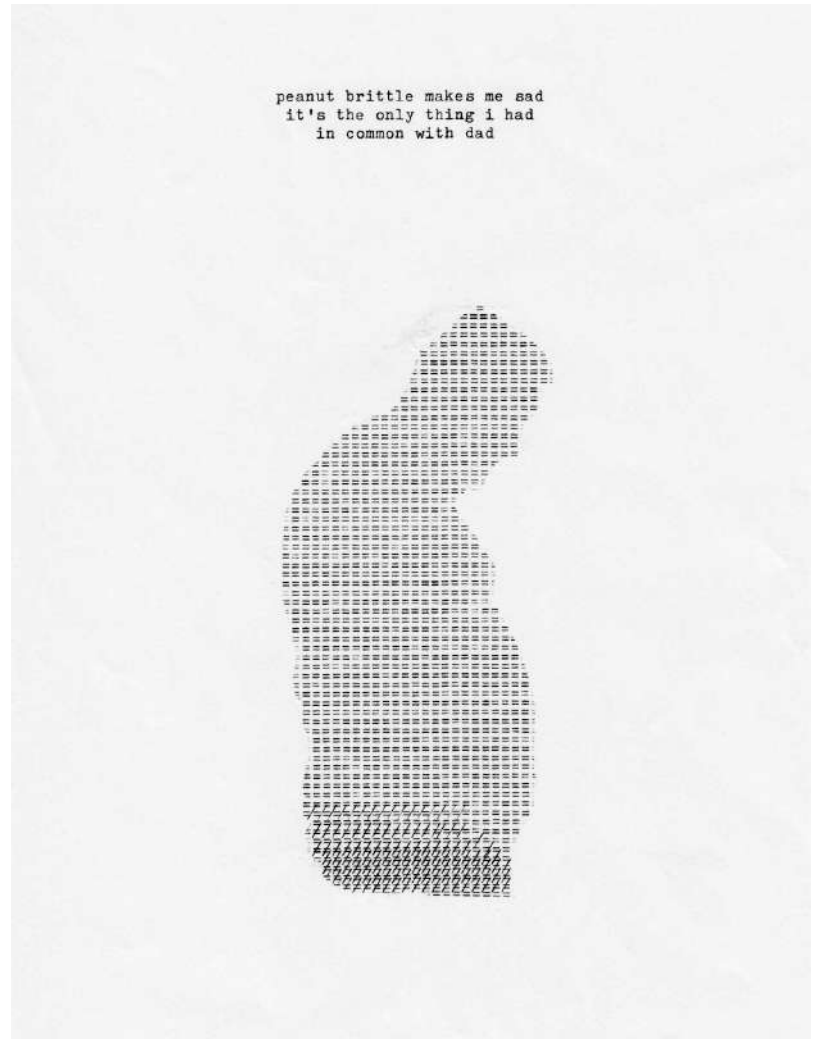
“Generally the church—not this church, the broader church—accepts healing but doesn’t do a lot to encourage it,” Pastor Brian explains. “So many of us have been touched by it, that’s why we bring Pastor Billy in.” He estimates Pastor Billy has been making the trip up to Toronto for twenty years.

“Sickness is a mentality,” he says as we take a seat in his comfortable office. “We all know people that have bitterness in them are more susceptible to sickness—so there’s many avenues to sickness and there’s many avenues to health. Pastor Billy or myself are thrilled if people can get the right nutrition, get the right vitamins, medicine, whatever... There’s a point where we would say if you have sugar diabetes, get insulin. While you’re getting insulin, get prayer.”

I’m relieved the church is on board for modern medicine, though Pastor Brian does say the power of prayer could lead to tailing off from a prescribed dose of medication. I can think of scenarios where that expectation would be needlessly painful, but I don’t press the point. More interesting is the matter of blame—if a devout follower doesn’t receive healing, how are they to interpret that?

Pastor Brian clarifies that Billy Burke doesn’t have the power to heal people. “He has the power to encourage them to expect that God can touch them,” a difference that remains hazy to me. He points out that the relatively high fail rates of modern medicine haven’t seriously undermined our faith in it.

“People don’t realize, he’ll not say he’s healing anybody. What he’s saying is he’s praying a healing touch, and then he’s trusting God to help you discover—”



Jill Mandrake writes strange but true stories and leads Sister DJ's Radio Band, featuring rhythm and blues covers, post-vaudeville original tunes and occasional comedy bits.

“Well, he does say ‘You are cured of cancer,’ or ‘The cancer’s gone,’ or ‘Can you hear that’ if you’re deaf in one ear,” I say.

Perhaps sensing my frustration, Pastor Brian makes a game effort to justify things rationally. He characterizes illness as “disharmony,” which is antithetical to heavenly harmony, which is analogous to the fact that gold with no molecular impurities would be transparent. It reminds me of an enthusiastic layperson explaining a book on quantum theory.

Sensing we won’t get much further with that line of questioning, I ask

how it feels to lay on hands. “Sometimes you can feel God’s power going through you, sometimes you don’t feel anything at all,” he tells me. I like that answer because much of life feels that way. It takes courage on his part to articulate a belief that could instantly brand you a kook in someone’s eyes. Too much certainty, however, is a recipe for disaster. So I ask him: will he concede that in the case of the girl with the communication disorder they had not done their best work?

He knows that’s what I think, because I’d asked him in writing whether there was more valour in

embracing and accepting difference than trying to remove it. In person I broach the subject by asking if the girl is one of those who might expect slow, incremental improvements rather than a sweeping change.

He tells me she showed up the next night with a marked improvement in her speech. "Her mother was overwhelmed... Pastor Billy even got her to sing."

So much for pondering the complexities of the faith. The kernel of understanding that the girl's autonomy should be respected is there but bound up with a messianic impulse. "He's trying to get her not to see her sickness," Pastor Brian explains. "What God's trying to do is go past your sickness, go past your sin... and encourage you to begin to have a new life."

I'm beginning to think I would be more impressed by a hearty "Hal-lelujah, miracles abound" than the constant attempt to tidy up and rationalize. Ultimately even Pastor Brian struggles to reconcile the mixture of bromides and fervent abandon that goes into a Billy Burke meeting.

"So that girl again, you would hope would get encouragement, and if she didn't get healed you'd at least hope she'd have hope, and Christ. Right? More people and more people are getting healed, because of more and more faith, more and more expectation. So that's what's happening."

"Perfect, yeah," I say, and excuse myself. Pastor Brian doesn't push a religious conversion on me, although he does invite me to the Christmas pageant. We shake hands and I thank him for the invitation. I don't go, but the next time I pass Billy Burke's roadside sign part of me is tempted to pull over again.

Matt Snell is a writer whose work has appeared in publications such as Hamilton Arts & Letters, Bourbon Penn, and PRISM International. He lives in Peterborough.

Till Talk

HAN FUSEN

Look buddy, I can't help it if you don't understand something this simple

NATURAL FIT

A man steps inside the Persian grocery where I work near Main and 14th Avenue. It's Tuesday morning, middle of winter in Vancouver. He doubles over into a spastic fit of coughs. Then he lets out one more dry cough to announce he's here.

"Hey, you don't look Lebanese," he says. "You're not the owner, are you?"

"If it matters, the owner's Persian. I just work here," I say.

"But a Chinese guy working here? It's like going to a Chinese restaurant and finding out that the cooks are Black."

I want to tell him my parents are from Taiwan but then I'm not sure if that disputes his claim of me being Chinese.

"Can I help you find something?" I say.

"I'm Lebanese. That's why I walked in here," he says.

He browses the aisles. He points out things the Lebanese buy: halwa, zaatar, labneh, yerba mate even. Then he says, "Syrians like the same things. I'm part Syrian too."

Not only is the man Lebanese and Syrian, I find out, but he's also Austrian and Al-Andalusi in heritage.

"I'm a descendant of Sephardi Jews and Moors expelled after the Reconquista in Spain," he says. "That means I'm both Jewish and Muslim."

"And how does that balance out?" I say.

"I'm non-practical," he says.

"Sure, or do you mean non-practicing?" I say.

"That's it," he says.

"For which religion?" I say.

"Both. Back home, my grandparents still pray or whatever," he says.

"In Lebanon?" I say.

"Argentina. I go back sometimes," he says.

"Must be nice down there," I say.

"It's not. They can't speak English. I don't like that. And the only other language I mess with is Chinese. *Nihao, xiexie, and yau mou gaau cho ab! See?*" he says.

"Back home is still Argentina?" I say.

"I was born there, bro. My dad moved us here to sell beds. Hey, I can get you a bed. I can get you a discount for a king size bed. It's going to be the best bed you've ever had," he says.

I tell him I don't need a new bed. Since he's been eyeing the trays of baklava, I ask if I can cut him a square.

"Listen, bro," he says. "I'm a dishwasher. I've got five bucks. How much hummus and olives can I buy with that?"

As I scoop out the hummus and pack the olives he tells me the restaurant he works at is a Greek taverna somewhere downtown. When I ask why it doesn't matter that he's not Greek, he says, "Dude, the Lebanese and the Greeks have been allies for five thousand years. I'm a natural fit."

MAPLE TREE

The name of the store is Afra. "It means 'maple tree' in Farsi," my boss says.

But why that, I pester him, as we stack the *sangak* onto the shelves alongside the pita.

"What do you mean why? Maples. Canada. Would 'beaver' be better?" he says.

That's not my point, I tell him. Persians know what it means. But most people here don't speak Farsi, and don't know what it means.

"Afra sounds Canadian. Look buddy, I can't help if you don't understand the business sense in something

this simple. Now go finish up at the deli,” he says.

I move behind the counter and stock the spanakopita and samosas. When he brings over a freshly baked plate of herb patty known as kookoo sabzi, I tease further and ask how Afra sounds more Canadian to an Anglophone than any other Farsi word. Or is it an exercise in multiculturalism in its most progressive sense, in which immigrants decide how to express themselves how they see fit in the country in their own way? Is it signifying to Persians that the grocery store is Canadian in a non-Anglocentric way?

“You went to university for that?” he says. He holds up the kookoo sabzi, still steaming in his hands. “Cut this into eighths, and do me a favour, don’t ask why.”

EASTERN WHATNOT

“Do you know if there’s any meat in this?” the woman asks.

I read the ingredients of the can of clam chowder. This kind of situation happens quite often in the store, parents or grandparents asking for something vegetarian, gluten-free, vegan even.

“Only clam meat,” I say. “This for the kids?”

“This is for me,” she says.

“So, you’re pescatarian!” I say.

“My goodness. A pesca-what? You can say I’m vegetarian. I just don’t eat animals, so no beef, chicken, lamb, and as long as there’s no bacon in this stuff, then it’s good to me,” she says.

“How long have you been vegetarian?” I ask.

“Nearly sixty years—my whole life. Of course, there wasn’t any of this where I came from,” she says as she sweeps the cans of clam chowder into her bag. “I’m a Kabalarian.”

I assume she belongs to some Doukhobor-like sect from the BC Interior or the Prairies, one that adheres to a Lenten diet, perhaps something resembling the Cathars of the Middle Ages.

“It’s a philosophy, a way of life.” She looks me up and down. “What’s your name?”

I tell her my English name and she says, “Yes, so I see.” Then she gives me a business card to look up her way of life. “It’s got some Eastern teachings in it too, don’t you know.”

As we wait for the card machine to register her payment, she adds, “It’s from a long way back, before all these green smoothies and yoga mats and whatnot.”

When she leaves, I look up the Society of Kabalarians of Canada website. There is a free first name analysis service. I type in my English name. The resulting preliminary report reads, “All names are not equal,” and offers the option of ordering a name and birthdate report, also for free.

MOOLA(H)

There’s a small change in the air pressure just before a customer enters the store. It happens the moment they first put their weight against the door, which holds and then gives. This is when I usually take my cue. But there’s one old man I hear from a block away. He shuffles and drags his feet down Main Street.

“Hey, boy! I need da smokes,” he says as he points his quad cane at the tobacco case behind me. “Du Molay. I wan da lih wans—da lih wans.”

His English is not very good. I’ve gathered enough to know he’s an old immigrant from Seiyap and that he came to Vancouver in an era when Seiyapese, a dialect of Cantonese, was still the main variety of Chinese spoken in Chinatown. That was a time when most of the Chinese immigrants in North America came from just four counties in southern China.

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I can speak Mandarin, and having grown up in Vancouver in the 90s, I sometimes pick up on Cantonese phrases that I absorbed from immigrants from Hong Kong (who speak a dialect like the one in Guangzhou, which the name Cantonese comes from), but that doesn't cut it for these situations.

In one instance, I write my surname for him on a receipt, just as I have done for my girlfriend's Japanese aunt. Chinese characters travel across borders better; they're readable to people from China and Japan, and some older people from Korea and Vietnam, and now tattoo parlours here in the West. But the old man doesn't recognize the logogram and says, "Aiya, I don't know dis wan."

One day I show him a list of Chinook words in a book I'm reading: *chako, chuck, cloosh, cultus, hyack, illahie, kamooks, Kinchotch, klabowya, kumtux, mamook, muckamuck, moola...*

He smiles, nods, and says, "Moola, yes, I wok moola long time, boy!"

"You speak Chinook, the trade language? Are you saying you worked in a *moola*—a mill—or do you mean *moolah* like the slang for money?" I ask.

"Wah? No, I make da money like dis." He motions his hands over the table like he's mixing mah-jong tiles. "I go Chinatown to make da money. Now gimme Du Molay—da lih wans."

NOT YET HUNGARY

The pickles here on the West Coast are inferior. I've heard this said by Ontarians and Manitobans.

A woman puts cucumbers in her bag.

"In Czechoslovakia, we eat this kind we call *kvashaky*. The secret: add old rye bread to help ferment," she says.

"I've been there before," I say. "To the Czech part. Well, just Prague."

"Did you like it?" she asks.

"It's my Plan B, for when I decide to stop paying rent in this city," I say.

"Good. When you go, tell them you are Canadian," she says. "Right

now, things are not so good over there."

I nod my head. "At least it's not yet Hungary."

"But maybe it should be like Hungary. More mosques and more mosques every day. Soon there will be no beautiful Praha for you to take pleasure in," she says.

"But you and I are here," I say. "My parents came from elsewhere. You came from elsewhere. Every day people are coming."

"Yes," she says. "But they are different."

"Like this store, which sells falafels and halal meats," I say.

I picture minarets poking out among the famous Gothic towers and cathedrals of Prague, the City of a Hundred Spires. I wonder if the woman is aware that Mount Pleasant, where we are now, was once called Church Hill, for its spires. Those churches are now converted by new sects of immigrants or repurposed by developers as chic condominium units.

"You're not feeling any contradiction?" I ask.

She smiles and shakes her head. She pays in nickels, dimes and quarters. "This way I get lighter," she says.

DRAWING THE LINE

I discount the old Persian man's Pamir dates.

"But this is absurd," he says. "Give me the price that everyone else pays. Why charge me less, because I am from Iran?"

This is indeed what the store owner decided, and it can't be that absurd, I think, for there are much more arbitrary reasons for giving discounts. There is a similar kind of goodwill in my culture termed *tongxiang*, I explain, which entails giving favours to those from the same hometown.

"But he is from Tehran!" he says. "I am from Esfahān. The next Iranian may be from Shiraz. And what if they

are Azeri or Kurdish or of the Baha'i faith? Where to draw the line? There is only one kind of person, I tell you, and that is a human being."

What a way to bridge back free market principles with cosmopolitan ethics.

My eyes focus on the white whiskers sprouting on his nose. When he catches me looking, I dart my eyes left and right and say, "You have lots to think through on your walks, eh? I see you going up and down the slope everyday."

"No, I take the walks to check my diabetes. But I cured myself, I tell you. I have not had problems for ten years," he says.

"And what's the secret?" I say.

"It is all published—the sort of research I did before I retired, when I was a professor at the Free University of Berlin. That was another life. I spoke German then. If you want to live, you must give Germany a try."

"And to move to Vancouver, that must be if you want to retire," I say.

"Ah," he says as he scoops out loose change from a tweed pocket. "This leads me back to my point. I moved here because Montreal, where I first immigrated, is too cold. And here you can be more than just still alive or retired. In Germany everyone is either Deutsch or not. Here, the possibilities are far more numerous." He puts down the additional quarters to make up for the difference in the price. "So now, you see, I must insist on not having the discount."

Han Fusen works in municipal public engagement and volunteers at Geist. He studied political science and human geography at the University of British Columbia. This is his first publication. He lives in Vancouver.

Dear Geist...



I have been writing and rewriting a creative non-fiction story for about a year. How do I know when the story is ready to send out?

—Teetering, Gimli MB



Which is correct, 4:00, four o'clock or 1600 h?

—Floria, Windsor ON

Dear Geist,

In my fiction writing workshop, one person said I should write a lot more about the dad character. Another person said that the dad character is superfluous and I should delete him. Both of these writers are very astute. Help!



—Dave, Red Deer AB



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whywolf is having an existential crisis.

Whywolf, Whenwolf, Werewolf by andrea bennett. bennett is a National Magazine Award-winning writer and editor. Their comics and illustrations have appeared in *Broken Pencil* and *Maisonneuve*, and their book, *Like a Boy but Not a Boy*, is forthcoming with Arsenal Pulp Press in fall 2020.

After the Money

MICHAŁ KOZŁOWSKI

Notes from the Governor General's Literary Awards

Despite reports and rumours emanating from the nation's capital over the last year about the Governor General's reluctance to perform Governor General duties and roles—signing state documents, reading throne speeches, presiding over swearings-in, hosting award ceremonies, etc.—the 2018 Governor General's Literary Awards, held last November at Rideau Hall, went off without a hitch. The Governor General, Julie Payette, a former astronaut, hosted dressed in a sort of medieval-looking purple and blue corset-type thing with a flower-pattern blouse and chunky leather boots.

Upon arriving at the front entrance of Rideau Hall guests were greeted by guards in tall fur hats and big overcoats. A freezing wind blasted off the river. Inside the guests were squeezed into the ballroom, most of which was cordoned off by thick rope, where hung a massive chandelier of 12,000 crystals, weighing one ton.

Then guests were ushered into the Tent Room—a large party room commissioned by the third Governor General of Canada, the Earl of Dufferin, in the mid-nineteenth century; built in the style of English party tents but indoors on account of the Ontario climate, it once doubled as a tennis

court—with walls of wide pink and white stripes, hung with paintings of former Governors General, pale men in military garb. Nearly every male guest at the Governor General's Literary Awards wore a black suit or tuxedo, save for one of the award winners' brother, who wore a handsome maroon-coloured jacket, and the winner in the English drama category, who wore a black sleeveless dress. Most of the women wore floor-length gowns: sequins, sparkles, mattes, velvets, silks.

That evening in the Tent Room the Governor General gave out \$350,000 in prize money to writers and translators in fourteen categories. The giving-out was preceded by the Governor General's speech, which verged on the surreal: the Governor General joked about being illiterate and then produced from behind her back a children's picture book (with images of planets,



whenwolf thought it was friday
but it was only thursday.



wherewolf is lost again.

stars, space, astronaut suits, spaceships) and proclaimed it her favourite book. This is the level of reading I'm used to, announced the Governor General, who is the viceregal representative of the Queen of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. The winners of the \$350,000 were seated front row during the speech, as was Adrienne Clarkson, a former Governor General, and John Ralston Saul, philosopher and famous viceregal consort.

The emcee, a handsome white-haired Québécois television host with a deep, rich voice conveyed oodles of sincerity as he introduced, then thanked and congratulated each award winner.

Dinner was served in the Long Gallery, hors d'oeuvres-style: tiny morsels of food on tiny plates—smoked fish, ceviche, roast beef, spring rolls, prawns, etc.—laid out on tables, attended to by culinary staff in chef hats and aprons.

Red wine and white wine and beer were served; no liquor.

A string quartet set the mood.

The Governor General was by now nowhere to be seen.

Guests were invited to tour the residential quarters of Rideau Hall, comprising sitting rooms and dining rooms, and a library that held a copy of every Governor General's Literary Award winner, going back to the mid-1930s, when the awards were created by Lord Tweedsmuir in response to a request by the Canadian Authors Association ("Writers helping writers since 1921") to establish a system of literary prizes. The first fiction winner, in 1936, was *Think of the Earth* by Bertram Booker, a spectral novel that takes place over three days—set in 1907 in the fictional or extinct town of Poplar Plains in Manitoba—containing the thrilling sentence, "The

Canon, leaning close, could just distinguish what he was saying: 'Money ... they're after money, all of 'em.... Thieves ... thousands of 'em ... fools! ... do you hear? ... Since the beginnin' men ain't heard, nor perceived by the ear ... nor seen by the eyes ... what he's prepared ... for them as wait patiently ... Patiently..."

Guests were also invited to tour the greenhouse, where the resident greenhouse keeper fielded questions about the sound of crickets present (natural pest control) and about Diefenbaker's dinosaurs (no explanation given).

At some point tea was served in the Tent Room.

The crowd cleared out by 9:30 p.m.

Michał Kozłowski is the associate editor of Geist. He was born in Krakow, Poland, and has lived in Ottawa, Winnipeg and now Vancouver. Read more of his work at geist.com.

FINDINGS



Photos from The Lost City: Ian MacEachern's Photographs of Saint John, curated by John Leroux. Published by Goose Lane in 2018. MacEachern's photographs have appeared in many publications, including artscanada, Chatelaine and

Simpler Things

TERESE MARIE MAILHOT

From Heart Berries. Published by Doubleday Canada in 2018. Mailhot is in the creative writing faculty at the Institute of American Indian Arts, where she graduated with an MFA in fiction. Her work has appeared in the Los Angeles Times, Rumpus, Carve Magazine, Offing, Toast and Yellow Medicine Review among others. She was recently named the Tecumseh Postdoctoral Fellow at Purdue University. She resides in West Lafayette, Indiana.

It is odd that I went to foster care while my mother worked in a group home. But it was not odd to me.

I can only elaborate on the small things, like her smallness, and how

light her fists were—how she pinched the fat of my fingers to tell me she loved me. She was always aware of her struggle. A single mother with four children is destined to die from

exhaustion, unless there is a miracle of fortune or justice.

We came close to fortune and justice when I was a kid. Paul Simon needed correspondence that my mother had written long before to a man named Salvador Agrón, the subject of a Broadway play he was writing. Sal was sentenced to death row at age sixteen for murdering two other teenagers. He earned a degree on the inside and became an activist. That's how he met Mom.

She spoke about Sal like I speak about you. We should have wanted for



Maclean's. His work has also appeared in exhibits throughout Canada and the United States. He lives in London, Ontario. John Leroux is an award-winning art historian, curator and architect.

simpler things, but in many ways my mother taught me love was divine—like a hermitage or vision or picking from the tree of knowledge. Mother didn't like the Bible, but I appreciate it for how suffering is related to profundity.

Paul Simon called while I was watching TV. Our landline was screwed into the old seventies wood panel of our kitchen wall. I was ashamed of the house. The room was barren. There was an orange, thrift shop dinette set, and a shrine on our counter for Stevie Ray Vaughan. It

was a picture of him surrounded by barks and sage my mother picked, with red ties and turquoise jewelry. The bracelets and rings were gifts from my uncle Lyle, a jeweler who idolizes Elvis and wore a bouffant until old age turned it into a less voluminous side part.

Mom was in the bath. Paul's voice was timid. He asked for Mom. I yelled to her that Paul was on the line. Mom told me to keep him on the phone while I heard her body emerge—splashes and her small wet feet running.

"How old are you?" Simon asked. "I'm ten. What do you do?" I asked. "I'm an artist," he said.

I told him that was nice and asked him what kind of art. He laughed at me.

My mother, wrapped in a towel, ripped the phone from my hand. She carried on several conversations like this. I began to suspect they were flirting when I went with Mom to the library to look up if Simon had a wife. I didn't want Paul Simon to be my new father. I saw an album cover once. He wore turtlenecks. He was pasty. He had beady eyes.

“He’s married to some redhead, I think. White woman,” Mom said. We had seen some news clippings and rented a biography. He was a god, and not the personalized one of benevolence, but the type who could take things away.

She sent him every letter between herself and Salvador Agrón. I had read the letters in our basement. There were images of horses and dirt and bodies, and nothing of love until it became all about love. Simon was inspired by Salvador’s plight.

Mother’s narrative was eventually drowned in Simon’s version of it all,

and nowhere was Sal’s story. He was dead.

We became self-important Indians with every call. Mom floated around the house after three-day shifts at a group home and became happy. After years of writing manically in her room, someone was finally using her words. A camera crew came to interview Mom. I recently saw film of her, where a narrator with a rich English accent said, “Paul Simon and his team researched every detail of the story. They even located Wahzinak. She offered Paul Simon her intimate memories of Sal’s character.”

“He was much more beautiful in real life,” my mother said. “He just illuminated. His prose was phenomenal. He could talk about the prison life. He could talk about his poverty. People come along and they grace your life, and they make it extraordinary.”

After the interview my mother cried into the phone, and she didn’t speak to us. She didn’t sit at the table; she sat on the floor. I watched her body shake. Maybe it was having cameras in our rotting home. It was infested with mold and ladybugs and old furniture we didn’t wear down ourselves. Maybe that’s my shame

Road to Success

From How To Be Free by Epictetus. Published by Princeton University Press in 2018. Translated by A. A. Long. Long is a professor emeritus of classics and an affiliated professor of philosophy at the University of California. He has published many books including Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life, Stoic Studies and Seneca: Letters on Ethics.

In every undertaking, examine its antecedents and their consequences, and only then proceed to the act itself. If you don’t do that, you will start enthusiastically, because you have not thought about any of the next stages; then, when difficulties appear, you will give up and be put to shame. Do you want to win at the Olympics? I do too, of course, because it’s a splendid thing. But examine the project from start to finish, and only go in for it after that. You must train, keep a strict diet, stay off pastries, submit to a regular exercise regime each day, summer or winter, drink no cold water and no wine except at appropriate times; in other words, you have surrender yourself to the trainer just as you would to your doctor. Then in the actual contest you have to dig in alongside the other contestants, and perhaps dislocate your hand or twist your ankle, swallow a lot of sand, get flogged, and with all of this lose the fight.

When you have thought about this, go and compete if you still want to. But if you don’t think first, you will be acting like children who play at wrestling for a while, then at being gladiators, then trumpeters, and then stage performers. That’s what you are like too, now an athlete, next a gladiator, then an orator, now a philosopher but nothing in your self as a whole. You are like a monkey mimicking whatever you see, as one thing after another takes your fancy. You haven’t pursued anything with due consideration or after thorough review; you mess about and don’t put your heart into things.

It’s the way some people who have seen a philosopher and heard one speak like Euphrates (though no one can really speak like him) want to go in for philosophy themselves. Dear man, think first about what the thing is like, and then study your own nature to see whether you are up to

it. Do you really want to compete in the pentathlon or the wrestling? If so, you had better study your arms and your thighs and your hips. People differ in what they are naturally suited to. Do you suppose you can go in for philosophy and eat and drink just as you do now or get angry and irritated in the same way? You are going to have to go without sleep, work really hard, stay away from friends and family, be disrespected by a young slave, get mocked by people in the street, and come off worse in rank, office, or courtroom, everywhere in fact. Think about all this and then see whether you want to exchange it for calm, freedom, and tranquility. If not, don’t go near philosophy; don’t be like children playing first a philosopher, and after that a tax collector, then an orator, and then an imperial official. These professions don’t match. You have to be one person, either good or bad. You have to work either on your commanding-faculty or on external things. Either the inner or the outer should be the focus of your efforts, which means adopting the role either of a philosopher or of an ordinary person. 🍷

talking. Maybe it was that Indians are at a ripe age when they're fifty, and Mother was there. Maybe it was that Salvador was kind.

She met a serpent in prison who was my father. The same provocation and sentimentality drew her in, and he wasn't kind. The legend is that he was banished from the house after many transgressions, and that we all waited by the door with weapons in case he came back, even me, a baby then, holding a hammer or a bat or a broom or a doll. The story has shifted because it's not funny anymore.

Simon gave us a choice: American dollars or a family trip to New York. Julia Roberts attended the opening. A woman who would later star in *Grey's Anatomy* played my mom. We missed the opportunity to see it all to buy school clothes. Mom spent the rest on bills, food, and things.

It could have redeemed her, like my words on the page—like I would have myself believe articulating her grace and pain could be redemptive. I didn't want Paul Simon to be my father, but I wanted him to save us. More than a few thousand—I wanted him to see us and decide we were worth a play in our own right. I wanted him to see my mother, beyond a groupie, or cliché, or an Indian woman—because she was more. He didn't see her.

The play reduced Mom to an "Indian hippie chick," as *Variety's* Greg Evans called her. A "prison groupie," and I have only known her as an outreach worker. Prison was part of that, getting them to write or draw, to find sanity in isolation. I'm trying not to make excuses, because she did fall. It's in the text and on my mind every day how she fell. It could be like Eve. The old texts say we get menses for the fall, feel pain for the fall. God couldn't watch it; he sent us his boy, but I doubt he watched his son die. I think he just waited for him on the other side.

One of my mother's old friends, Richard, wrote about her breasts and

Salvador's womanizing for his non-fiction book. He wrote with provocation and sentimentality while the iron was hot. Dick flew from California to Seabird to show Mom the book. He told me about his Jeep and that he would take me to the city someday, and Mom grew suspicious. He handed her the book after tea. She went to her room, came out, and told him to leave. Mother cried. I found the book underneath her bed and understood the contents like Hildegard, a prophet without an education. Her heart was inflamed, and she knew the scriptures and the gospel. She didn't understand

the tenses or the divisions of syllables, but she could read it.

The pain was a process to understanding. Men were born to hurt my mother in the flesh and the text, and she was my savior. The language was always wrong. Even in this account I can't convey the pulse of her. In her sleep I couldn't turn away, in love with her heavy breathing. She rarely slept, but, when she did, it felt generative and sacred like a bear's hibernation. Her small palms were red with heat. She always fell asleep with a book on her chest. It was the illumination of living light. 🌱

Reaching Out

EVE JOSEPH

From Quarrels. Published by Anvil Press in 2018. Joseph's work has been nominated for the Dorothy Livesay Award, won the Hubert Evans award for nonfiction and was one of the Top 100 picks of the year by the Globe and Mail.

MY MOTHER WAS A WHITE SHEET DRYING ON THE LINE. Wooden clothespins held her tight as she lifted and snapped and filled like a sail. At night, when she covered me, I inhaled lily of the valley, burning leaves, the starched collar of a nurse's uniform and the stillness of a recently abandoned room. She taught me how to iron the creases out of a man's shirt after all the men had disappeared. My mother played piano by ear in the basement. A long line of hungry people gathered outside to hear her play. They wanted news from home. Overhead, handkerchiefs fluttered in the breeze. Little telegrams sent but never delivered.

COCKROACHES SWARMED OVER THE DECKS. THEY CASCADED out of the cutlery drawer and fell with a click into the stainless steel sink. Each one was an oracle. On calm nights, when the moon was a porthole through which our ship sailed, the pantry hummed with their prophecies. God

spoke to us through them. I gave left-over scraps to the workers in port—pickled herring and black bread—and they brought me burlap sacks stuffed with green mangoes. On long voyages, we wore gloves in bed to keep the roaches from gnawing our fingernails.

IN OUR BASEMENT, THE WRINGER-WASHER BARKED LIKE a baby seal. Strangers showed up with offerings of raw fish wrapped in newspaper. My mother thanked them and started giving weekly reports on the pup's progress. Brigitte Bardot sent a handwritten note on perfumed stationery applauding the rescue effort and chiding Sophia Loren for wearing fur. In the end, it got out of hand and my mother told the strangers, who had become her dearest friends, she had released the seal into the ocean. *Look*, she said, pointing to a bald head bobbing in the gray waves, *he looks just like Gandhiji without his glasses on.* 🌱

Curiosities

GWEN BENAWAY

*From Holy Wild. Published by Book*bug in 2018. Gwen Benaway is of Anishinaabe and Métis descent. Her poetry and essays have been published in national publications and anthologies including the Globe and Mail, Maclean's and CBC Arts. She lives in Toronto.*

1.

I buy a dress for this maybe date
at a second-hand shop last Saturday, pink chiffon

smells of old perfume embroidered in black flowers

for our second date which may not happen
or may not be a date,

I can never tell who finds my body
desirable or curious,

I ask a boy if it's ok for me to wear a dress

*will he be seen in public
with a girl like me*

it feels polite to let him decide
if he is brave enough

girls have to be sweet
or we're worthless

he tells me to wear whatever feels pretty
as if I could feel pretty or if being a woman

was being beautiful, like pretty is something
I have access to in this body.

men shout faggot at me
wherever I go, threaten my body,

a woman spit at me today, her eyes
a disgust I can't unsee.

the dress hangs in my closet,
untouched and soft

a dream of a life in a body I can't have.

girls like me can't feel anything like pretty,
the same way my grandmothers felt

when they were taught being Indian wasn't a crime
as long as you try hard

to make your body disappear

it's only ok to be a tranny or an Indian
if you try to act like
something else.

2.

museums for Indians full of our dead junk,
masks on walls, cut-up lodge poles,

the shells we threw away
sleep beside artifacts they stole.

they dug up our burials out near Peterborough
so deep the graves showed the skeletons

of dead kin, white eyes pour over the bones
like bleach across the remains of our humanity.

I used to think the worst was us
as school lessons

to be consumed, real only by their imagination alone.

after my transition, museums aren't so bad,
the glass cases protect the dead

from interrogation

but I can be touched
an NDN transsexual

walk through white people staring.

I think how easy it is to be a skeleton,
underground in a lodge

laid out and frozen, my heart still
safe forever from them,

if desecration is our destiny,
let it come when I've gone
to a place the living can't see. 🌱



Glenn Gould as a child, at his piano with his dog, Nicky, Toronto, [c. 1940]. Photo taken by Gordon W. Powley. From the Archives of Ontario online exhibit Dogs: Ontario's Best Friend.

NO-NO NUDES

JOHN KALBFLEISCH

A selection of subheadings from No Place More Suitable: Four Centuries of Montreal Stories.

Published by Véhicule Press in 2018.

Severed Head Kept on Talking
Supposed Witch Outlasts Angry Priest
They Escaped Execution—One Way or Another
Scandalous or Modest?
Banqueting Left Him Exhausted
Summer's Heat Was Hellish
Con Man's Scam Sparked Fears of Invasion

Lachine Canal's Birth Pangs Lasted Centuries
Nothing Funny in This 'Jocular Persecution'
Supposed Cad Didn't Know Dogs from Hounds
Dude's Trial Had Them Laughing
Nudes Were a No-No in Victorian Montreal
Statue of the Virgin Fired City's Passions
Hanged Murderer's Relatives Defy the Body-Snatchers 🐾

Expiration Date

JUDY LEBLANC

From The Promise of Water. Published by Oolichan Books in 2017. Judy LeBlanc's work has been published in filling Station, Malahat Review, Prism, Antigonish Review and Grain. Her work has won the Island Fiction contest (2015) and the Antigonish Review Sheldon Currie Fiction contest (2012). She teaches English and Creative Writing at North Island College.

Your dead brother walks toward you on the beach.

"It's time you got here; there's been nothing but trouble with Mom," you say.

He stops in front of you, drops his crossed arms to his side, tilts his head and smiles as if he saw you only yesterday. There's colour in his cheeks and not a trace of grey in his hair. He looks better than he did in those last days in the hospital when his skin was a pale membrane stretched over bone.

You want to welcome him back, but what slips out in your excitement is, "Nice dye job." It used to irritate him when you said that. Why did you say that?

He touches his head and grins; tiny lines and a dimple appear at the corners of his mouth. The night he died, after not speaking for hours, he'd opened his eyes, clicked his tongue and said, "I told you I didn't want company." Then he'd stroked his chin like he wished he'd had time to shave.

You glance behind you on the bank as if expecting to see his car parked there, but what you see cradled in the branches of a gnarled and monstrous cedar is a canoe. As far as you know your brother never set foot in a canoe.

He wears a cotton sweater the soft grey of the morning fog and he sits on the rock beside you. The sun will burn off the fog and fill the sky with light; then you'll invite him to join you back at the house on the patio. You'll make him a gin and tonic—he always liked a gin and tonic on a summer day. He'll stretch his long body out on the lounge chair and you'll remind him of that time when you were kids and you built a raft from logs on the beach;

you were going to sail to China. He'll admire the new house, your very own since the divorce. You'll tell him he was right about your ex. You'll have another drink and tell him his nephew is in university now. A lot of years have passed. You won't ask him about where he's been. Though you're curious, it seems an invasion of privacy to interview a man about his afterlife—and maybe you don't want to know.

"What's going on with Mom?" He picks up a rock and turns it over in his hand.

It so happens that you've been thinking about rocks, how they embed their deep geology in telltale striations while changing their appearance and shape over millennia. In that sense, if they were alive, they would never actually die. You might explain this to him, but you are reluctant to speak of death.

He didn't like to talk about death when he was alive. He'd sooner talk about everyday things: the rudeness of the fat woman at the checkout in Loblaws, how she twitched her nose at him like a rabbit and wouldn't honour his expired rain check. You would point out that inarguable fact of an expiration date, but he would obsess about these kinds of affronts for hours, the checker becoming more gargoyle-like with every telling so that the event morphed into a black comedy and in the end he'd have you laughing. Or he'd roll his eyes at your husband or your kids, how you handled some domestic problem and he liked to give advice that you sometimes took even though you considered him clueless about the tedium and heartaches of family life.

Heartaches he knew though he spoke of them rarely, and usually

only with the assistance of plenty of burgundy-coloured wine. A year before he died your brother returned from a holiday—he was always going south to Tiquana, to Acapulco, leaving Toronto behind then returning—to find his partner had rented a basement suite in a neighbourhood far from the Beaches where the two of them had lived for eight long years. The partner, a man not nearly as good-looking as your brother, had moved all of your brother's things into this apartment and demanded the keys to the house in the Beaches. This struck you as an act of cruelty, but unlike the incident in the grocery store, your brother saw his former lover's actions as justified and reasonable, and in spite of them, maybe because of them, he continued to be in love with this man.

But now you don't want him to talk about these things—they are in the past—you want to keep him focused on the business of your mother. "What's going on with Mom is old age, mostly," you say.

Of course he looks puzzled. What would he know of aging? You say nothing because you don't want to sound resentful.

His gaze shifts across the beach to the low tide line and you feel uncomfortable because that's the place where your mother and you spread his ashes years before.

"She wants to die," you say.

He whirls his head around and for a second you're afraid it might spin full circle on his neck like that scene in *The Exorcist*, but it stops at his shoulder.

"She told everyone she had cancer. So Auntie went out and rented a Karaoke machine and set it up in Mom's apartment. She propped Mom up in the recliner with pillows and blankets. Then Auntie made us listen to her sing, 'Wind Beneath my Wings,' you know..."

"The divine Miss M." He smiles and sings Bette's song, carrying a tune in a way he never could when he was alive, and you feel some of the old

jealousy. He finishes one verse and says, "What did Mom do?"

"She threw a hot water bottle at the machine and told Auntie to leave, just leave."

He laughs. "What a bitch."

"Then I phoned her doctor even though she hates me talking to him. He said she didn't have cancer, but that she should quit smoking."

Your brother wouldn't have bothered phoning the doctor. You see now that it was only because he was the youngest. Still, habit makes you say, "It's not fair that everything falls on my shoulders."

He shrugs. "Not much I can do from here." He's said this before.

"She carts that oxygen tank around in one hand and a cigarette in another. She's going to blow herself up."

He pats the place where he once kept a pack of cigarettes in his breast pocket. Your mom and he shared that: the smoking. You could hear them laughing on the back porch while you did the dishes in the kitchen.

"She's never been the same..." You don't finish what you were going to say. "You could go visit her, couldn't you?" You've said this before.

He grins and looks at you from the corner of his eyes. He opens his mouth and inside it's hollow as a cave. "I do."

"She never tells me."

"You'd tell her it was impossible."

You are both silent for a moment.

"All she does is cry," he says.

"Some things never change."

"And then they do."

You trace a stick in the sand and see that his feet have disappeared. You panic because you haven't yet gone for the gin and tonic. There are things you didn't say before and you want to say now. There're things you want to know. "Is there anything you need?"

He looks puzzled again. "What will you do about Mom?" he asks.

"What can I do?" Surely now, after where he's been he must know something, have access to answers, some certainty that you don't.

He shrugs. Beyond him far out on the water you catch a glimpse of a canoe rocking in the waves, as if it's waiting for a passenger. Your brother is submerged in a cloud, above which floats his head and shoulders. "It's up to her," he says.

"Should we go for a swim before you leave?" You used to like to swim together.

He shakes his head. He no longer has a tongue or a mouth, only an empty space there. The wind catches what's left of him like it did his ashes.

You stand and scan the blank surface of the sea. "It wasn't anything I said, was it?"

But he's gone and you'll never know for sure. 🍷

Dull Patch, ON

ANDRÉ ALEXIS

From Days by Moonlight. Published by Coach House Books in 2019. André Alexis was born in Trinidad and grew up in Canada. His work has won the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize, the Scotiabank Giller Prize and the 2017 edition of CBC's Canada Reads (Fifteen Dogs), and been shortlisted for the Trillium Book Award (The Hidden Keys). In 2017 he received a Windham-Campbell Prize for his body of work.

The Rebarbative Moose was done up in the faux-English or faux-Irish style of pubs across the province. The bar was stained wood, as were the bar stools and most of the tables. Behind the bar, there was a picture of Prince Charles and his consort, Camilla. Beside the picture was a clock that looked like an owl with its eyes wide open. The pub's name was meant to suggest England. At least, it sounded English to its owner, a Flemish immigrant who was convinced the word *rebarbative* was Shakespearean.

We — Mr. Henderson, Professor Bruno, and I — sat at a table near the centre of the Moose. All around us, men and women drank a local cider known as 'amber mole' — so named because, according to the waitress, 'if you drink too much of it, you won't care what hole you're in.' Her words brought cheers from the tables around us. Mr. Henderson paid for our pints. But when the cider came, Professor Bruno pushed his glass toward me.

— I'm sorry, he said, but I'm not allowed alcohol. My kidneys are giving me trouble. Alfie's young. He'll be happy to drink mine.

He smiled at me, and, in that moment, I understood that it wasn't the alcohol that troubled him but, rather, the cider itself. The professor had evidently tasted it before. And after my first mouthful I understood why he didn't want to repeat the experience. The cider tasted as if apple juice had been strained through dirty socks.

— How do you like it? Mr. Henderson asked.

— That's hard to say, I answered.

— Well, drink up, he said. I can't stand drinking alone. It reminds me of my ex-wife.

I couldn't decide how to drink the cider. The faster I drank, the faster I'd get over the unpleasantness. But when I drink quickly, I tend to get drunk, which makes it harder to turn down more. The thing is, I didn't want to get drunk, because the Moose had an unpleasant atmosphere. It felt as if all the pub's patrons were aware of our presence and weren't happy about it. I drank slowly, though this meant, with every sip, I was haunted by the thought of someone rubbing their socks in my face.

As it turned out, our presence was irritating to the Moose's patrons. Professor Bruno resembled a person

who was disliked in Coulson's Hill: Bob Grenville, a man from Nobleton who'd seduced and impregnated a number of young women in the town. The seduction and impregnation were not what people held against him. What they couldn't forgive was that Grenville had, in a drunken rage, burned down the town's post office — a nineteenth-century wooden manse that had been lovingly preserved — because he resented that the constant demands for child support he received inevitably bore the stamp of the Coulson's Hill post office.

Still, all went more or less well until, after drinking a few pints of

cider, Mr. Henderson went off to the washroom. As soon as he'd gone, a man approached our table.

— The hell you doing here? he asked.

The pub was quiet.

The man, who wore a red baseball cap that said *Massey Ferguson*, swore at the professor.

— You piece-a-shit building burner, he said. Go back to Nobleton.

— I'm from around Nobleton, said Professor Bruno, but I've never burned anything.

— Shut up, said Massey Ferguson, nobody's asking you. We know what you did.

— I think you've got the wrong person, I said. This is Professor Bruno from the University of Toronto.

— Oh, said Massey Ferguson, that changes everything. He's from Toronto!

Mr. Ferguson, tall and muscular, lunged at Professor Bruno and tried to pull him up by the lapels. I got up at once, reached behind me for my chair, and tried to bring it down on Mr. Ferguson's back. I'd never been in a bar fight. My reaction, desperate and almost instinctive, was inspired by movies I'd seen, movies in which chairs shatter on people's backs. In the movies, it's fluidly and easily done. So, one can imagine how astonished I was when I realized I hadn't grabbed a chair, as I'd meant to, but, rather, a large and very unhappy owl.

It's understating it to say I found this moment astonishing.

A number of things had to happen for me to grasp the bird. To begin with: when we came into the Moose, I mistook the owl at the bar for a clock. It was, in fact, a real owl perched beside a clock. My misapprehension had been a trick of the mind. But then, it's so unusual to find birds indoors, my first thought would naturally have been that the thing was a statue or a stuffed specimen. As a result, I was not on the lookout for an owl.

Then, while reaching for the back of my chair, I somehow managed to grasp the bird without looking at it.

Fourteen

DOMINIQUE BERNIER-CORMIER

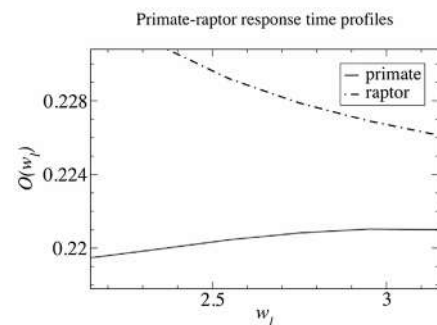
From Correspondent. Published by Icehouse Poetry in 2018. Dominique Bernier-Cormier is a poetry editor for Rabila's Ghost Press. His poem "Fabric" won the Fiddlehead Ralph Gustafson Prize for Best Poem in 2017. His work has also been shortlisted for the Montreal International Poetry Prize, Arc's Poem of the Year Award, CV2's Young Buck Poetry Prize and a National Magazine Award.

My mother, at fourteen, swims for hours before school every day. Her palms cup water, wrapped in bracelets of silver bubbles, rosaries of air. She breathes to the rhythm of morning prayer. *Je vous salue Marie, pleine de grâce.* A kick on *Marie*, a breath on *grâce*. Clockwork. Outside, nuns circle the pool in their black habits. Hands behind their backs, the white clouds of their voices. Snow falling on Quebec City's copper roofs. A bell ringing. When she swims the backstroke, my mother balances a cold glass of water on her forehead. To learn to keep still. To learn not to shake when she runs out of breath, when breath runs out of her. The glass throws a ring of light across her freckled face. If it falls into the water, the clock will stop, go back to zero.

Pressure is increasing in the compartment.

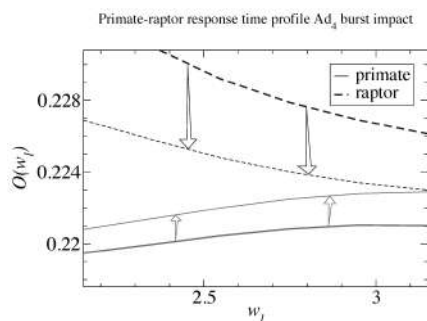
My father, at fourteen, boards a Russian cargo ship in the port of Saint John, New Brunswick. The captain shakes his hand and pulls him and his friend on board for a tour, tourists in their own home. A strange country of steel floating in familiar waters. The hold bursting with sacks of gold wheat. My father and the captain talk in broken English, talk in circles. Russian men look up from their meals, spoons frozen in air. They wave hello. The captain points at valves and dials, saying words in Russian. A needle points to *rain* on the face of a barometer. The captain knocks on the metal wall, says *strong*, rolling the *R*. Back on the open deck, he hands my father a blue and white grammar book. On the drive home, it lies closed in his lap. He runs his hand over the rough cover, imagines the secrets trapped inside.

someone will read this. 🐼



Moreover, I caught the bird's legs at the exact moment it had extended them in order to land on the back of my chair!

The bird was almost certainly at ease with human beings, being the pub's mascot. But I think it must have been as stunned as I was by the turn of events. It began to screech as soon as I caught it and flapped its wings about wildly. Incongruously, in the midst of its screeching and struggle, the expression on the owl's face was not of panic but quizzical dismay: eyes wide open, furiously blinking, as if it were trying to understand what I was doing.



I froze for a moment, holding the owl away from me as if it were a child having a temper tantrum. Then I let go and the owl flew up, its green siftings falling as it flew back to its place at the bar: near the picture of Charles and Camilla, beside the clock. There it preened, ruffling and unruffling its feathers, as if trying to recover its dignity.

You'd have thought the Moose's patrons would be offended and angry, having seen their mascot manhandled by a stranger. And, for a moment, they did seem to collectively consider how to react. The place was so quiet that the only words I heard were those sung by Gordon Lightfoot, the *Canadian Railroad Trilogy* playing for an nth time on an old jukebox.

Massey Ferguson still had a grip on the professor's lapel with one hand. His other hand had been raised to fend off the owl. But then Mr. Henderson returned from the washroom and the atmosphere changed again. Mr. Henderson struck the young man's head, as if slapping salmon from a stream. And, hands now up

She's the One Who Lost Her Mom

SHANNON BRAMER

*From Precious Energy. Published by Book*bug in 2017. Shannon Bramer is a poet and playwright. She has published chapbooks with above/ground press and Book*bug, and regularly conducts poetry workshops for students of all ages. She lives in Toronto.*

she's the one whose mom is mean about the ice-cream truck
and she's the one whose mom won't vaccinate

and she's the one whose mom is in Mitsubishi ads
she's the one whose mom teaches us about peanut allergies

she's the one whose mom is sad a lot and she's the one whose mom

got divorced again, she's the one whose mom can sew dolls, pillows
and other broken stuff back together

she's the one whose mom makes metal jewellery and tiny chairs
and she's the one whose mom is against gluten

she's the one whose mom hates it outside
and she's the one with two or three, maybe four moms

who all have azaleas drawn on their arms and shoulders

she's the one with the mom who came to visit our class
and talked about volcanoes, who loves roses and accounting

the one with the same mom who told us
we all need to get bank accounts in our own names

and learn about money, now, while we're still young 🍷

to protect his hat, Massey Ferguson meekly apologized: to Mr. Henderson, to Professor Bruno, to me, to everyone in the Moose.

Mr. Henderson glared at the man but let him walk away.

— Knob Grenville died last year! someone shouted.

And all around us there was mumbling, the sound like a pack of feral mothers soothing a child. Without any of us asking for them, several pints of cider came to our table, and the Moose's mood was once again light, the main topic of conversation being, once again, the moral superiority of Coulson's Hill over Nobleton.

Feeling obliged to drink the cider that had been bought for us, I was soon light-headed. One of the last things I remember clearly was a friend of Mr. Henderson's telling us about the origins of Coulson's Hill. The man told us the same story I'd heard. But he added a detail. Though the town's founder, George Coulson, had refused to excavate the last bit of ground on his property, George's son, Edward, had dug up the hill as soon as his father died. So, it was Edward Coulson who discovered a seam of gold that brought him great wealth. In fact, the seam ran deep, through all the property of

present-day Coulson's Hill. Though they wore baseball caps and dressed like unsuccessful farmers, everyone with property in Coulson's Hill was, according to Mr. Henderson's friend, immensely wealthy.

— I thought, said Professor Bruno, that the hill had been dug up and there was nothing there.

— You're from Nobleton, aren't you? asked Mr. Henderson's friend.

— Near there, said Professor Bruno.

— Well, there you go, said Mr. Henderson's friend.

After a bit more banter, Mr. Henderson and Professor Bruno finally began to talk about the subject they'd

met to speak of: John Skennen. I heard fragments of their conversation, but by then I'd drunk too much and the last thing I remember before passing out was Professor Bruno admitting that, in the end, the place he'd come from, this dull patch of Ontario, was more mysterious and threatening than he'd remembered. 🍷

when Louis Riel went crazy

KATHERENA VERMETTE

From river woman. Reproduced with permission from House of Anansi Press, Toronto. Katherena Vermette is a Métis writer from Treaty One territory. Her work has won the Governor General's Literary Award for Poetry; the Burt Award for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Young Adult Literature; and the Amazon.ca First Novel Award; and was a finalist for the Governor General's Literary Award for Fiction, the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize and CBC's Canada Reads.

1.

after the Red River "Rebellion" of 1869
Louis Riel went crazy
he ran off and hid
in a bush along the Seine
a land that jutted
out into the stream
a place everyone called
Vermette's point
just a thick
mass of thin trees
next to a narrow
slot of ploughed land
meek farm house
a brief place
nondescript
but the prideful home of my great-
great uncle and aunt

Riel stayed there a month
a long month when
spring spread out slowly
separated him from his "crimes"
I imagine my aunt left food for him
at the bush's edge
bannock lard and meat on an old tin plate
a meal for a dog
or a "rebel"
something he would have to hurry to
so the foxes didn't get there first

some say that's where Louis took
the name David where
in his cold hungry penitence
God spoke to him
gave him his divine purpose
and a middle name

when Louis Riel was hanged in 1885
my great-great uncle had no land
Manitoba had become a province
Canadian surveyors came in
and Métis homesteads were dissected
bisected
halved
quartered
over and over again until
nothing was left
only a square to balance one foot on
for only one second
before they all fell over

Ottawa took it all by then
all those half breed lands
ribbon lots not "properly bought"
were sold
and my ancestral uncle's home was
pulled
up from under him like a rug
rolled up from the river's edge
all the way to the road
tucked under Canada's collective arm

and chucked on an eastbound train
with all the other rugs
all the other
rolled-up land
became tidy
cylindrical tokens
conquered
presents to be presented
to John A
nothing more than
rolled-up grass like pressed cigars
he lit up and smoked
'til they were spent
only white
ash brushed off
red coats
and made
nothing

2.

there is still a place called Vermette
just southeast of Winnipeg
still along the Seine
it has
a postal code
a store and a sign because
they let us use the names of our dead
as if that means
we're allowed to honour them
we do not forget our dead

J-Tips

NIKKI FURRER

From A Woman's Guide to Cannabis. Published by Workman Publishing in 2018. Nikki Furrer is a lawyer and a cannabis critic for The Cannabist. She also develops cannabis strains and products for medical and recreational markets.

1. DECIDE WHO YOU WANT TO GET HIGH WITH.

If you feel nervous about your first high, make sure to do it with people you feel comfortable with and who make you laugh. Ideally, it would be someone who has gotten high before, but two first-timers can also handle it. It's also fine to do it alone, because you are going to start with a low dosage and go slowly and responsibly.

2. DECIDE WHAT METHOD.

Smoke, vape, or eat. If you eat, eat 10 milligrams of THC—and no more!—and keep in mind that it takes up to ninety minutes to kick in. Choose an edible with both THC and CBD for the most medicinal high. If you vape for

your first high, get a prefilled cartridge and battery. The budtender will show you how to put it together. Take it one inhalation at a time, just like smoking, but wait at least thirty minutes between each inhalation. Cartridges come in many different THC:CBD ratios. The budtender can advise you, or you can simply ask for what you want.

3. PLAN YOUR SNACKS.

Before you get high, get yourself a glass of water and make sure you have great things to nibble on. Don't think about gluten or calories or carbs. This is the moment for good chocolate and your favorite treats. Think about taste and flavor, because once you get high, that's all you're going to care about.

4. GET COMFORTABLE.

Yoga pants, pajama pants, or no pants at all. Turn on your favorite music and turn down the lights. You should be finished with the day's responsibilities and ready to relax in bed.

5. CONSIDER YOUR ACTIVITIES.

Try creative, artistic pursuits like coloring books, knitting, sewing, and painting. Or binge-watch episodes of your favorite show. One that makes you laugh is a good choice. One caveat: Getting high slows down our short-term memory, so reading while high is generally no fun.

6. RELAX AND ENJOY YOUR HIGH.

Notice your body relaxing and unwinding. Enjoy the mood boost and let yourself have a good time. 🌿

we know where they are
and sometimes we pull
them out of the ground like relics
we brush them off
wonder at their possibility
like rotting bulbs of some
rare and fragile orchid
we tend to them
all winter
put them back
into the earth come spring
with nothing
more tangible than hope to
make them flower

our names are scattered
seeds all over this
mother land
fathers' name
sons' names

Ritchot
Beliveau
Beaupre

just words long lost of meaning

Dumont
Desjarlais
Debuc
Leduc

south side street signs
markers

Tourenne
Turenne
Traverse
Trembley

the city is a graveyard

Guimond
Guiboche
Guibault
Gautier

my "conquered" people
these children of bereft sons who
once thought themselves so grande
they had the nerve to create
a province

Carriere
Charriere
Chartrand
Cote

dead names breathing
thin dusty life

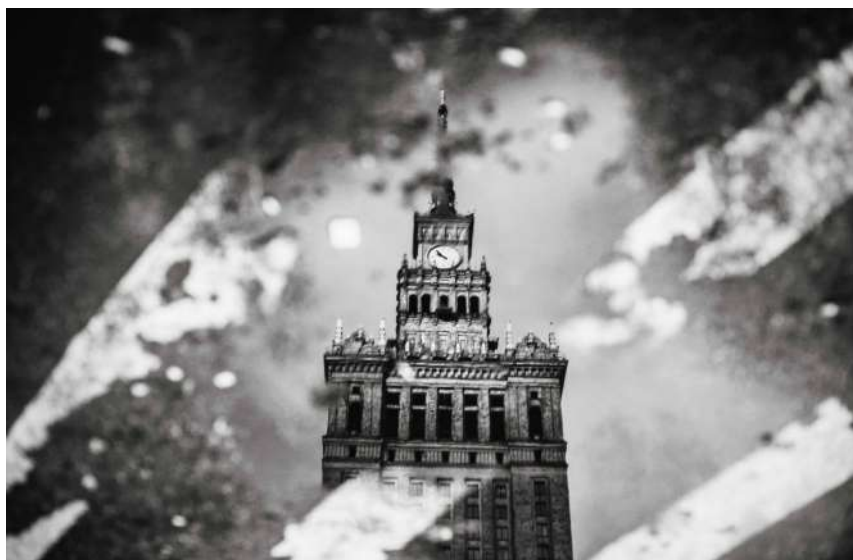
and Riel
Riel
everywhere Riel

we are intertwined within
this city
as if we belong
as if we are honoured 🌿

Symbiosis in Warsaw

OLA SZCZECINSKA

I have come to Warsaw to keep from losing my memories



If I'm still alive in two months I'll take you to Kampinos forest. The air is good there. Not like here, the air here is poison. You can't feel good in the city: you have to be with the trees. You have to be in the forest.

It is 2009, Warsaw, and I have come to live with my grandmother.

Grandma is eighty-six years old and she lives alone. She has cataracts in her eyes, emphysema in her lungs, angina in her chest, arthritis in her joints.

I don't yet have any of these things: I am twenty-nine, single, unemployed. I have just finished two years of teaching English in Tokyo and don't have anything waiting for me in Toronto, where I'm from.

The two of us are spending the winter sitting on two wingback chairs in her living room, slowly walking together to St. Zygmunt's church on Sundays, and shopping at the outdoor farmer's market across the snow-covered park.

We eat and talk by the window of her tiny kitchen, watching sparrows and starlings flicker in the sky. We drink raspberry syrup that Grandma makes, tea made from linden leaves that she picked: "From the countryside, where the air is cleaner." She crunches dried leaves into my cup.

She tells me her war stories.

This is why I have come: in Etobicoke—the suburban neighbourhood where I grew up—life had been easy. A house and a car, a fridge filled with milk and cheese and meat. Summers by the lake, bicycle rides through safe, peaceful streets. Blueberry Eggos for breakfast and a television set that was always on, emitting recorded laughter.

I am certain that I am soft, adrift. I feel lost in the world—rootless—a dreamer carried away by the slightest wind. We left Poland when I was two years old, in 1982. Since then I have seen my grandmother only a handful of times, and I don't feel I know her. My memories of her are random, scattered, unconnected. Flashes of her walking me to school in Etobicoke, along icy sidewalks and knee-high snow. A fragment from a summer visit to Warsaw, of my sister and me flinging her cabbage pierogi to the sparrows from the balcony, her outraged eyes and shouting. I have memories of her drawing on her eyebrows before church and wearing round fur hats; of her scolding my grandfather for giving us coins; of her gripping my hand tightly as we walked alongside busy roads.

I remember also intermittent phone calls, at birthdays and Easters, when long distance talk was expensive, special, and the sound of a double ring had everyone in the house in a kind of panic, jumping from their seats, racing down the stairs or bursting through the bathroom door, lunging for the phone before its ringing stopped.

Those phone calls were difficult for me, strained. Too much small talk about school, health, and the weather; too much struggle to find the right Polish words.

Now, finally, I have a chance to spend some time with her, to really get to know my grandmother, my *babcia*. Now I can weave those disparate threads together, can learn from her, grow. I have come here because my mother had asked me to, in an email, as I was preparing to finally leave Tokyo. But the longer I stay the more I realize why I've really come: I am a young grasshopper, in search of a master. And *Babcia* can teach me how to become a warrior.

But now time is short, and I worry I have left it too long.

Inside the apartment is a clock that hangs on the kitchen wall: it is large, round and loud. The apartment is silent except for this clock and it fills the gaps of *Babcia's* stories with its steady ticking. It drums in the background, follows me around. It stalks me through the rooms as I go about my day, then hovers over my bed when I lie down for the night.

When I was younger, how I used to run around! All day long, all over Warsaw. Here I'd go, there I'd go, by bus, by foot... all day long, never a need to stop. Now? I can't even take a few steps without running out of breath. Can you tell me why?

After the war, *Babcia* left her wooden house with a roof made of straw. "What *didn't* we grow there?" She raises her eyes to the Virgin Mary, to Jesus, the God Almighty.

Apples, blackcurrants, raspberries, cherries, apricots, sunflowers, parsley, beets, potatoes, dill, onions, thyme, cucumbers... Chickens, cows, dogs, pigs and roosters.

"Did you have horses?" I ask.

Babcia nearly spits up her potato sauerkraut soup. "Well *of course* we had horses! How do you think we did anything back then, without any horses?"

This was in the nineteen-twenties, thirties and forties. Elsewhere in the world towers had sprung and roads had been paved. Markets had crashed. Cities had burned. People were flying through clouds.

But my grandparents' farm sat quietly on a field in Krzemień-Wieś, as always. Magpies sang from their rooftop in the mornings. Linden leaves rustled. Along the green primeval banks the winding Bug River murmured.

“Not like today! They just ride their tractors and the work is done, and still they complain about ‘too much work.’ Before the war do you think we had tractors?” She lets out an indignant laugh and shakes her head. “What work? *Riding* a tractor? They have too much time now, *that* is today’s problem: too much time, not enough work. Back then we had only our hands. And our horses.”

“Poor horses,” I say, as I stir my steaming soup.

Babcia looks like she wants to hit me. She lets out another short laugh that sounds like a shout. “Poor horses? Poor *horses*?” She shakes her head in amazement. “Horses are intelligent. They *have* to work.”

I contemplate this seemingly profound statement. *Horses are intelligent therefore they have to work.* It appears like the tip of an immense truth, an iceberg, reaching deep into the darkness of wise, ancient water.

“I loved my horse,” she adds.

I have never heard her use that word before: love. Or show any outward sign of joy at all. I smile. “What was the name of your horse?”

“*Name*?” She looks at me like I’m crazy. “Name of my *horse*? I don’t know... Horse!”

“Well then how did you call him over?”

“Well, I would just walk up to him. Grab his reins. Climb up.”

“But dogs had names.”

“Dogs, yes, but never horses. You think horses care if they have names?”

“Do dogs care?”

“Of course dogs care!” We both laugh at this, then she shrugs and looks away as if bored by all this drivel. She points to my soup without looking at it. “Eat.”

We sit in silence a moment, drawing hot soup from our bowls, blowing into our spoons before ferrying them into our mouths. Steam rises; the smell of kielbasa, cabbage, potatoes.

Outside the frosted kitchen window and beneath the white light of a small, distant sun red-tiled rooftops stretch toward the distance; beyond lies downtown, the Palace of Culture and Science, the new Golden Terraces complex and the dingy maze of subterranean walkways. The sky is a pale blue; it is February in Warsaw.

I probe my grandmother with more questions as we finish our soup. She answers:

“What does ‘wanting’ have to do with ‘doing?’ Something has to get done, and you do it.”

“You can never go wrong if you serve God.”

“We used to go barefoot, it’s how we are meant to walk. Shoes were for Sundays: we’d carry our shoes to church with us and put them on only once we got there.”

“The best milk is when it comes straight from the cow, still warm.”

“Soap was only for the body, not the dishes. What doesn’t water clean? You could always use sand if the pot was really that bad.”

“Did we have sinks? What for? Sinks make you lazy!”

“Milk comes out warm?” I ask. “That’s disgusting.”

Babcia holds her spoon midair, her mouth hanging open. She sets it back down in her bowl and looks squarely at me. “*Disgusting*?” She shakes her head. “It is the healthiest milk there is. The *tastiest*.”

We stare at one another, her gaze scorching, and I feel small fires crawling up the sides of my face, licking at my cheeks. “Right. Of course it comes out warm, of course.”

“That’s right, *the tastiest*. The very best meal you could have in those days was fresh baked bread with a warm glass of milk from the cow.”



Babcia tells me more about life on the farm before the war, and I imagine the hours she spent spinning crops into culinary gold. I imagine the kitchen as a steaming, grease-specked, belching and clanging beast hiccupping sauerkraut and kielbasa soup (*kapuśniak*), plum dumplings with fried bread crumbs (*knedle*), stewed pork knuckle (*golonka*), buckwheat with pork fat and fried egg (*kasza*), poppy seed cake (*makowiec*), Jewish chalka buns encrusted with almonds and sugared butter.

Whatever they did not immediately eat, she says, they carefully sealed into jars and stored in the cellar, saving it for the long fruitless winter. Jars collected in the darkness. Garlic and carrots reclined against the glass; stubby cucumbers rested on branches of sweet dill and peppercorns.

Sometimes they'd slaughter a pig, then bury it whole deep beneath the ground where it would remain for months, encased in the cool soil, protected from the ravages of time, space, the wars of men.

OMG you can do that? I want to say. But I stay quiet, nod my head.

Years went by like that at my grandparents' farm. They sat around the kitchen table and laughed and knitted and played cards. They chased out the chickens when they ventured into the house. They yelled at each other about money and chores. About stupid things they couldn't later remember.

When the Soviet army passed through the countryside in 1944 they brought their horses into my grandparents' house. "What kind of people bring horses into a house?" She widens her eyes; her thin pencil-drawn eyebrows rise. She stares at me, waits for an answer.

I shake my head and shrug. War is a foreign country to me where anything seems possible.

"They burned *campfires* in our *barn!*" An old anger rises up, takes possession of her face. Her eyes grow wild, her eyebrows lunge toward one another as though ready to duel it out, the sixty-five-year-old memory striking out from the dark. "They were always drunk," she grumbles. The anger like a gale passes, and her face settles. She pulls a small mirror she keeps on the counter closer, peers into it, tucks some loose strands of grey hair behind her right ear and then abruptly pushes the mirror away, turning the reflecting glass around. "A German would *never* bring a horse into a house. They were cruel, but very civilized. Not like the Russians. They were kind enough, just barbaric."

I tell her I need to hear more stories like this, because I haven't seen her in years, or Warsaw in a decade. I was losing all my memories.

**They burned *campfires* in our
barn!” An old anger rises up,
the sixty-five-year-old memory
striking out from the dark.
“A German would *never* bring
a horse into a house.**

“Did you ever see dead people?”

Babcia yells at me, “What else? Of course! Do you think there could be a war, without any dead people in it? That is all there was, rubble with dead people in it. Piles and piles of them. Dead horses, too.”

Babcia falls silent and we stare out the window. The sky is a winter blue. The rooftops across the way are a bright red. I am sitting at the kitchen counter with my last grandparent as the bells of St. Zygmunt peal through the air, and a murmur of starlings explodes in the sky.

We watch the birds a while. I am mesmerized by how they rise and fall, rise and fall, endless black waves crashing against a red brick shore, rising up again in new and different forms. And I wonder: how do the starlings know where to go?

“We were lucky many times, that is the only way you survived the war. And God’s will. Your grandfather was crazy in Warsaw. He used to run around while the bullets flew by! During the Uprising after he’d left our village. And he used to say, ‘If God forged a bullet with my name on it, that bullet would find me no matter where I hid.’ So he’d run around like that, bald-faced, while all the bullets flew by. Lunatic.’ Babcia chuckles and shakes her head. “And he was right, he was.” She looks directly at me, her eyes grown serious: “There is no hiding from God.”

I nod.

“Another time the front was coming, to our village.”

“The front? Was coming?” The word is the same in Polish as in English, but for some reason I do not recognize it or immediately see how a front comes to a village.

“Yes, the front.” She waits for me, but I am stuck at this word, unable to move forward with her. “The *front*. The war? You know, the Germans and Soviets fighting?”

And suddenly, clear as day, two opposing armies rise up in my mind as they roll into my grandmother’s village to face one another, their green uniforms, artillery and guns firing on either side. The image clicks into place. “Oh, the *front*.”

Babcia nods. “So the front was coming. Of course nobody knew that, but we were lucky because a German stationed in our village warned me, said: you better leave right now. I don’t know why he told me, but we left right then, I ran back home and grabbed everyone and left—”

“How did you leave, by car or horse?”

“By foot! That’s the only way you got around then. Even in 1952, not long after we moved to Warsaw, there was nothing. I walked twelve kilometres while carrying your mother one day, to the hospital because she was sick. That’s just how we got around back then, every day at least four kilometres. And nobody complained! That’s just how it was, so you did it; you don’t know how easy you have it. Anyway when we got back to the village, that time...” Babcia looks away, shakes her head

slightly and looks outside. “People dead everywhere. I don’t know why he told me... but we were lucky he did.”

“Maybe he liked you. Thought you were pretty.”

“Ha! Yes, maybe.”

“What was his name, do you remember?”

Babcia looks at me like I’ve lost it again. “*Herr Who-Knows.*” She reaches for the mirror once more, glances at herself then swiftly turns it around and pushes it back. “Or maybe he liked me because I knew German. He was a good one. Not like the SS who lived in our house.”

“The SS who lived in your house?” My blood runs cold. How does an SS officer come to live in a Polish peasant’s house?

“Yeah, the SS who lived with us.”

“There was an SS living in your house?”

“Yes, there was. And he was terrible, oohhh.” She enacts a shudder.

Once again I feel we’ve reached an impasse, a locked time-language barrier that I don’t have the codes for. What I want to understand is: why and how the hell was there an SS officer living at your house? What my grandmother seems to be hearing is: oh really, there was an SS officer at your house? I try one more time. “Why was there an SS living in your house?”

She looks at me as though she’s not sure I am using my Polish words correctly. She speaks slowly, clearly: “Because there was an SS living in our house.”

I let this one go, make a note to Google it later on. (I learn that soldiers often occupied private homes during the war and this, too, suddenly crystallizes into an image in my mind. Of course they did: where else would millions of soldiers go?) I ask about the SS and she tells me he was cruel, that everyone stayed away from him, barely met his gaze. She laughs and tells me that he liked to sit in their only chair and smoke, luxuriating in his exhalations, blowing smoke rings while staring at her father, who loved sitting in that chair and loved smoking, and who stood cigaretteless, watching. She chuckles. “Because you couldn’t get tobacco anywhere then. Drove my father crazy.”

I do not know very much about my grandmother’s father, Pawel, aside from the fact that he was an alcoholic his whole life, until finally one day he could not take himself to the liquor store because his legs gave out. Owing to my grandmother’s and great-grandmother’s resoluteness—they refused to buy him booze—the end of his mobility spelled the end of his drinking life. This is a fragment my mother has handed down to me, the only one that exists of him in my mind.

Now, sitting in Babcia’s kitchen, with its permanent smell of pickles and propane, I am handed a new fragment, a new thread to weave into the tapestry of my memory of my great-grandfather, one in which he is wilful, strong, able. She tells me he built a bomb shelter with his brother, behind the house. “They did this secretly at night, while that SS slept inside. If he had caught them... ooooh...” She shudders again.

“What was the bomb shelter like?”



Babcia shrugs. "It was like a bomb shelter."

"Well what did it look like?"

"Like a hole in the ground! What else does a hole in the ground look like?" She looks down, smooths her apron. "We were lucky he did that; we hid down there for three days straight one time, no way could we have survived without that shelter."

I ask what they did down there for three days, while the Nazis and Soviets and partisans bombed and shot and gassed each other somewhere above their heads.

"What do you think we did? We sat there. We waited."

I push; I do not let this one go. "You don't even have a single memory from being down there? You must remember something. Not even a scrap?"

Babcia looks to the ceiling, scanning it for memories. I glance up as well: I see chipped paint, a white ceiling with a few cracks in it.

"Well, I remember my cousin had just given birth. We gave her all our food, and we didn't have much. But we gave her all of it and still, she couldn't make any milk, not any. And that baby cried and cried... oh my God, how that poor little thing screamed the whole time..." She gets up from her chair and looks down at me, haunted, her fingers resting on the counter for support. "It is better not to talk about certain things."

"How did you survive any of it?"

She eyes the starlings outside, forming a black-beaded rosary in the sky. "I told you: luck and God."

"No. There's more to it than that: *you* survived it." I look earnestly into her eyes. "I would have died," I say solemnly.

Babcia glances down at me, sees how serious my face is and for some reason knocks her head back, howls. Her aged raspy laugh lights up hundreds of wrinkles, her skin like weathered earth cracking.

After the war, they left the village and bought an apartment in Warsaw. My grandfather took wood from the bombed-out buildings nearby and made new furniture by hand. "He made this stool you're sitting on. And that table." She scans the tiny kitchen and nods to the cupboards. "Those too. He made almost everything we needed."

I smile at the thought of sitting on my grandfather's stool, and expect my grandmother to fall into a moment of sadness. Because I have. But she doesn't, and instead she is looking at the clock and muttering about her medicine.

I used to have such blonde hair; I don't understand it. How can your hair just change like that? It was so blonde once, so blonde. Not even that long ago.

When March comes Babcia begins to feel worse, and I catch cold. She complains about how dark it is, that she feels drunk, says she can barely keep herself sitting in her chair.

"You should lie down," I tell her. "It's this long winter. We'll both feel better in the spring. We'll go to the forest."

"Ha," she says weakly. "You might have a cold, but that's different. This is the end of me, I know it." She reminds me of the number for the ambulance and where her overnight purse is. She asks me to stay with her.

Nonetheless it is she who sets out to heal me. She rummages through her pantry, retrieves small metal tins with dried leaves and herbs, jars filled with syrups, fermenting vegetables and roots. She brews me thyme tea, offers me vodka with pepper, hot beer with lemon juice for my cough. She makes me soups, pushes vitamins in front of me, slices up bread and slathers on thick coats of butter with raw garlic.

One day she decides to make me carrot juice and we slowly walk to the market together. It is a five-minute walk for me, but it takes much longer with my grandmother. Every few minutes she stops abruptly and tries to catch her breath. She clutches at her heart, her skin pales, and I watch as panic and fear rise up in her eyes. I stand with my hands in my pockets, eyes on my shoes, kicking at the snow. I chew on my lip and wait in agony for the moment to pass.

When we get to the market I follow her to a stand where two farmers wearing down coats—a mother with a daughter roughly my age—are selling vegetables and fruit from the back of their truck. They rub their hands, blow into them, smile and greet us as we approach. Babcia picks up a carrot. She examines it, slowly scratches some of its skin off with her old yellowed thumb, then licks the insides quickly with her tongue—like a snake—flickering it in and out. I look at the farmers with alarm, but they continue bouncing in the cold and blowing into their hands, waiting for the verdict. “It’s sweet,” Babcia mutters. She looks up at them: “We’ll take four kilo.”

When we return home Babcia processes the carrots in a juicer and pours out two glasses. “Drink.”

I take the glass and we drink the juice at the counter, looking out the window at the rooftops, at the sparrows flitting through the sky. The clock ticks and she eyes it. She reminds me that the midday news will be coming on soon so we’d better get to the living room. “Then after we’ll say the rosary.”

I do not feel like saying the rosary—I never do—but I oblige; my company, after all, is what I have to offer.

When we finish praying I am bored and a little tired and I wonder what I should do. I watch my grandmother slowly get up from the wingback and walk over to the cabinet from which she pulls out a journal. She returns to the chair with it and spreads out the newspaper, reads a bit, then with a shaky hand opens the journal and begins writing.

“What are you writing, Babcia? A letter?”

“The events.”

“The events?”

“Yes. From the news today. So that I know for later what happened.”

I watch a while as she diligently scans the articles in the newspaper, trails the sentences with her finger, looks up thoughtfully to the ceiling, then returns her attention to the notebook and writes. I ask myself what excuse I have, for not writing, for not caring about “the events,” when I have so much more time and energy to work with. *What’s the point*, a voice in me replies. I sneak outside for a cigarette.

The winter passes by in this way and I do begin to feel better. But Babcia doesn’t, and I spend much of the time walking to the pharmacy for her, paying her bills at the credit union, walking to the market alongside grey postwar apartment blocks, through cold wind and barren trees, returning with bags of cucumbers, sliced ham and apples. There are dogs without leashes, old people in furs, guarded and weary glances.

Other mornings I go downtown where I sit in cafés with my laptop, drinking cappuccinos, smoking cigarette after cigarette until I’m strung out and jittery. Then I bum around Warsaw’s bookstores, visit war museums and memorials, attend public talks on collective memory; Jewish-Polish relations after the War; monuments as discourse and political spaces: I struggle to follow along. Inevitably as evening comes I end up at a bar, alone, drinking beer or sipping cherry vodka (*wisniówka*) on the rocks.

I begin thinking that I've never killed a chicken or ever pickled anything. I feel a sudden panic and I think: tomorrow. Tomorrow I will do that. Pickle something, that is, not kill a chicken.

"You are drunk," Babcia says to me one evening when I return.

She looks angry and so heartbroken that I lie. "I am not. I only had a couple."

"Only a certain kind of woman stays out past dark," she says. She shakes her head sadly, sends me a sidelong glance.

But I smile. "Don't worry, Babcia, times have changed. Everyone goes out at night now. Anyway, I really don't usually drink that much."

She tries to read my expression, gauge its veracity. She nods.

One evening I go out after the news, leaving my grandmother to recite her evening rosary. I tell her I'm going to an internet café to speak with my friend from New York. I tell her this is cheaper than talking by phone and that I can see my friend's face in the monitor.

Babcia looks confused and asks what the difference is between a computer and the internet. I explain and she shrugs. "When we were young we were always outside. Now you all just sit inside all day, with this computer-internet. What's going to happen to all of you?"

I kiss her on the cheek as I leave.

"Go with God."

"Okay. Thanks."

It is dark out, quiet as I make my way to the subway. Lights and television sets flicker through sheer curtains of the old postwar blocks. Dogs bark in the distance.

For some reason I begin thinking that I've never killed a chicken or ever pickled anything. I feel a sudden panic and I think: tomorrow. Tomorrow I will do that. Pickle something, that is, not kill a chicken. I will go to the market and buy some carrots, beets and turnips. And maybe some mushrooms. Then I will ask my grandmother to show me how, and we will spend the afternoon together. Pickling.

I understand why we all have to die, I do. I understand that we have to go to God. But explain to me: why do we have to suffer?

"Your uncle was a communist."

We are sitting in the living room waiting for the weather report to start at 7:25. Babcia shuts the TV off for commercials, and we are sitting in the two wingbacks, staring in silence at the blank screen.

"What? Uncle Michał?" I am surprised. He is a devoted Catholic. The first day I flew in to Poland he took me straight to church where he knelt at a pew with his eyes tightly closed, forehead resting on his folded hands, feverishly

mouthed a silent prayer. The following day he took me on a tour of Warsaw, during which we visited every church and cathedral in the Old Town. By the fifth or sixth church I declined to accompany my uncle in the pews and lingered outside by the doors, smoking.

“He was no Catholic back then!” She turns to me stiffly with her arthritic neck, nods meaningfully. She is wearing a pair of dark oversized sunglasses that take up half her face—the light of the television hurts her eyes—and they make her look a little dangerous, like a mobster.

I admire the sunglasses a moment, brown and wide framed. They look like they’re from the seventies, and I want them. “You weren’t a communist, though,” I say finally.

She turns again to me with those big sunglasses, crinkles her nose and puckers her mouth like she’s bitten a sour fruit. She sticks out the tip of her tongue.

I smile. I cock my head a little, narrow my eyes. “Not even for a moment?”

“Ha!” She shakes her head, no way. “Every single election without exception we cast an empty ballot. Well, until 1989 of course.” She glances down at her hands, stretches her skin, smooths out the wrinkles until they are gone, then watches them spring back into place as soon as she lets go. “Everyone did that.”

I look back toward the blank screen to process this revelation. Empty ballots every election. Everyone. A feeling of excitement rises up from my stomach: a new golden thread.

We sit in silence a moment, both of us lost in thought. Above the television there is a shrine to the Holy Family, a portrait of Mary, of Pope John Paul II (“Our Pope”), and two of Jesus: one filled with soft light in which he stands with his wounded hands outstretched, looking very sad, and the other kitsch, his heart large and red like in a Valentine card, emitting a bright beam of super-healing golden light. A cross hangs above all of it.

It is quiet, except for the muffled sounds of the neighbour’s television and the steady ticking of the kitchen clock.

“What was it like when it collapsed?”

Babcia shrugs. “We were happy at first. Communism was bad.” She pauses, turns to me. “But is *this* so much better?”

I sit very still, waiting for her to continue. I expect an affirmation to come, some kind of reluctant concession to the current system, an acknowledgment of all the good free market democracy has brought. But nothing comes.

“Democracy? Ha! Back then at least everyone was cared for, and everyone worked. Now? Everyone is just robbing everyone else.” She shakes her head, looks down at her pink beaded rosary and thumbs the tiny silver cross. “Poland is going straight to the dirt, believe me. Along with the rest of the world.”

She gazes toward the balcony and I follow with my eyes. It is night and we can see our distorted reflections in the glass balcony doors staring back at us. The





rest of the room is reflected, too: the floor lamp and Babcia's bed, the lacquered wooden cabinetry that takes up an entire wall. There are embroidered linens housed in those drawers, old Communist identity cards, and coins engraved *PRL*: Polish People's Republic. There are black and white photos of my grandfather standing upright on a charging horse, of my mother as a teenager staring into the camera with her arms crossed, and of people that I do not know, never met, cannot remember.

There are other things. A sky-blue wind-up alarm clock, marked *MADE IN USSR*; columns of decades-old journals filled with my grandmother's forceful handwriting; stacks of tiny address books dating back to the fifties that she still won't part with ("You never know," she says to me); ivory figurines of elephants and lions from her trips to South Africa; silk scarves; my mother's school notebooks, covered in her first shaky attempts at cursive writing; old furs that smell of mothballs; tweed skirt suits that Babcia still wears to mass on Sundays; amber, silver, turquoise; love letters from my grandfather from his days at the shipyards; war medals, stale chocolates, and lush ostrich feathers. The cabinet is stuffed with stories; it swells with memories.

On the rare days that Babcia goes for tea next door, I immediately sit on the carpet by the cabinet and explore its compartments. I eat the chocolate, I smell the embroidered linens. I gaze at my grandfather's passport photo, try to read his old letters.

On one of these days I take the small blue clock out and wind it. It ticks and for a while I stare into it. My mind becomes still, the room fades, and I imagine all the invisible threads woven around the clock, the hidden stories orbiting. I go to the dining room where my bed is and slip it into my suitcase.

Why is everything so dark? I can hardly see anything today, everything seems black, in shadow. Even you. Have you turned off the lights?

Babcia dies alone in the hospital two months after I return to Canada. My parents and I have just flown back to Toronto from my sister's wedding in Cuba, and guilt and sorrow wash over me.

For weeks I agonize over my decision, wishing I had stayed in Warsaw just a little longer, been at her side as she departed. "If only I had stayed," I say to everyone.

“She was a strong, proud woman,” a friend replies one day. “She probably preferred to die alone.”

I try to accept these words as the right way of seeing things, try to bury my regret inside them. For years I try.

Time passes though, and I move into my first bachelor apartment, then move again with my partner to the other side of the continent. Every now and then I pick up the small blue clock and I wind it. Its ticking fills the room as I stare at it—MADE IN USSR—and I recall my grandmother. Her face rises up at my call, and I see her as she was: resilient, steady, buoyant.

What does wanting have to do with doing? Something has to get done, and you do it.

I close my eyes, try to make more room for her to expand inside me. I close my eyes to better remember how she weathered the days: always walking, cooking, writing, praying. Always working, always moving.

I feel my way forward through the years as they come, I try to get the days right. I stop smoking, stop drinking all the time. I set out to grow new roots, and forge a meaningful life.

And I try to do what she did when the days come in too hard: I try to let all that time, like waves, crash and break against my bones.

Ola Szczecinska was born in Poland and immigrated to Toronto with her family in 1984. She completed an M.A. in History at the University of Toronto. She moved overseas to teach ESL and began to write short stories. When she returned to Canada she continued to write, while working in bars and bush camps. Her piece “Leaving Mr. Bielski” was published in Six Hens. She lives in Whitehorse.



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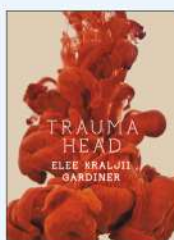
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Sappho Questions Medusa

CARLA NAPPI

The piece below is part of an ongoing project in which Carla Nappi, an historian, and Carrie Jenkins, a philosopher, reimagine Plato's *Symposium* into a collection of poems that centre women's voices. It transforms a speech from *Symposium*, "Socrates Questions Agathon," into the story of what might have happened if Sappho and Medusa had become lovers. Instead of Socrates pressing Agathon to anatomize and dissect the depiction of love that the poet had offered in his own speech, here Sappho herself is anatomized into rocks and gems and fossils through the love of her interlocutor. (Readers who are interested in reading this piece in conversation with the original text will spot the section of Plato's "Socrates Questions Agathon" that informed its corresponding poem by following the numbers in each poem's title: 198B-C, 198D, etc.)



0 (198B-C). *In which Sappho's poems are petrified before she has time to edit*

- 1 My words are rock, my lyrics turned to stone
- 2 just as I was about to trim them down.
- 3 I'm left to time, then, as too much of me.
- 4 (I'd run if there had been a where to run
- 5 to, out beyond the shrivelled space of now.)
- 6 A woman whose dark hair's a hissing crown
- 7 turned Gorgon eyes on me. (Has she seen you?)
- 8 (This is the count of every thing. One, two.)

1 (198D). *And so we are left with a poet not in fragments but instead as overabundance*

- 1 My words got tangled in her snaky head
- 2 and I found myself giving up my dawn
- 3 my lyre my long transparent dress
- 4 my music and now there's too much of me
- 5 and of my words my songs myself my love...
- 6 I tried to cut them back in life, in death,
- 7 because I knew well that I didn't know
- 8 the first thing about love. Poor, dear Sappho
- 9 who's too much left. But that's also, you see,
- 10 To be the winner. Paingiver. That's me.

2 (198E-199A). *What happens when a poet and a Gorgon have a love affair?*

1 And as my lover turns my voice to stone,
2 the Gorgon bites into it like a peach
3 and chews and chews and chews
4 and
5 chews
6 and
7 chews
8 (What if your lover threw the pulp away
9 and ate only the seeds the peel the stem,
10 and what if that's the way she ate you, too,
11 would you feel like a tree that fruited wrong?)
12 Toss me that apple and I'll sing a song.

3 (199B). *And so, as the Gorgon reads what her lover writes, and the eyes make love to the curves of the words, in those movements the poetry is petrified.*

1 Rock worms crawl hard in the strata of me,
2 a rotting body that's rot's opposite.
3 I kiss my lover with a mouldy mouth
4 and try to breathe a poem in my kiss
5 while letters in my lungs go petrified
6 and each glass word rips tissue in its teeth,
7 a fossil of a phrasing of desire
8 as songs precipitate out from my flesh.
9 Break my body open when it's done
10 and read my love traced in the stony breath
11 and find the questions trapped there in my gut
12 and crack my stony bowel to pull them free
13 and hold them up like Yorick's skull to see:
14 And is this to be loved, or not to be?

4 (199C). *And the reader turns paleontologist digging for the bones of music in the stone, as the lover digging in the body of her beloved.*

1 Gentle as you brush the crusted blood
2 from vowels knobbing from my bones, and gentle
3 while you split the muscle as it sheets
4 like mica from the rhyming in my thigh,
5 and gentle, please, be gentle as you bring
6 the cracking constant hammer down again
7 to try to loose the music from my teeth,
8 and gentle, as you pry them from my gums
9 and drop the jagged fragments in a jar
10 already white with love-bleached bits of flesh
11 that make a pretty tinkling when you shake.
12 What if a poem set like sediment
13 its lines its layers hardening with time
14 its verses hiding fossils in the sand?
15 What if we bury creatures in a song?
16 (Y'all who sang before me did it wrong.)

5 (199D). *So, dig. And ask your questions.*

1 I watch the bits of sand drop into place
2 like jagged punctuation heaping piles
3 of stops and pauses stops and pauses stops
4 and stops and stops made out of little stones.
5 I follow their directions, one by one,
6 and stop. And stop. I stop. I stop. I pause,
7 I wait, I watch. A drop, a stop, I wait,
8 a drop, I watch. A geologic woman
9 marking time in sediment and breath
10 until the limestone like a mother heaves
11 her body metamorphic from the earth
12 as she gives marble birth to love deformed.
13 And whalebones stretch and pull her marble flesh,
14 her crystal belly chambers into vast
15 nautiloid hunger as it eats itself
16 alive, and watch I watch I rise I carve
17 new punctuation on this poet's breast.
18 What's happy if she's not the happiest?

6 (199E). *Now try to tell me about love.*

1 What happens when you fossilize a voice?
2 Does it flake out from the lungs in sheet
3 music played by the wind and birds and rain?
4 (She once dreamed of a dinosaur who tried
5 to sing a song to his beloved but
6 all he could make with his crocodile throat
7 were low deep booms and so his lover thrust
8 her listening head down deep into the sand
9 and it stayed there until some eager boy
10 from some eager time came with pick and knife
11 and chipped away her ears and put the bones
12 into his little eager bag and slung
13 the sound stones on his shoulder with his lunch
14 and drove away. And after she awoke
15 whenever she would open lips and throat
16 all that came out were low deep booms and so
17 she loved her lover like a crocodile
18 and breathed out reptile valentines, her skin
19 scaling to play the sounds her voice recalled.)
20 (Her skin's a purse, now. Fashion for the fall.)

7 (200A). *Then keep this object of love in mind,
and remember what it is.*

1 I see you, feathered serpent. Sweet winged snake,
2 who coils at me in seashells and in wind-
3 borne dust around my head that settles in
4 amid my braids and covers me in time.
5 Desire depends on absence of the one
6 desired, they tell me. So I sit alone
7 with neck craned up to spot my pterosaur,
8 remembering how I wove your hissing hair
9 into a writhing pair of wings, and how
10 I pressed into your head like clay and raised
11 a regal beaky crown. (Don't look at me,
12 my love: please turn around.) Quetzalcoat
13 above me like a meteor demanding
14 sacrifice. What will you ask of me,
15 the woman waiting for you on the land,
16 if ever the sky lets you come back home?
17 Don't ask yourself what's likely, Socrates
18 said to a room once: think of what must be.
19 And so from sun to Socrates I turn,
20 and to necessity as my concern.
21 And when life wears me out, they'll find me dressed
22 in raggy wings I'll staple to my breast
23 when thinking of the love who wore them best.

8 (200B). *Presumably, no one is in need of those
things he already has.*

1 Before my body ages into stone
2 I'll open up my throat and sing for you
3 so that my voice creates a kind of time
4 that makes a kind of home where you can dwell.
5 And when the final beating of my heart
6 comes knocking on your door, you'll find me there,
7 a column like a tree gone petrified.
8 Come touch my bark and turn me on my side
9 and make a deep cut through the trunk of me
10 and close your eyes and run your fingers round
11 the sedimenting of my voice like tree
12 rings marking out the rich years and the lean
13 and play me like a record of what's been.
14 And will you, love, not then be satisfied?
15 Our story should have storms inside, you said.
16 Fulfilling a desire kills it dead.
17 Look upon the ocean when it roils
18 and metamorphosis is what you'll see.
19 Look upon the waters when they're still
20 and what you'll see is yourself staring back.
21 Though satisfaction calms the choppy seas,
22 let us be groping kraken in a squall
23 instead of honest mirrors on a wall
24 that smudge and crack and shatter when they fall.



9 (200C).

But maybe a solitary woman could want to be solitary.

We'll live inside a conch shell on a shore
and I can make my bed up at the tip
while you explore the water at the lip
and when my song twists toward you through the whorls,
the words accreting memories like pearls,
you'll string them up and wear them as a crown.

*In cases like these, you might think people really do want to
be things they already are.*

I'll find a crown-of-thorns starfish and string
the coral alveoli from my lungs
and drape the garland on the creature's spines
and crawl inside one of the little globes
so when you see the moonlight on the sea
you won't know that the tinsel's hiding me.

I bring them up so they won't deceive us.

You'll know of me the way you know of tinsel
coming into life in the earth's mantle
(amethysts and other fruits of trouble),
rising to the surface with the pebbles
doing just their darndest to be humble,
finding friends only amidst the fossils.

*If you stop to think about them, you will see that these
people are what they are, whether they want to be or not.*

I'll make my fossil friendships in the sand
while bits of me are crumbling into sand,
I'll give my spine to trilobites, the sand
will polish all my ribs and when the sand
is done the arthropods will swim through sand
to come and claim my bones.

*And who, may I ask, would ever bother to desire what's
necessary?*

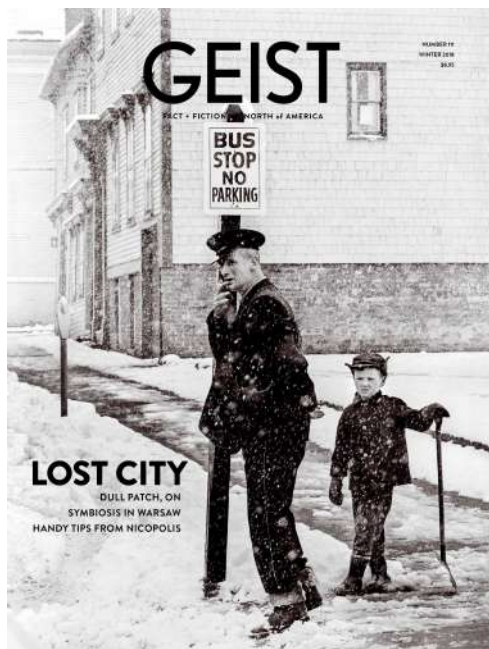
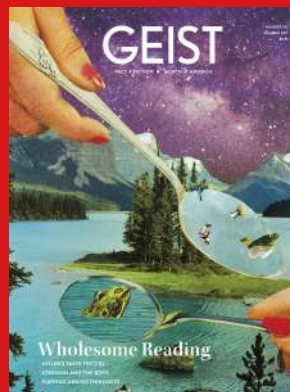
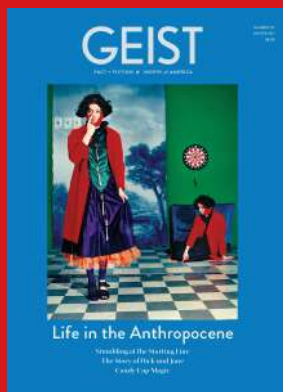
You'll live inside a cowry on the shore,
forgetting what your pearly crown was for.

10 (200D). *Whenever you say, I desire what I already
have, ask yourself whether you don't mean this:*

1 To love, he said, is only to desire
2 the preservation of what one has now.
3 And so preserve me, lover. With your stare
4 you'll raise a fossil fauna from my ribs.
5 You look at me wiwaxic and the scales
6 grow skeletal upon me, spiny fingers
7 feather forth to brush across my bones.
8 Preserve me, keep me safe, glance at me
9 opabinic, sprouting stony stalky eyes
10 upon my feet to stretch and reach and look
11 upon you as you kill to keep me safe
12 from time from death from you. Preserve me, love.
13 Make me hallucigenic from the needling
14 worms your vision makes from crack and crush
15 as they crawl from my mouth and craft a smile
16 of spike and prick fit only for your kiss.
17 And when I'm found in fragments years from now
18 they'll gather up what's left inside a box
19 and label it and put it on a shelf
20 until one afternoon an artist, bored
21 of this or that will come to reconstruct
22 me in a spiny prehistoric story
23 of extinct morphologies of love.
24 With paint and ink she'll raise me from the dead
25 and bloom fantastic gardens from my flesh
26 and make of me a lost strange clan of beasts
27 that time herself refused to let go of.
28 And will you recognize me then, my love?



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FIRST
PRIZE

The Snowplow Buccaneer

GWEN MARTIN

(Sung to the tune of “Rolling Down to Old Maui”)

VERSE 1

I've a full-time gig with a snowplow rig
from November through to May.
With my trusty plow, it's amazing how
I can make a decent pay.
While you snore and sleep in your cozy sheets
and your blankets tucked in tight,
I'm patrolling the street on the John Deere beat,
pushing snow and ice all night.

CHORUS

With my coffee mug and my rum-filled jug,
it's a renegade career.
I can travel afar, I can wreck your car.
I'm a snowplow buccaneer.

CHORUS

VERSE 2

Ye hangashores with your high-priced chores
and your suits of grey or blue,
you think we're a bunch with a two-hour lunch
and a redneck point of view.
Yet I tell you straight that the thing I hate—
more than midnight shifts or cold—
is a speeding jerk on his way to work
trying to run me off the road.

CHORUS

VERSE 3

My favourite part of the job I do
is a source of constant thrill.
It's a secret trick called the “plowman's flick.”
All it takes is speed and skill.
Only minutes after you clear the end
of your driveway or your lane,
I plow right past with my blade half-mast,
and I block you in again.

CHORUS

*Gwen Martin is a freelance writer and editor.
She knows her local snowplow operator and
will sing shanties (badly) if pressed.*

SECOND
PRIZE

Sailing the Accountant Sea: A Fiscal Pirate's Shanty

JENNIFER KINNEAR

(Sung to the tune of "The Pirate Shanty")

VERSE 1

Behold, this band of CPAs, avast your screams
We're hiding out in plain sight on the finance team
Analyzing P&Ls and balance sheets
Debits, credits, T-accounts, they're a bosun's treats

CHORUS

A cheque run for the vendors, a cheque run for the subs
A cheque run for the picaroons with mileage claims
I do not fear the bank rec, I do not fear the VAT
But fiscal year-end threatens to expose our number games

VERSE 2

Each day I try to educate these young green MBAs
Who don't know their multipliers from their billing rates
They don't see we need cash flow to pay their salary
And I catch them sending invoices without the GST!

VERSE 3

The auditors are coming and will open up our books
They'll question our provisions, give expenses second looks
So, batten down the revenues, we'll try another tack
'Cause if they find those stashed doubloons we all will get
the sack

CHORUS

VERSE 4

A wise old pirate I admired, he once said to me
"We're bean counters! We sail upon the Accountant's Sea
I know this month's unreconciled but come and follow me."
He showed me how to plug that gap with one journal entry

CHORUS

VERSE 5

Now we sail into the sunset of another fiscal year
Our coffers full of loot, and our bellies full of beer
Best not to get too squiffy, lest we become the prey
Of that scurvy pack of bilge rats called the Sea... Arrrgh... Eh!

Jhenn Kinnear writes as a hobby when she isn't at her day job (where she ALWAYS respects Generally Accepted Accounting Principles). She lives north of Toronto.

THIRD
PRIZE

The Bookaneer Life: A Librarian's Sea Shanty

CARRIE CLICKARD

VERSE 1

Unchain your hearts from the shelving carts
come join our librarian fleet
If ye've drive and ambition to book erudition
we're the best bookish brigands you'll meet!

CHORUS

For it's "Arrr, W, Arrr"—We fight Illit'racy!
A pirate band with a book in each hand
and a wealth of expertise
in the five laws, the big six and all the seven seas.

VERSE 2

Masters of knowledge from many a college
purveyors of books brave and bold
with masts and yards
and library cards
and a treasure of tomes in our hold.

CHORUS

VERSE 3

The seas we tread in silent dread
recovering books overdue
with a curse on our lips
we'll be boarding yer ships
and stealing them back from you!

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Carrie L. Clickard is a pirate at heart and poet by trade. Clickard's work has appeared in numerous publications including Muse, Andromeda Spaceways, Mirror Dance, Light, Literary Nest, Defenestration, Poet's Haven and Enchanted Conversations. For more information please visit www.clickard.com.

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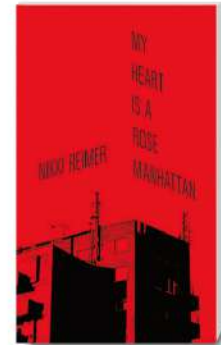


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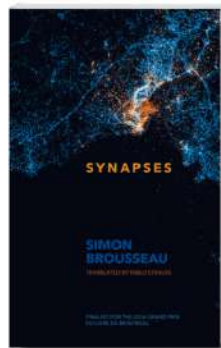


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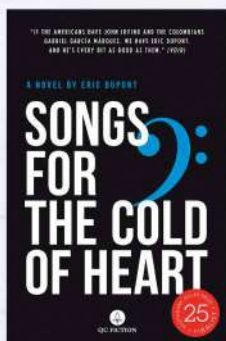
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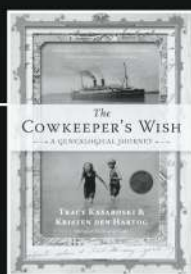
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ALBERTO MANGUEL

Reading is a subversive activity

In 1995, the bishop of Évreux, Jacques Gaillot, was called by Pope John Paul II to go to Rome. There, because of his activism in defence of, among others, the Palestinian people, the Holy Father told him that on the following day, Friday, January 13, at 12 o'clock, he would cease to be Bishop of Évreux and that he would be given instead the bishopric of Partenia, in the highlands of Sétif in Algeria, where Gaillot had done his French military service. Though the seat of Partenia had disappeared in the fifth century and Gaillot was effectively left without a physical diocese, his followers decided that, in the age of electronic technology, it was possible to create a bishopric in cyberspace. A few months later, in early 1996, the virtual seat of Partenia was electronically established, operated from Zurich and accessible in seven languages. Perhaps this was what Christ (who hadn't foreseen the Internet) meant when he said: "My kingdom is not of this world."

In library terms, Christ's words can have both a spatial and a temporal meaning. Libraries exist materially in one place, in solid buildings of brick or marble, but their holdings span time to give evidence of what occurred in the near and distant past, hopefully serving as a lesson for its readers in the future. Most readers intuit that what we call reality, beyond



the restricted concepts of blood and nationality, is held between those pages, stored for them or for their offspring to lend words to the experiences they've lived through, or will perhaps one day encounter. This extends the concrete space a library occupies to every place conceivable described somewhere in its holdings, even imaginary places, wherever a reader might be sitting, bringing its words to mind. The kings of Alexandria sought to accumulate under one roof every book within the borders of their realm; they didn't know that a library's ambition (be it Alexandria or the poorest library of a remote village) is vaster than that of kings and does not limit itself to political frontiers. Sir Thomas Browne made this clear in his *Religio Medici* of 1643: "We carry with us the wonders we seek without

us: there is all Africa and her prodigies in us; we are that bold and adventurous piece of Nature which he that studies wisely learns in a compendium what others labour at in a divided piece and endless volume." He could have been defining a library.

During my time as director of the National Library of Argentina I felt it was important for our institution to become truly national by becoming universal, as Borges had wanted, and by developing its cultural role not only as a centre for the memory

and identity of the people of Argentina but by extending its mission across the world, bringing into our stacks "the wonders we seek without us." Several national libraries already do this by allowing readers from beyond the country's borders free access to their material, sending books and documents overseas, physically or virtually, expanding the traditional understanding of the interlibrary loan system usually restricted to a city or a country. And yet, we asked, why not widen this generous purpose and assist librarians not only in providing books for absent readers and supplementing the holdings of other libraries, but also in creating or re-creating libraries that have been destroyed by earthquakes, storms or fire, or that have been closed due to government censorship, or libraries that cannot be

established in the first place, for arrogant political reasons?

An example. The Library of Ukrainian Literature in Moscow was founded in 1986 and, in 2000, was granted an autarchic status. However, in March 2017, President Putin ordered its closure and its tens of thousands of volumes were seized and incorporated into the Library of Foreign Literature of Moscow. The head librarian, Natalia G. Sharina, was declared guilty of “inciting hatred toward the Russian people” and of “possessing herself of state funds” to purchase anti-Russian texts, in order to grant Ukrainian nationalists a refuge in Moscow. For these alleged crimes, Sharina was given a suspended sentence of four years in jail. Learning of these events, the National Library of Argentina decided to open a Ukrainian Library within its precinct, offering in material and virtual form to readers around the world a repository of Ukrainian material that would, in some small measure, replace the precious library they had lost. We did this in accordance with the beliefs of the founder of our National Library, Mariano Moreno, who in 1810 wrote: “Truth, like virtue, has in itself its own indisputable apology. By discussing and making it known it appears in all its luminous splendour. If restrictions are opposed to an intellectual discourse, both the spirit and the matter will languish, and errors, lies, anguish, fanaticism and stultification will be the banner of nations, and will cause for all time their abasement, their misery and their ruin.”

A second example. As we should know by now, technology can serve as an instrument against intelligence and depth of thought or, on the contrary, as a weapon against stultification, fanaticism and censorship. It was in this spirit that the National Library of Argentina suggested setting up a virtual National Library of Palestine, following the steps of the supporters of Bishop Gaillot. Why not, we said,

suggest fostering this new National Library under the auspices of our own, creating a sister institution, virtual like the diocese of Partenia, to which we would contribute material, and solicit contributions from other libraries? Why not assist Palestinians in creating a National Library that would be, like ours, a symbol of identity and a repository of their memory? Unfortunately, in spite of many attempts, conflicting opinions and bureaucratic tangles prevented the project from ever taking wing. Nevertheless, the project still exists *in potentia*, and perhaps one day it will come to fruition.

These attempts at crossing and erasing borders in the world of libraries are possible because, in its very nature, a library is borderless. To establish sections that prevent the mingling of arts and sciences, to restrict access to certain books only to certain privileged readers, to forbid the acquisition of problematic

titles and to avoid controversial material, are all forms of curtailment that are never, in the end, fully effective because readers will always find ways to blur divisions, gain illegal access, place controversial titles on the stacks behind the authorities’ backs. Reading, as we have long known, is a subversive activity and does not believe in the convention of borders.

In the ninth century, the Syrian poet Abu Tammam, compiler of one of the best-loved collections of Arabic verse, *Hamasab*, wrote these lines:

Blood relationship we may lack,
But literature is our adopted father.

Alberto Manguel is the award-winning author of hundreds of works, most recently (in English) Packing My Library: An Elegy and Ten Digressions, Curiosity and All Men Are Liars. He lives in New York. Read more of his work at manguel.com and geist.com.

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ENDNOTES

REVIEWS, COMMENTS, CURIOSA

KARL OVE KNAUSGAARD: A TALE OF THE TAPE

Now that **The End** (Harvill Secker), the sixth and final volume of Karl Ove Knausgaard's mega-novel *My Struggle*, has appeared in an English translation (by Don Bartlett), we can finally compare Karl Ove's literary edifice with others of similar ilk—and bulk. *The End* is a modest 1,160 pages of Nordic self-revelation; the paperback edition weighs in at 1116 grams and the six books collectively occupy 9.5 inches of my shelf space and put a 4.422 kg strain upon the floor joists. These metrics place Knausgaard's project squarely in the superheavyweight category, where it can jostle aggressively with the likes of Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (seven novels in three vol-

umes: 6.5 inches and 3.920 kg), Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time* (twelve novels: 5.7 inches and 2.045 kg) and—another recent



crowd favourite—Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan Quartet (5.5 inches; 1.678 kg). To properly assess these behemoths, I think that we need a new literary prize to compete with the Giller, the Booker and the Nobel, the victor to be determined through a series of head-to-head sumo bouts. These bouts might play out as follows. In semi-final #1, Ferrante faces Knausgaard. Ms. Ferrante, lighter on her feet, initially dances rings around the loquacious Norseman, mocking him as Oberyn unwisely taunted the Mountain in Season 4 of *Game of Thrones*, with (I fear) the same outcome: Ferrante supine, Knausgaard bloodied but triumphant. Semi-final #2 has Powell vs. Proust.

The match begins with a ceremonial exchange of national pastries; Proust disdains Powell's homemade currant bun and distracts Powell with a fresh-baked madeleine. This allows Proust to deliver a punishing series of *barite*, or open hand strikes to Powell's neck. In the championship bout, Knausgaard, swaddled in a black loincloth, bows deeply to Proust, who is resplendent in an ornate *kesbō-mawashi*. Knausgaard, unexpectedly deferential, appears uncertain as to where to place his hands. He hesitates, allowing Marcel to execute a neat *okuritsuridashi*, or rear lift-out, tossing Karl Ove from the ring. Fans of Gallic social climbing cheer wildly as Monsieur Proust retains the coveted Emperor's Cup.

—Michael Hayward

MR. DALLOWAY

Every year, 4chan.org (an online meeting place famous for birthing the “alt-right”) releases a ranking of their top 100 books of all time. To say that this year's list is male-dominated is an understatement: there are only two



books written by women on the list, and both of them are by Virginia Woolf—*The Waves* (#85) and *To the Lighthouse* (#73). Although it might be easy to disregard the list as another symptom of the cultural mindset that got Trump elected, it does raise the question: why did Virginia Woolf, and only Virginia Woolf, break through the posturing of a famously misogynistic internet community? Not having read her in the

past, I bought a copy of *To the Lighthouse* in order to better understand.

To the Lighthouse follows the Ramsay family, who are vacationing at their cottage on England's southern coast. Woolf is not delicate with her characters' feelings; the slightest mishap in the Ramsay family often results in an anxious spiral of thought that can be dizzying to read. Take, for example, the sensitive James Ramsay who, when we are first introduced to him, falls into an Oedipal fantasy in response to a perceived slight from his father. This is the first hint into the appeal of the novel to disaffected male readers; Woolf's unrelenting and oftentimes harsh readings of her characters' most personal thoughts exposes a world of heart-breakingly misdirected masculinity. Later in the novel, we are introduced to Charles Tansley, a graduate student of philosophy who is staying with the Ramsays. He's prone to mocking those he deems intellectually inferior to him, especially women, and Woolf explains his behaviour as Tansley's expression of a need for reassurance—here disclosing the confused psychology of a man who sees himself as underappreciated in his time.

The irony of all this, of course, is that it requires a distinctly female perspective to gaze past the outwardly aggressive behaviour of these young men and understand it for what it really is: a desire for affection, for sympathy. By bravely venturing into the struggles of each of her characters, Woolf uncovers the fragility that lies just underneath their rancour, and suddenly it becomes clear why *To the Lighthouse* is as piercing a cultural note now as it was to readers of its day.

—Jonathan Heggen

WHAT THEY SAY

On the face of it, **Family Lexicon** by Natalia Ginzburg, translated by Jenny McPhee (NYRB; first published in 1963), is a narrative portrait of an Italian family: mother Lidia, father Guiseppe (nicknamed Beppino) and their six children, with cameos by grandparents, uncles and aunts. All family members and their dynamics materialize vividly in the writing of Natalia, the younger of the two daughters, who reports what each family member always says, with bare-bones explanation. “Don’t be a nitwit!” shouts Beppino, the most frantic and irascible of them all, in a manner more fretful than bossy. “Don’t be such a moron!” or jackass, or buffoon, or poseur. “Don’t pick at your cuticles!” When Natalia’s brother marries Amedeo Modigliani’s daughter, Beppino pronounces Modigliani’s painting

“Dribbledrabs! Doodledums!” At a restaurant in Rome, when a waiter shoos away a woman begging, Beppino shouts at the waiter: “I forbid you to chase off that poor woman! Let her be!” He then dashes over to give her some money. In gratitude the woman begins to play her guitar for him. “Get out of here!” shouts Beppino. “I can’t stand to hear that sound!”

Lidia, Ginzburg’s mother, is given to sudden outbursts of joyous song, mostly tunes she made up in boarding school.



Her lexical trademarks are to sigh “How I do love cheese!” and to fuss that her grandchildren “won’t have anything to cover their bottoms!”

When grown-up Natalia moves away with her husband and children, Lidia wails, “She’ll let them go around with nothing to cover their bottoms!” Uncle

Barbison can be counted on to say “Sulfuric acid stinks of fart!” Aunt Celestine’s refrain is “See that bread there? It’s all barite!” Grandmother (maternal): “Every day it’s something, every day something, and today Drusilla has broke her specs!” Grandmother (paternal): “In this house you make a bordello out of everything!”

And so on—with copious exclamation marks, a simple, elegant device to ensure we can “hear” the family endlessly shouting out the lexicon as we read it. Thank heaven no expert told Ginzburg it’s bad writing. Nor did Jenny McPhee, who translated the book into English and somehow made it look easy. I’m guessing it kept her up at night—many nights. What is the Italian word that became *nitwit*? or *jackass*? or *doodledums*? In English they seem perfect translations, whatever the original was.

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PENCIL PUSHERS

The not-funny aspect of Ginzburg's narrative (which she insisted be presented as a novel) is that it takes place in the 1920s and '30s, when Hitler and Mussolini were rising to power. Beppino was Jewish; the family and their friends were artists, writers, publishers and the like, all anti-fascist activists and resistance fighters. At any moment, any of them could be dragged away to a terrible fate, and some were: most notably Ginzburg's first husband, who was tortured to death by the German Nazis after the fall of Mussolini. Ginzburg's genius is to report the terrible bits with all the rest; the engine is the lexicon and the reader rides it to the end, laughing, weeping, drawing back in horror. All of these turns are the stuff of life, not marginal bad patches. Ginzburg invokes and repeats bits so that the stew of love, fear, anger, comfort, devotion, envy, guilt, clubbiness and all the rest—which every family has, if not as boisterously as this one—comes organically into view with minimal explanation. She arranges things for humour, for pacing, for suspense and shape.

And, in one case, to introduce one of Beppino's sayings. He responds to any behaviour he deems inappropriate as a "negroism": talking to a stranger on a train, packing sugar cubes for one of the family's many bracing hikes, warming one's feet on the radiator. "Don't be negroes!" he would shout. What does a writer or translator (or, indeed, a publisher who is reissuing a classic) do with this? Ginzburg put it on page 1, with a few examples and a brief explanation, period. As Peg Bowers points out in her cogent afterword, in *Family Lexicon* Ginzburg isn't trying to figure anything out. She "writes to furnish an alternative to carelessness, forgetting, and indifference."

—Mary Schendlinger

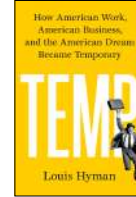
David Graeber is a professor of anthropology whose 2013 article "On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs: A Work Rant" in *Strike* magazine attracted a passionate response. Overwhelmed by workers who wanted to share personal stories, he found that the trend was even bigger than he thought: his own and other studies found that 30–40% of workers in rich countries see their jobs as pointless. He expanded his work into the book **Bullshit Jobs: A Theory** (Simon and Schuster) which seeks to understand what sort of bullshit jobs exist and why. Graeber identifies five classes of bullshit jobs: flunkies, task masters, box tickers, duct tapers and goons, and he provides examples of the type of (non)work done by each. Bullshit jobs have proliferated in areas like middle management and in real estate, finance and insurance, where workers report that they have little work to do and that if their position and their entire industry were eliminated it would improve the economy and the world.



Rather than enjoying their idleness, most respondents were bored and unhappy and begged co-workers or bosses to find them something to do.

How is it possible that in a capitalist system, positions are created where there is almost no work to be done? Graeber lays out the complex reasons and investigates who benefits and how. The resulting argument is dense but fascinating, especially the anecdotes related by workers who are often paid to literally do nothing. Graeber is appalled that society allows and accepts this state of affairs. A shorter work week is well within reach, but the richest countries encourage their citizens to work longer hours at jobs they feel are pointless. The solution he proposes is one that is gaining much traction and enthusiasm: universal basic income.

In Temp: How American Work, American Business, and the American Dream Became Temporary (Penguin Random House), Cornell professor Louis Hyman examines the transformation of work in America from stable and predictable to flexible and precarious. This shift in the



post-World War Two era was no economic accident or technological inevitability, he writes, but a series of human choices, which he comprehensively documents. Conservative, risk-averse strategies gave way to a cult of the entrepreneur, corporate leanness and obsession with shareholder value. Job insecurity on a massive scale is a new condition, he suggests, as many employers found it easier and more lucrative to hire consultants, temps and other part-time labourers. The book considers the ascendancy of consultantancy firms and temp agencies, how temporary work patterns have been different for women and minorities, and how the ubiquitous gig economy has exposed the nail in the coffin of secure jobs. The story of *Temp* is one of shifts in economic structures, corporate ideologies and cultural norms. The book contains micro-narratives, including stories about the temp agencies Manpower and Kelly Girls, about Microserfs and the origins of Craigslist, but it is concerned with the big picture, so be prepared for an involved read. *Temp* is not as fun as *Bullshit Jobs*, but it has a strong, clear thesis, is thorough, and follows the key twists and turns that got us where we are today.

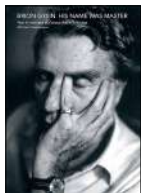
—Kris Rothstein

BRION GYSIN: HONORARY CANADIAN

Writer and counterculture legend Brion Gysin was born in 1916 in a Canadian military hospital in England, to Canadian parents; he later

attended an Anglican boarding school in Edmonton—either of these facts would make him at the very least an *honorary* Canadian. Gysin was a fascinating character, described by William S. Burroughs as “the only man I ever respected.” Gysin is often credited, inaccurately, as being the first to stumble on the “cut-up” technique for writing: in 1958, in room 15 of the Beat Hotel in Paris (the technique had already been described by Dadaists in the 1920s). Gysin had sliced through stacks of newspapers while cutting a mount for a drawing and noticed that, by rearranging these random fragments of text, he’d created a *new* text which (he felt) revealed the true meaning of the original. He and Burroughs experimented extensively with cut-up, Burroughs even suggesting that “When you cut into the present the future leaks out.” There’s an excellent biography of Gysin: *Nothing*

Is True, Everything Is Permitted (2005); now we have **Brion Gysin: His Name Was Master** (Trapart Books), a collection of transcribed conversations between Gysin and Genesis P-Orridge (another fascinating figure from the avant-garde; check them out on Wikipedia). The conversations took place in Gysin’s Paris apartment in the spring and fall of 1980. They are gossipy; they are scatological; they are philosophical; they are mundane. The topics covered range



from matters literary and artistic (the Surrealists; the Beats in Paris; William S. Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch*) to matters magickal (P-Orridge’s preferred spelling of the term). Gysin goes into detail on the origins of his famous Dreamachine, a mechanical means for inducing a dream state, and thereby accessing the

unconscious. *Brion Gysin: His Name Was Master* will never be a bestseller; it is a labour of love for Trapart Books, a one-man independent publisher based in Sweden. It gives hope to all those who still recall the days before publishing became a business dominated by multinational conglomerates, whose primary concern is, and always will be, the bottom line.

—Michael Hayward

PERFECTLY ADEQUATE EXPECTATIONS

In August, two of my friends and two of their friends went to see the movie **Crazy Rich Asians**. The movie had received good reviews on CBC and Rotten Tomatoes (plus one of my friends usually likes romantic comedies), so my friends and their friends took a ferry, drove for ninety minutes,



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paid their admission, bought popcorn and drinks, and settled in on their reclining seats to watch a movie that they ended up hating. My friends were embarrassed that they had persuaded their friends to come along and they felt that they had paid way too much to see a bad movie about ridiculously rich people. “It’s just like the ‘Emperor’s New Clothes,’” said one of my friends. “No one is admitting that the movie is terrible.”



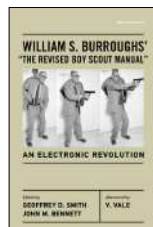
Three months later, despite my warnings about the movie, my daughter paid \$7 US to rent it online and

then she and her husband and I sat on their comfy couch, sipped Scotch, and for the next two hours laughed out loud as we watched Rachel (the ordinary young woman) and Nick (the filthy rich young man) deal with his crazy (and sometimes scary) family and friends. Sure, it was formulaic, and I usually don’t care about filthy rich people, but the Singaporean street food looked delicious and a couple of the supporting actors were hilarious. The ending included the usual last-minute suspense and I really didn’t believe that the relationship would survive, but when I caught sight of a fellow passenger watching the movie on a recent Air Canada flight (it’s everywhere now), a warm fuzzy feeling came over me. —Patty Osborne

JAPANESE BEATNIKS AND REVISED BOY SCOUTS

William S. Burroughs was the most subversive of the writers known collectively as “the Beats,” his writings influencing the avant-garde of later generations. **The Revised Boy Scout Manual: An Electronic Revolution** (Ohio State Press) is an obscure bit of Burroughsiana that first appeared in audio form on cassette in 1970. This edition has been collated and synthesized from various versions of

Burroughs’s text: “typescripts, tape recordings, periodical publications, books, and online.” *The Revised Boy Scout Manual* is essentially an extended rant, a metaphorical “call to arms,” crossed with a practical “how to” manual, for those who oppose and wish to overthrow the status quo. The tactics? Any- and everything from stockpiling small arms (which, Burroughs notes, are only effective “in a condition of chaos such as could be expected after a



nuclear attack”) to a radical revision of language (“The definite article THE will be deleted and the indefinite article A will take its place”).

You can hear Burroughs’s distinctive nasal snarl in every phrase: “The food in England is now fit only for the consumption of an underprivileged vulture”; “Slaughter the shits of the world, then we can all have some fun for a change.” *The Revised Boy Scout Manual* is both of its time (the proto-revolutionary 60s) and timely: our era’s “1%” could easily be added to the long list of entrenched enemies / oppressors / surveillors who are identified in Burroughs’s text: “police, army, navy, business, mass media, CIA.”

Kerouac: Beat Painting (Skira) is the exhibition catalog for a 2018 gallery show mounted by the Museo MA*GA in Gallarate, northern Italy. The show presented “a series of never-before-seen artworks, images



and studies representing the visual art of Jack Kerouac,” nearly 100 works which Kerouac created during the late 1950s and early 1960s. The catalog also collects a sheaf of critical essays on Kerouac’s visual art, from writers who seem to delight in demonstrating their command of art-theory and other jargon, bandying terms like “Beat syncretism,” “heirophanies” and “oneiric

imagination.” Kerouac was a writer first and foremost, but his painting was guided by the same desire: to channel spontaneity, and to avoid self-censorship. One of the critical essays in *Beat Painting*, from Sandrina Bandera, quotes from one of Kerouac’s 1959 notebooks, in which he exhorts himself to “USE BRUSH SPONTANEOUSLY: i.e. without drawing, without long pause or delay, without erasing... pile it on.” Kerouac’s visual art will always be seen as a minor curiosity in comparison to his novels, which remain influential fifty years after Kerouac’s death.

Several Beat writers acknowledge the influence of Buddhism and Asian culture, but the influence worked in both directions: a generation of Japanese



poets saw the Beats as emblematic of American cool. This aspect of the association is explored in **Japan and the Beats**, a special

issue of the Tokyo Poetry Journal (ToPoJo). One highlight of the issue is an English translation of a 1992 interview with “Japan’s first hippy,” the late Nanao Sakaki. Sakaki, who was a good friend of both Gary Snyder and Allen Ginsberg (and of Vancouver poet Trevor Carolan) used to spend a lot of time walking in the mountains of Japan and the deserts of the southwestern United States, covering up to 45 kilometres a day. “In the winter I like to be in the snowy mountains, and in the summer I like to go swimming in the coral sea.” There’s a slight Canadian connection as well, through Kazuko Shiraiishi, a poet once described by Kenneth Patchen as “the Allen Ginsberg of Japan.” Shiraiishi—who is represented by a pair of poems that show Ginsberg’s influence, and by a biographical essay (by A. Robert Lee)—was born in Vancouver in 1931, and raised in Japan, where she now lives.

—Michael Hayward

OFF THE SHELF

A student and a professor tiptoe around love and lust in a fourth-year Chaucer seminar in *Dividing the Wayside* (Palimpsest Press) by **Jenny Haysom**. In *Whistle in the Dark* by **Emma Healey** (Knopf Canada) Lana receives a dick pic and shrugs, her mom freaks out and her dad asks, “Is the man a stranger or strange?” In *The Cat Vanishes* (Signature Editions) by **Louise Carson**, Gerry rushes out of the grocery store to get away from the pushy advances of a man. A doctor injects a radioactive substance into Forde and says “It’ll make your willie glow in the dark” in *Finding Again the World* (Biblioasis) by **John Metcalf**. A father texts his daughter, “Oh, I forgot to tell you about your mother’s psychotic break” in *Honestly* (Book*hug Press) by **Steven Zultanski**. In *Side by Side* (Inanna) by **Anita Kushwaha** a distraught wife yanks an album of photos of her dead son from her husband out of fear that he will ruin it. John lunges at Claire with a knife for calling him a “short guy with empty balls” in *The Daughters’ Story* (Baraka Books) by **Murielle Cyr**. In the morning Cesily’s body washes up on the shore a few miles down the river in *Notes towards Recovery* (Latitude 46 Publishing) by **Louise Ells**. In *Mouth of Truth* (Guernica Editions) by **Lillian Boraks-Nemetz**, Batya flies to Europe to find out more about her father and the silver disk. In *The Green Chamber* (Talonbooks) by **Martine Desjardins** a father offers his son freedom from their family name in exchange for an engagement to a girl named Penny. A son misses a few calls from his father and rushes to find his father lying naked on the floor in *The Ambassador of What* (ECW Press) by **Adrian Michael Kelly**. The candles keep going out because a student forgets to bring plastic cups to a candlelight vigil in *Small Predators* (ARP Books) by **Jennifer Ilse Black**. In *The Death and Life of Strother Purcell* (Goose Lane) by **Ian Weir** a killer chases after his half-brother into the mountains, never to be seen again. A man tells secrets about a corrupt humanitarian worker to a journalist in *White* (Talonbooks) by **Deni Ellis B  chard**. In *Steel Animals* (Inanna) by **S.K. Dymant** three police officers corner and arrest a protester running back to her apartment. “Maybe you should call your lawyer,” says an FBI agent to the prime suspect of an investigation into a mink farm explosion in *The Invisible Reich* (Tarot and Chi Publishing) by **Kenneth Allan Pazder**.

Dean, who is on parole, panics when a rumour spreads that Paula’s dad called the cops to the house party in *This Keeps Happening* (Invisible Publishing) by **H.B. Hogan**. Abby swerves the car into the right lane to avoid a near-death collision with a semi-truck on a weekend trip to Vancouver in *Stray* (Little A) by **Tanya Marquardt**. Jane paces around her apartment through the night worrying about bed bugs in *Little Yellow House* (Gutteridge Books) by **Carissa Halton**. A genderfluid ex-frat brother, who was voted Melting Queen, faces a group of protestors chanting “Melting QUEEN, not Melting QUEER” in *The Melting Queen* (NeWest Press) by **Bruce Cinnamon**. A dog bites Kora’s hand while she saves her brother from a pack of wild dogs in *The Tiger Flu* (Arsenal Pulp Press) by **Larissa Lai**. Marie downs a glass of scotch as she reminisces about her parents in *The Birds That Stay* (Second Story Press) by **Ann Lambert**. Jennie catches Julie snooping in her orange tent and offers her breakfast in *Land Mammals and Sea Creatures* (ECW Press) by **Jen Neale**. Skinnyboy tells Heather his band’s music is a mix of Nirvana, Joni Mitchell and a hint of Bob Marley in *Reproduction* (Random House Canada) by **Ian Williams**.

NOTED ELSEWHERE

The *Brantford Expositor* says *Beyond Forgetting: Celebrating 100 Years of Al Purdy*, edited by **Howard White** and **Emma Skagen** is a “pure delight”; Anonymous Reader, the sole reviewer of the book on *bookshout*, gives it five stars; according to the *Vancouver Sun*, one of the five reasons to check out the book is the tribute to Purdy “celebrating, exploring and criticizing Canada in his work”; Catherine Owens says on *Marrow Reviews* she “can hear [Al] harrumphing contentedly over [the book] from whatever pub in the afterlife he now graces with his presence.” Meeni Levi on *goodreads.com* says *Little Warlord* by **Roni Simunovic** is “a satisfying yarn with some nicely drawn characters”; van-ludwig-writes posts on Tumblr “let me buy your book please”; and ein Wurm on Twitter says Simunovic “did such a fantastic job.” The writer Carol Rose Daniels says *I Am a Body of Land* by **Shannon Webb-Campbell** “forces readers out of polite conversation”; Chris on *goodreads.com* says the poems are accessible and moving; and the writer Susan Musgrave says the poems cross “borders, margins, treaties, yellow tape warning.”

The GEIST Cryptic Crossword

Prepared by Meandricus

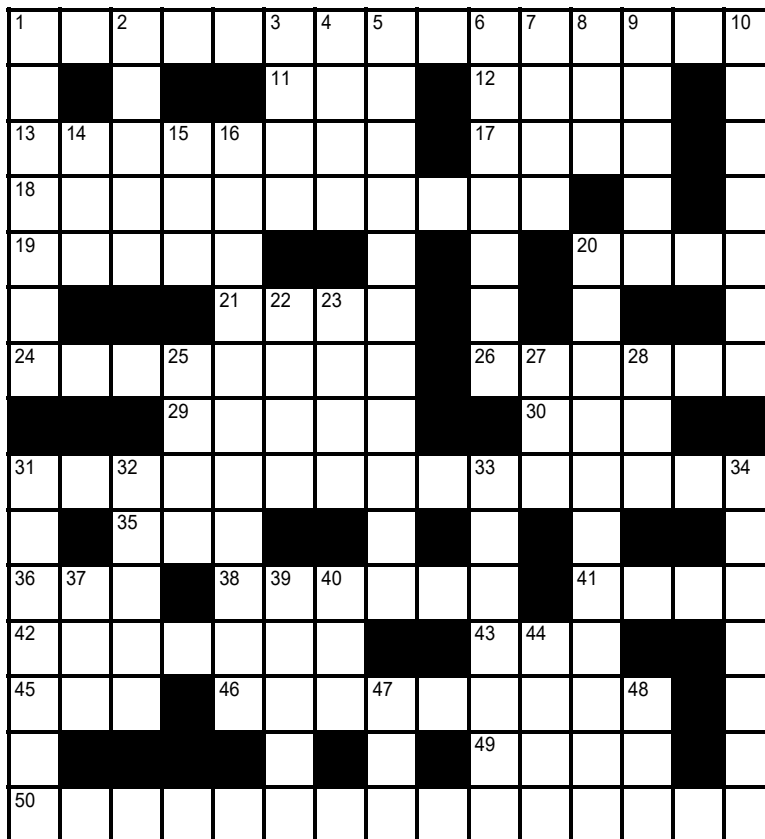
Send a copy of your completed puzzle, along with your name and address, to:

Puzzle #111 GEIST
210-111 West Hastings St.
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Fax 604-677-6319

The winner will be selected at random from correct solutions received and will be awarded a one-year subscription to *Geist* or—if already a subscriber—a Geist magnet. Good luck!

ACROSS

- 1 Last Xmas, Jacob wasn't around to see that grouchy guy Aladdin as a rodeo star (4)
- 11 Drink this. You're so pale that there must be something wrong with you
- 12 After you bring in that fish, let's have some Scotch and go dancing!
- 13 I'm aghast! An awkward position like that must hurt!
- 17 What do you think? It's a bit rough but could be brilliant
- 18 I don't get it: in the end they paid and then couldn't hold onto it (3)
- 19 Start by wrapping that up and then have some candy with the host
- 20 It sucks that those guys with yellow footwear went missing from Alice's aviary
- 21 I always mix up MSF with that other group (abbrev)
- 24 Dad, Pedro is extremely good-looking except when he croaks (2)
- 26 She spat an answer like she was going to take a piece out of me (2)
- 29 That long-armed fellow used to be a person of the forest
- 30 My French self would like to join that seafaring group (abbrev)
- 31 Let's start by not leaping onto my essential meaning (3)
- 35 Without Vee it still comes out equal
- 36 At 11 we need to hop east (abbrev)
- 38 Enid, go see if that book's on the bedside table
- 41 Not so popular, not so talented, not so fabulous? Guess I'll write a diary!
- 42 C'mon Ned, let's judge their fitness
- 43 Gregor and Julian's first (abbrev)
- 45 Put on your cap before you trade with the aliens (abbrev)
- 46 Isaac, pour more gravy for Greedy Guts!
- 49 In the EU, jumping over a cord in a gang can help you in Battle of the Stars (abbrev)
- 50 No non-profit true to itself would indicate they weren't going to give it back

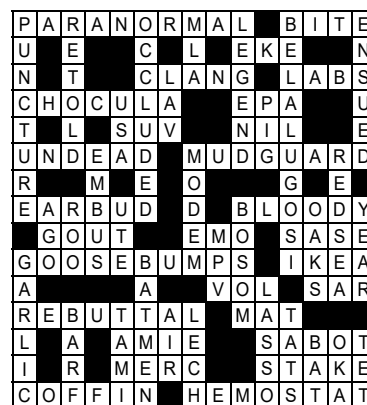


DOWN

- 1 We need Dad to turn this job around before the end (2)
- 2 In Rome they practised chado for one purpose only (2)
- 3 It's mental because in this you'd be the opposite of this
- 4 Molly loved to eat one to clear things up
- 5 Poor Howard's dang done a skeedaddle with that pretty little gal (3)
- 6 This points to the option of taking the express to the southern hemisphere
- 7 It's kind of archaic to give advice to the clarinetist. It might confuse them
- 8 That horse sounds like an old female by another name
- 9 Let's sing about the Santa Ana that blew through there so we don't forget about it
- 10 After she died, a graphic artist got busy (2)
- 14 He goes ballistic when I suggest that he stay close to home (abbrev)
- 15 Sporty Olympians who aren't from the mainland often use a code (abbrev)
- 16 Reagan redid things so that the bell was exactly the same (3)
- 20 I can't eat the donuts, Dad, I'm stuck in the mine in an ice fog! (2)
- 22 Sounds like that dreamboat could have been my secret number 7
- 23 When Benedict blabbed he sounded pretty good
- 25 Why did Alex always criticize his namesake?
- 27 I'll just run out to the store for a cold bite

- 28 After we eat that pasty stuff, we'll dance with weights
- 31 She can certainly get aroused when we make things interesting (2)
- 32 The way to the end may need capital
- 33 He had a fine run but she got more laughs
- 34 In '63 Desmond had a record-making break (2)
- 37 I know it's legal but why is my belly getting bigger?
- 39 Hola amigo! Sex and flying are what we're studying today
- 40 Curses, it's almost defect-free! (abbrev)
- 44 Don't tell me you ain't past it!
- 47 Barb's grass is at the end of the lawn
- 48 Sounds like Susan spends money in the city but not in the north

The was no winner for Puzzle 110



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