

GEIST

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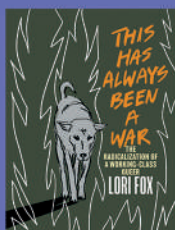
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The Insulin Soldiers / Lady Wrestler Downed at 43 / Short Long-Distance Lit

BOOKS AT EVERY THRESHOLD.



THIS HAS ALWAYS BEEN A WAR

Lori Fox

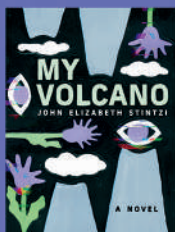
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Chelsea Vowel

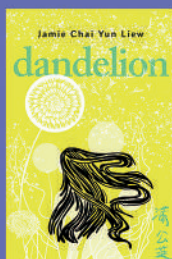
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COVER IMAGE: "Peach Blossom Island (Grow Lamp)" by Howie Tsui, 2019, pigment on mulberry paper. This work belongs to the series "Parallax Chambers," which brings together ink drawing and computer programming to blend imagery from martial arts fiction and the Kowloon Walled City, an ungoverned enclave that existed between the borders of China and Hong Kong from 1898 to 1994. See the whole series at howietsui.com.



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Mason Zeinali biked 101 km around downtown Toronto, tracking his route using Strava, an app that lets users track and map their fitness activities using GPS. Zeinali submitted the results to a Strava art contest hosted by the University of Toronto Road Racing Club, which he, of course, won.

STOLEN GENERATION

I came to learn about Randy Fred and his remarkable story after reading a CBC article. I live in Brisbane, Australia, where the stain of the stolen generation (Australia's version of the residential school system) permeates life to this day. I'm so grateful that a publication like yours exists to broaden the national discourse. G'day and thank you from Australia.
—*Farah, Brisbane*

READING AND REALIZING

I used to visit the Fred family home when I was younger, and friends with one of Randy's children. Through those years, I never knew I was in the home of a man who would help rectify the wrongs done to Indigenous people. I knew about the case he was involved in (where, in the late '90s, Fred and other survivors of the Alberni Indian Residential School sued the Government of Canada and United Church of Canada for their complicity in the abuse of students), but that's all it was to me: a case. Here I am now almost twenty years later, reading and realizing. I wonder if all those times I walked into their home and saw Randy Fred quietly typing away on his computer, he was working on opening the eyes of Canadians

to injustice, changing history without my knowing it. My respect for the entire Fred family is endless.

—*Raymond Bell Surette*

Read "Resistance and Renewal" by Randy Fred in Geist 118.

TOY VERSION RACISM

"Toy Version Racism" (No. 116) is a well written and informative report. Desmond Cole gives detailed evidence of the history of systemic racism in Toronto, particularly the carding of racialized people. After reading this article, I will be reading his book, *The Skin We're In*. Thank you for publishing such high quality journalism on current and controversial topics.

—*E. Crawford*

CHECKERED PAST

I recently discovered "Checkered Past" by Robert Everett-Green (No. 99), a wonderful article about a sports coat that belonged to my late brother-in-law, Walter Buhl Ford III, in the 1960s. I was happy to learn that Buhl's coat had found a new home and that its craftsmanship was truly appreciated. I know Buhl would have loved that it was valued and well cared for.

—*D.C. Josh Spaulding III*

ARTISTS IN THIS ISSUE

Anna Binta Diallo is a multidisciplinary visual artist who investigates memory and nostalgia to create unexpected narratives surrounding identity. Her work has been exhibited across the world and she is the recipient of the Black Designers of Canada Award of Excellence. She lives in Winnipeg, MB, on Treaty 1 Territory. You can find her at annabintadiallo.com.

James Pollock is the author of *Sailing to Babylon* (Able Muse Press) and *You Are Here: Essays on the Art of Poetry in Canada* (The Porcupine's Quill). He has been a finalist for both the Griffin Poetry Prize and the Governor General's Literary Award for poetry. Read more of his work at geist.com. Pollock lives in Madison, WI and at jamespollock.org.

Noemie Lemasson works at a homeless shelter for women with severe mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders. She incorporates collage art as a form of art therapy for her clients to learn healthy coping skills. Her work consists of analog and upcycled collage art. She lives in New York City.

Morris Lum is a Trinidadian-born photographer/artist whose work has been exhibited and screened across North America. The images that accompany "Don't Worry, Leonardo Has a Plan" by K'ari Fisher on pages 42-50 are from his series "Visitors Information," an investigation of the historical, commercial and residential sites that surround Simcoe Street in Oshawa, ON. See more at morrislum.ca.

Howie Tsui (徐浩恩) works in a wide range of media. He employs a stylized form of decisive imagery to disarm broadening hegemonic regimes. His work has been exhibited at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Burrard Arts Foundation and elsewhere. He is represented by Patel Brown and lives in Vancouver, BC. You can find him at howietsui.com.

The buttons throughout this issue are courtesy of **The ArQuives**, the largest independent LGBTQ2+ archive in the world. Since 1973, the organization has been dedicated to collecting, preserving, and celebrating the stories and histories of LGBTQ2+ people in Canada. The images were originally published in *Out North: An Archive of Queer Activism and Kinship in Canada* (Figure 1 Publishing) by Craig Jennex and Nisha Eswaran.

WRITE TO GEIST

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Flying the Coop

Sara Cassidy

You can't break eggs without making an omelette



"I'll be back in a few hours," I tell my teen son as I leave the house, "with eggs." He is 6'1" and lean as a knife. He works out daily, so four eggs is nothing. I had thought I'd pick some up at a supermarket, but when I call in at my friend's, five hens are scratching exuberantly in the yard after days of being cooped up—literally. My friend hands me four eggs straight from the nest box. The eggs are remarkably different one from the other in size and colour and

thickness of the shell. As each year passes, the peculiarities of every tangible thing sing louder.

My friend and I decide to walk to what is called the Chinese cemetery. On the way, we pass Ross Bay Cemetery, named for Isabella Ross, a Métis woman from near Winnipeg who in the 1850s became both BC's first female and first Indigenous "registered landowner" (that's the unassuming term that city historians use).

Isabella Ross's interesting accomplishment is usually explained away by the fact she was married to a Scottish chief trader for the Hudson's Bay Company. But he died years before she bought the land, offed by appendicitis while she was pregnant with their tenth child.

Isabella Ross's hundred-acre parcel faced what we now call the Salish Sea, and was so filled with waterfowl—ducks and geese and grebes, presumably—she named it Fowl Bay Farm. Eventually, after Ross had sold off parcels to stay financially afloat, the city bought the rest to use as a cemetery, where Isabella is now buried alongside James Douglas and Emily Carr and Billy Barker.

The Chinese community was given Ross Bay Cemetery's "L Block," to share with Japanese and Indigenous communities. People's names were not put on their graves, only a cruel noun and a number. L Block lay so close to the shore (this was before a seawall was built) graves would be washed away in storms, so the Chinese Benevolent Association bought the site up the road. The Chinese cemetery is one of my favourite places to visit. No burials are performed here anymore, but everyone is remembered. I like to visit the altar, where people leave oranges and other offerings, sometimes a cigarette. Today the only item is an egg, half lost in the altar's shadows.

When I boil eggs for my son, I boil them for ages. What is it with kids and soft yolks? Sometimes I'll forget and remember the eggs when the water's nearly boiled away. My mother forgot an egg in this way. When she left

her desk to get a cup of tea, there it was, “a little sphere of ash.” The other day I similarly forgot something for a long time. The grey in my hair was looking like pigeon feathers, so I’d bought some henna—the fake commercial kind. I was supposed to rinse it after twenty minutes, but by the time I remembered, two hours had passed. My hair is now a dark mass, like a bad wig, that rebuffs light. My friends respond in different ways. Some don’t notice at all. Others notice but don’t say a thing. Others notice and say “Wow, you did your hair.” Some try to say something nice, like “It looks pretty good!” One said, “You can re-colour it, you know.” And I’m sure another one would go even further: “Why don’t you come over and I’ll help you re-colour it?”

It reminds me of a piece of advice I once got about advice. I was sorting out a tricky situation—a relationship that was fifty percent deeply joyful and fifty percent deeply miserable: do I stay or do I go? I started asking friends what I should do. One said to me, “Consider which friends you’re going to for advice. That should tell you something about what you want to hear.” I love advice. My sisters do too—we beg each other for advice. It’s terribly maligned, advice. Because of sexism. Women give advice, men dispense wisdom.

I studied philosophy at university in the 1980s and never once studied a woman. I was never taught by a woman either. Or by any BIPOC. All these men were going on about this lofty thing called the human condition, and I remember thinking, Well, whatever that is, it is something I’ll never experience. The human condition had nothing to do with me. Some days if I think about it too long I want to get my tuition back. I can feel the bills being counted into my outstretched hand.

And to think there’d been Hypatia of Alexandria (murdered by a mob of Christians!), Simone de Beauvoir,

FLASHLIGHT

Nothing is braver; darkness its element,
its gear a diode, batteries, a case,
a switch, a focus, and a temperament
suited to discovery in the face

of ignorance. It finds lost things, keyholes,
targets, and the way, with photons hurled
at mystery. It understands its role is
to propagate some light into the world.

—James Pollock

Joyce Mitchell Cook... That ten years before I was born, Hannah Arendt had written a book called *The Human Condition!* Arendt was very interested in totalitarianism, and “identified as the root of tyranny the act of making other human beings irrelevant,” as Maria Popova puts it in a *Brain Pickings* article. In her essay “The Eggs Speak Up,” Arendt warns against fighting the big evils without fighting the little ones; they are all connected. She discusses how Stalin graduated along his expansively repressive path, from revolution, where “you can’t make an omelette without breaking a few eggs”—“eggs” being people—to “you can’t break eggs without making an omelette,” where repression is integral to the political machine.

Arendt believed the “antidote” to totalitarianism is “love of the world,” as Popova puts it, and wrote that love’s goal is the kind of fearlessness that exists in the notion of eternal afterlife, where people are safe from dispossession.

I wish I’d learned about Hannah Arendt in my twenties. If I had, I’m sure I would have been braver all these years. What I’m trying to do now is to be aware when I cross paths with repression and dispossession, omissions and lies, dismissal and diminishment. Sometimes the evidence is quick, in passing, a little blaze of sun between leaves. Sometimes it’s a lot closer, like heat on a burn. Sometimes I find I’m the one maintaining the fire—in my ignorance, my lack of questioning, my lazy comforts. I can worry about my hair, be anointed with my friends’ advice, pedal my bike along the shore with eggs in my pocket—have love for the world—but none of that means I’m not on my guard, ready and willing to hear about people’s pain and strength.

Sara Cassidy’s novel Nevers was a finalist for the 2020 Governor General’s Literary Award in Young People’s Literature. She regularly publishes short personal essays on Instagram @sarascassidy. Find more of her work in Geist 89, 96 and 98.

Black Velvet, If You Please

ROBYN LUDWIG

The secret is in the velvet



*Joy Caros paints a portrait of Spencer Tracy, who appeared in the film *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*.*

The phrase “velvet painting” brings to mind crying clowns and softcore tropical nudes, stacked unceremoniously in thrift shops or flea markets. Among these you’re unlikely to find a valuable Edgar Leeteg, the only velvet artist to achieve any degree of name recognition; but you may happen upon a neglected gem by one of four Canadian women—Minn Sjolseth-Carter,

Dorothy Francis, May Clarke, Joy Caros—who painted prolifically, pragmatically and obscurely, on velvet.

In my early twenties, I received my first piece of velvet art, a hideous, enormous still life of a bowl of fruit, purchased at Value Village by a friend as a gag gift for my birthday. Over the next two decades I’ve acquired three dozen velvet paintings, including a

“Velvis” that I religiously lint brush, an unsigned, slightly crooked, crown-of-thorns Jesus haggled from a Winnipeg antiques shop, and a narrow assemblage of blue flowers on black velvet, with a typewritten inscription on pink card stock: “VI Waddington, Winnipeg.” A search revealed the artist as Viola Clara Martha Waddington (1916–2003), whose obituary referred to unspecified “creative talents.” I feel object empathy for the paint-by-numbers kit paintings made by women artists like Waddington, a feeling as irrational as my affection for unattributed velvet paintings made in assembly-line factories. I rescue their velvety floral arrangements, consigned, as the unwanted craft projects of amateurs and hobbyists, to online classifieds, cobwebbed attics, garage sales. Or worse, to landfills. I trace the origins of my velvet hoarding tendencies to a fire that gutted my family home when I was twelve. I learned that the only safe attachment to possessions comes with things that are cheap, laughable, easily replaced.

In 2018, I purchased, through Kijiji, a velvet portrait of an elderly Asian man, signed “Min Sjolseth” [sic] and entitled “Sommy Bing.” I discovered that Minn Sjolseth-Carter (1919–1995) was a Norwegian-born artist who settled in Vancouver in 1957 and opened the Minn-Tonge gallery, downtown on Pender Street. There she produced oil-on-black-velvet portraits of Asian and Polynesian men, women and children, in sufficient quantities to still appear regularly on auction sites. I got in touch with her daughter, the visual artist Laila Campbell, who stated bluntly in an email, “Somehow these works were very popular then.” Sjolseth-Carter closed the gallery in 1967, quitting velvet and committing herself exclusively to other media. After her death, much of her substantial body of work was accessioned by museums and galleries, but not one of her velvets.

In March 2020 I spotted a Dorothy Francis (1923–2016) painting on Craigslist and drove out to New Westminster to meet the owner. I parked illegally in the cul-de-sac of a high-rise condo development. Wearing surgical gloves and a cloth mask, I handed twenty-five dollars to an older gentleman, who wore a mask but no gloves. He handed me a 20" x 27" portrait of an elderly Asian man brushed into soft brown velvet, an offensively hackneyed piece that I was both excited and ashamed to get my hands on. The seller seemed relieved that the painting had found an appreciative buyer. At home, I emailed Francis's son, the visual artist Tim Francis, who wrote, "Part of mom's motivation to paint on velvet was doing portraits because she thought they could be compelling. The other part was likely financial. With five young children I know my father pushed her to

produce work that would sell." Five years after her death, Francis remains only known for her watercolours, pastels and acrylics on paper and canvas.

In late March 2020, unemployed and bored as a result of the pandemic, I decided to track down Joy Caros (b.1932), the indisputable queen of velvet painting. Caros came across the phone line as formidable. With little sentimentality she described her early years as an artist in Vancouver. She experimented first with difficult-to-handle chalk on velvet. She plied her trade painting portraits for tourists in Stanley Park, and for customers at Trader Vic's Polynesian-themed restaurant in Coal Harbour. Vancouver's Jewish community provided her a stable source of lucrative commissions throughout the 1950s. What changed the course of her career was a tour of Hawaii, and an invitation to visit the

gallery of the art dealer Barney Davis. Davis represented Leeteg, whom he marketed as the "Gauguin of American velvet painting." He hired Caros to surreptitiously retouch Leeteg paintings for sale. Also in Hawaii, while exhibiting her velvets at the Hilton Hawaiian Village hotel, Caros had a chance meeting with the director Stanley Kramer. He commissioned a dozen portraits of the cast of his 1963 film *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*, flying her out to Hollywood.

Back home in 1964, Caros painted the Beatles on velvet. She offered the painting to the local DJ Red Robinson in exchange for front-row seats to the Beatles' only concert in Vancouver. Later that year, Caros took her velvet paintings on a cross-country tour of the Canadian Pacific Railway grand hotels and sold out by the time she left Toronto for Montreal.

Caros left Canada and spent more than thirty years in Italy. Abroad she marketed her trademark velvet iconography: water and tear droplets on Polynesian women and children. She continued to pursue sales through exhibits at hotels in Europe and North America. In the late 1990s, she left behind velvet as a canvas. Family portraits commissioned by the visually impaired singer Andrea Bocelli were her last velvet works.

During our conversation, Caros said Europeans respect velvet more than Americans do. She lamented "commercial junk" reproductions and forgeries that devalued her work, and she spoke with exasperation about efforts to defend the copyright to her images. Yet she also talked animatedly about licensing her work for pillow-cases and candy wrappers. She stated, "I don't miss velvet. There is no market for it. I don't think about it."

Caros came across as dismissive of her velvet work, but fiercely proud of her technique. Able to produce one painting a week, Caros would stretch velvet over hardboard, sketch an

Sunday Morning Sidewalk

HENRY DOYLE

It's God's day off and mine too.
There are tents on every block and back alley now.
As I walk down sidewalks cleared by rain
to get a coffee and newspaper,
I complain to myself about the price of the paper.
But I need that crossword.
Maybe this time I will finish it, although I never do.
In front of the Ovaltine restaurant, a 5 1/2 foot woman
in a drenched grey hoodie weaves and flails
through Hastings Street traffic
like a scarecrow in the wind.
Horns blare at her "I don't give a shit" smile.

Henry Doyle has been working as a custodian and maintenance worker in shelters and SROs on the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver since 2008. He now works in the biggest shelter in North America. Anvil Press published his debut collection, No Shelter, in 2021.

outline with chalk or pastel and dry-brush oil paint with pig-hair brushes. A technique, she boasted, “few artists can manage.” She regaled how a visitor to one of her shows in Italy snipped off a piece of the velvet, believing that “the secret was in the velvet.”

In April 2020, I stumbled upon the work of the velvet artist May Clarke (date of birth and death unknown) of Ontario. A slight biography on the Historical Peel Artists website said that Clarke became a “professional artist” in 1964 due to “public demand” for her oils on black velvet and that “as fast as she completed a picture on velvet, a buyer would purchase it from her.” I was able to locate one original May Clarke, acquired by a woman in Ontario from a thrift store: a portrait of a sultry, exoticized woman, with a blank expression, hooded in lace. It was a technically competent, if unoriginal, composition that evoked the uncanny valley, as unnerving as the big eyes of a Margaret Keane painting, whose work recently experienced a resurgence after Tim Burton made a biopic about her called *Big Eyes*. Even a fan such as myself has to acknowledge velvet paintings as aesthetically disturbing and problematic as artifacts of appropriation and cringeworthy stereotypes.

A few weeks after our phone interview, I accepted an invitation to meet with Caros, who is in her eighties, at her New Westminster apartment. The walls were decorated salon-style with her oil-on-canvas paintings. She showed me some of the velvets in her private collection, unframed for storage. The fabric, a black rayon cotton velvet, with upright hairs that do not flatten when pressed with paint, she said, came from a wholesaler in New York.

She turned the edges of the fabric, revealing a patterned design that can help differentiate authentic from fake.

She then held the loose fabric up to the light. With a true Caros painting,

Ash

TERENCE BYRNES

The old man on the balcony
across Ash
keeps watch over our street,
whose brief name
spells out the powdery end of things.

The public air transmits
his days wirelessly
to my open window:
the undisciplined bark of his phone alarm
the radio’s diffusion of weather and sports
the entreaties of grey-suited heralds of God
the greeting to an indifferent neighbour
the wet choke of his cough
the folding of his empty chair
the sighing exhaustion of day’s end.

As I listen,
it seems I should be able to step out
and walk on the thick summer air
across Ash below
to silently enter his flat,
where I imagine seeing:
an odalisque on black velvet
a sink rimmed with amber rust
car parts degreasing in a coffee can
the carcass of a blind television
the curling pages of last year’s calendar.

I don’t know. Perhaps that is unfair.
Perhaps his flat, like mine,
is spare and airy,
decorated with his daughter’s awards
for films on climate change, refugees,
the forthcoming vaccine,
his radio always tuned to CBC One,
as he listens and waits
as I listen and wait
for news of the annihilating fire.

Terence Byrnes is a Montréal writer and photographer. See more of his work at terencebyrnes.com and geist.com.

she explained, you can “see the light through.” She added with glee, “You could run it through the washing machine!” I asked if she knew Dorothy, Minn or May. Caros answered with a defiant, “Nobody can copy me. Joy Caros and that’s all.” Before I left, Caros expressed hope that a retrospective exhibition could be held for her before she passes.

In September 2020, I chatted with Caren Anderson, former co-owner of the Velveteria Museum in Los Angeles, which shuttered in 2019. She told me about the self-taught American velvet painter Cecelia “CeCe” Rodriguez, still painting in Las Vegas at the age of 101, though no longer on velvet. Anderson lamented that velvet painting was “another thing men had claimed for themselves.” I think about women like Rodriguez, Caros, Clarke, Sjolseth-Carter, Francis, whose names and work are invisible to “high art” critics, curators and collectors, even to those who champion outsider and kitsch art. Women whose work stamped a female gaze onto the ubiquitous exoticized bodies of velvet painting. I worry for the few remaining elder stateswomen of velvet painting, like Caros and Rodriguez. I look forward to celebrating the end of the pandemic with a sickly sweet cocktail at the Waldorf Hotel in Vancouver, the walls of its historic Tiki Bar adorned with Leetegs. I examine suspiciously an “original” Joy Caros painting on eBay, on sale for the bargain of \$750, and I would love to hold it up to the light.

Robyn Ludwig is a script supervisor in the BC film and television industry. She holds a Master of Film and Literature from the University of York, UK. Her writing has been published in the Columbia Journal, Cartoon Research, Silent London and Vancouver Observer.

The Acknowledgements

STEPHEN SMITH

Any resemblances to persons living or dead are purely vindictive

In the Acknowledgements I cop to various, well, not exactly crimes, let’s call them *trespasses*: forgive me. I do some repenting, too, run a few retractions up the proverbial flagpole, the odd refutation. If I make some promises (and I do), it’s on the understanding that nobody is actually keeping track of what gets followed through on, let alone what doesn’t. Before I get around to thanking anyone, I say my sorries, my farewells. Any resemblances to persons living or dead, I disclaim, are purely vindictive. In bidding my adieus, I get some jabs in, and an uppercut. My low blows go lower than intended, and thereby mostly miss the mark. My tears are crocodile. My scores, I settle. The lyrics I quote without necessarily meaning to belong mostly to Bruce Cockburn, so shout-out to him. The parable I include gets a little garbled, then a little teary, it’s the one with the fishes or the loaves that are ... lost? I get into a whole thing about whether is there a word for a garbled parable—a garbale? *Let me be the first to admit that I’ve never been one to ask permission*, I write, *please would you allow me that?* The little prayer I attempt takes a turn for the worse, then another, and another. *You are ahead by a century*, I reiterate, and mean it. The italics are mine, I make clear, despite what you may have heard. Joking: I mean Gord Downie, of course, no disrespect to Bruce, in fact, kudos to him. My qualms are also crocodile, if that’s a thing. Is it? Crocodile qualms? The immunity I’m seeking no lawyer has, so far, been able to draft in a way that’s going to hold up in court. I name my muse and my nemesis, but not my friend Lyle, who never liked the limelight. *Ask anybody,*

I suggest. *Anybody?* I threaten my heroes, but they’re only idol threats. I make a point of listing, for posterity as much as anything, and to boost the word count, a few of my favourite words: *jazzercise, gumption, boxercise, lobsterine, tootle*. My influences are obvious to anyone who’s been paying attention, but what about my influencers? I throw in an invoice, just to fuck with people, which is to say, I guess, the powers that be. I let this be a warning. Don’t read the comments, I comment. And ask: are you not entertained? I discuss money-back guarantees, the idea of them as well as their history, which is surprising, if you bore down, the philosophy, the whole question of a world without risks, is that really one we’d be happy inhabiting? The moral of the story I hint at without getting into specifics. I go out on a limb, where I perform a little pirouette. *Just watch me*, I demand, with all due respect if not so much as a by-your-leave to Pierre Trudeau, which I guess is sort of an homage in its own right? We hardly knew ye, I say, or insinuate. Thank you, thank you, I bleat, so very kind, shedding more tears, a sneeze, bowing slightly at the waist, stretching those hamstrings, backing up slowly while sweeping a hand out in a final flourish, stop the presses, the show must go on, see you next time, *don’t tell me what the poets are doing, oh Tokyo, I never can sleep in your arms.*

Stephen Smith has written for the West End Phoenix, Canadian Geographic, Outside and The New York Times. He lives in Toronto and at puckstruck.com.

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FINDINGS



From Saskatchewan Book, a book of photos by George Webber, with text by Lorna Crozier. Published by Rocky Mountain Books in 2020. Saskatchewan Book contains two hundred photos of prairie landscapes and rural structures taken by Webber over a span of thirty years. The photos above were taken in 2018 in Saskatchewan. The photo

Ethical Remembering

LISA BIRD-WILSON

From the July/August 2021 issue of Quill & Quire. Lisa Bird-Wilson is a Métis and nêhiyaw writer. Her work has appeared in many anthologies and journals in Canada. Her first novel, Probably Ruby, was published in the summer of 2021 by Doubleday Canada. She lives in Saskatoon. Find more of her work at lisabirdwilson.com and at geist.com.

When I was in the midst of working on my 2016 poetry collection, *The Red Files* (Nightwood Editions), which reflects on the legacy of the residential school system—its impacts on families and

histories—I had a conversation over casual drinks with friends of friends, people I didn't know. The topic arose that I was a writer (none of them were). Asked what I was working on, I replied,

“A collection of poetry.”

“About what?”

“Well,” I hesitated. “My process has been to examine residential school photos and other archival sources and create poems from that experience.” We were in the dim amber lighting of a pub—the kind that puts you in a relaxed mood and lets you lower your defences over a couple of beers, enjoy a few laughs and some lighthearted conversation. I sensed the question, and more specifically my response, threatened to alter the mood. But I didn't yet have one answer about my residential school poetry for those who do not



on the left was taken near the junction of Highways 18 and 19 and the photo on the right was taken in Lemsford. George Webber's photographs have been published in Canadian Geographic, The New York Times and Geist. He lives in Calgary.

know or think about colonial history and its impacts on Indigenous lives, and another for people who get it and are on the same page. In that moment, I simply answered a question about my work—work that was encompassing and consuming and thoughtful and deep—as if we were all coming from similar understandings about the world. I soon realized I should have more consciously thought about the fact that I was the only Indigenous person at the table. But, like I mentioned, my defences were down.

In reaction to my answer about examining residential school photos and documents, one of the individuals blurted out, “What for?” with a force that was nearly physical, in a tone filled with revulsion and horror. They seemed truly bewildered as to why I would want to look so closely at such a thing. As if I

was writing poetry about excrement instead of about people, family members, and ancestors.

I’ve dissected that response over time, years in fact, and concluded that it was based on a non-Indigenous interpretation of residential school history, one that categorizes it as ugly and repulsive—too horrible to look at. But that response glosses over the fact that it’s only those in a privileged position who get to choose. Looking away is not an option for Indigenous people—it’s not for us to choose to look away from our families, relatives, ancestors; from a colonial history we didn’t ask for or deserve; from our own blood memory. We cannot simply opt out.

But what that dismissive response also misses, more importantly, is an appreciation that the history of our families and communities is full of

love. What I couldn't explain in that bar, in its warm amber light over a glass of beer, was what was happening to me as I wrote those poems—what I was in the middle of experiencing. The ways I was learning to be cognizant, daily, of tenderness. The ways I connected and reconnected with my relatives, my ancestors, as I read and observed and circulated their stories and their images—their essences—through my mental and physical being. How I was transformed, repeatedly, by the experience. The ways I was mindful of care—the new resonance the word *care-ful* held for me. And, most of all, how I was learning to approach the work with love.

How could I even hope to make those monias people see the children I saw in the photos from my grandparents' community? The little boys, particularly in one photo, laughing at something, the camera clicking at exactly the right moment, and how I latched onto their obvious joy as if my life depended on it. I wanted those boys to have that more than anything—to have joy and laughter. That was my wish for the children of that school. If residential schools stripped away Indigenous children's humanity, deprived them of the love that any child deserves, then I wanted to offer love and compassion to them in my words and my depictions; if I could have hugged them, I would have—their child spirits, their innocence. I wrote as much with my heart as my head. More even.

Maybe what I was experiencing was part of an ethical remembering. A collective ethic of blood-memory-love where we rely on one another, exist in relationship to one another—us, in the here and now and the various generations back as far as I can trace—in order to create and recreate and, ultimately, love ourselves. What I mean to say is: I do not exist without them—biologically, yes, but also spiritually, as I am created and recreated repeatedly by the act of knowing them. Likewise, their continued existence is reliant upon my creative work bringing them to life again and again as imagined subjects. And I will pass this imaginative gift along to my children, and they to theirs. In this iterative process, we compose one another across generations and time.

This circular building of identity, this imaginative work, is my response to the question, "What for?" The 215 children's graves discovered in May at the site of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School opens the wound again for those innocent victims—not the first and not the last. My response is to repeat: I love you, I see you, I hold you. I don't know what else to do as we grieve our children, our ancestors, our blood memory, ourselves.

For the children, for the future, for the past; that's what for. 🌿

Family Justice

VICKI LAVEAU-HARVIE

From The Erratics. Reissued by Knopf Doubleday, a division of Penguin Random House Canada Limited, in 2020. Reproduced by arrangement with the publisher. All rights reserved. Originally published by Finch Publishing in 2018. Vicki Laveau-Harvie was born in Canada and now lives in Australia. The Erratics is a memoir about her return to her hometown in Alberta. It won the Finch Memoir Prize in 2018 and the Stella Prize in 2019.

My parents live in paradise, twenty acres with a ranch house on a rise, nothing between you and the sky

and the distant mountains. Overlapping cedar shingles on the roof that will last for generations or until the house falls down.

No near neighbors.

The house is paradise in the same way the Hotel California is: a fortress with many bedrooms, a wine cellar, a mud room, a huge windowless library, a grand piano in the great room, two furnaces, and a bomb shelter dug five meters deep into the hill in case Cuban missiles are ever aimed at the Turner Valley oilfields or the trout in Sheep Creek.

The doors of this house open to no one. The phone rings unanswered, unheard by my father, who finds his life livable if he takes the batteries out of his hearing aid, and ignored by my mother, who knows the world is out to get her. The leaves of the trembling aspens can shake all day like gold coins in air as clear as cider, but this is not a welcoming place.

So, early winter in the house a mile from the six-lane highway running straight south to the States. On this day a solid ribbon of eighteen-wheelers is gunning it full throttle for Great Falls, Montana, or Boise, Idaho, making the most of the open roads and hardly believing their luck, just a drift of powder across the road when you gear up, like icing sugar from a doughnut.

In the kitchen, my mother's hipbone crumbles and breaks and she falls.

They must have phoned someone. They must have opened the door to strangers who came to help. These strangers will have walked into this time-capsule house sealed against the outside world for a decade. The breaching of the no-go zone must have made a sound like a crowbar splintering wood.

Some days later, at the hospital, I prop myself up in a midblue tub chair in the social worker's room. Outside the sky is colorless, the landscape dun and dry, a wasteland waiting for snow.

The year's work is done on the land, and the wards on the floor below my mother's are full of farmers and ranchers under observation for a vague and undefinable malaise. It's the same every year. I blame the landscape, out there pining like a suitorless spinster for the snow, for the blinding swathe of white that will mask its disgrace and wrap it in beauty until the spring when, against all odds, bountiful things will pierce the earth, grow and flower.

At my parents' house, where I stay with my sister, my stick-figure skin-and-bones father creeps along the hallway at night to turn the thermostats up on the furnaces. My sister sighs and mutters as she turns them down and slams the door to her bedroom.

I don't care either way. I just wish she wouldn't sleep with her window wide open. Hasn't she read *In Cold Blood*? These sparsely populated spaces where the buffalo no longer roam draw sociopaths, people with guns and opportunistic local crackheads.

We are no match for any of those, such as we are: two women well past any semblance of bloom, often mistaken for twins in supermarkets and gas stations, which pisses off the younger of the two, and a shanking, shambling old man who is not, as I first feared, terminally stricken. It is simpler than that. He has been starving for some time and suffers, like Patty Hearst before him, from Stockholm syndrome.

So I sit in my tub chair facing the young social worker dispatched to get a bead on us, and we are

broaching the subject of my mother, her fractiousness which is disrupting hospital routine, her dicey rehab prospects, and her eventual discharge.

Or at least my vis-à-vis is trying to broach. I am gamely trying to pretend that I do not see her flipping through the index pages of the *Family Justice and Equity Handbook* in her mind, looking for an

“VANCOUVER CHINATOWN” MAY 31, 2020

*From One and Half of You by Leanne Dunic. Published by Talonbooks in 2021. Leanne Dunic is the author of To Love the Coming End (Book*bug) and The Gift (Book*bug). She lives on the unceded and occupied Traditional Territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh and səlihlwətaʔl peoples. Find her at leannedunic.com.*

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appropriate heading. My mother has told her that my sister and I disappeared decades ago and that the investigators she hired on several continents found no trace of us. But now, somehow sensing her frailty, smelling death and money, we have come in to land feet-first, like vultures in a western, wanting to put her away.

The last bit is true.

The young woman eyes me cautiously. It must have been hard when you were growing up, she begins.

I look balefully at her. I mean, she says, with a mother so... Her voice dies out. She looks to the landscape for help. I want to get this over with. I help.

LADY WRESTLER DOWNED AT 43

By Julia Morrison. From Prism International, Summer 1960, Volume 1:4. Julia Morrison received an MA from the University of Iowa. Her poems have appeared in New World Writing, Homage to Baudelaire, Accent and Poetry.

And she was strong.
Her muscles were the envy of old trees;
Those eyes were coins which could buy out the moon.
Her dinners were apparent on her face
For she never left a bite to feed
Whatever crawls about while we're asleep,
Yet her table was a kingdom of debris:
String, comb, spools—toys to please a cat.

And she took up her life at forty-three.
Perfume, shoes and scarves grew on her floors—
Exotic flowers lacking serious pots.
As she played well with life, it played with her:
Eyes and muscles, fearful of the floor,
Confused it with a table or the door;
She had her bedding fastened to the wall.

Her progress was the matter of a rule
Learned as invented. She invented well,
And there was no lack of teaching:
Who knew what rule might make tomorrow's grace?
Then her eyes grew cool, her muscles twitched.
No word was said when, fitful for the door,
Her strongest secret turned up on the floor. 🌀

Extreme? I say. Mercurial? Challenging, yes. Quite a vibrant personality, my mother.

To be blunt, she says, your mother can be difficult.

So. They've noticed.

I'm ready for this. I have rehearsed with my sister for this. I have had to, because here is what happened yesterday.

Supper time, yesterday evening. My sister is carving a chicken for dinner when the phone rings. She speaks on the phone for some minutes, carving knife in hand, then she hangs up and announces that they want to see us at the hospital to talk about my mother, in particular about something they call her difficulty adjusting. My sister looks to the ceiling and begins to exult like a true believer giving praise.

Finally, she cries. Somebody will finally believe us! They can see how crazy she is. They'll believe us now. She skewers a couple of old nonbelievers from our childhood on her carving knife on the way back to the stove.

In a flash I see our situation clearly. It's like a split screen, a two-part problem my sister and I have not spoken about in clear terms in the hours since we arrived here.

My mother is, by virtue of a crumbling bone, an osteoporotic hip, confined exactly where we need her to be: in a hospital, for an extended period of time, away from my father. If we're smart enough, we'll use the respite this broken bone affords us to make sure she never comes home at all, that she will remain confined, not for her hip but for a completely different reason, and that my father will have room to recover from her regimen of starvation and brainwashing.

They don't care about crazy, I say. It's not about crazy. She's in there for hip rehab and she's giving them a lot of trouble. They just want to make sure that we are ready for her to be discharged as soon as they can decently do it.

Watch what you wish for, I warn her. We don't want them to believe she's always been crazy. If they believe that, we can't make a case for keeping her confined from now on, somewhere where she can't kill Dad by increments.

Or in one go, I add, thinking of the rifle in its chamois cover propped in the corner of the study downstairs.

We'll need them to believe in a slightly modified metaphor: an unstable slope that has recently given way: a slippage like Frank Slide in the Rockies that

killed scores; a sudden cascading deterioration, maybe during the anesthetic for her hip. It could be true. It happens. We need her not to come home because she will perish in this house and so will her husband, so she must be seen unable to cope now, not as having always been that way.

This upsets my sister. She wants validation, vindication. She wants it to be about crazy. She wants to paint “I told you so” on the walls of the hospital, in blood. She has a case, but she can only indulge herself at a cost I am not willing to pay. I know I am right.

I win. With bad grace, she rehearses with me after dinner. We stand, like airline hostesses, feet



together. Here, I say, is your normal range of personality traits. I hold my hands a foot part, waist height, palms facing, as though pressing on the ends of a wholemeal sandwich loaf.

And this, I say, spreading my arms wide as though indicating an exit on the right, we wish, and an exit on the left, if only, is my mother's range. Tendency to extremes, challenging for loved ones. “Loved” in quotation marks.

And now, just recently, this unfortunate slippage, which has pushed her beyond any parameters our arms can encompass. Eyes down, palms up, helpless.

That is what we will say.

Repeat after me. 🌱

Bravado

TANYA TAGAQ

From Split Tooth. Published by Viking Canada, a division of Penguin Random House Canada Limited, in 2018. Reproduced by arrangement with the publisher. All rights reserved. Tanya Tagaq is an award-winning singer, composer and author. Split Tooth was shortlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize in 2018. You can find her at tanyatagaq.com.

It's a dusty summer night in the High Arctic. The sun is shining brightly overhead. The sun always brings life and mischief, serenity and visions. It's two o'clock in the morning and I've shrugged off my curfew. There will be hell to pay when I get home and my father's thunderous footsteps shake the house with a blazing ire that only he can conjure.

It's worth it to disobey and join my brethren in our celebration of freedom, electricity, and curiosity. Fingertips anxious and knock knees oscillating, we conjure and conspire; we harness desires and swat away doubt. The winter was long and oppressive. We all knew that soon we would be in our teenaged years and this time was precious. All children on the cusp of puberty seem to understand that this magic time will end soon. Greeting the

future and yearning for maturity and yet planted firmly in the moon. Revelling in our youth, wishing it would never end. Never seeing past the tips of our noses as we are driven through our bodies with the perfect lightning strike of growing cells and perceived immortality. We transcend time and pluck smiles off each other's faces. Dig giggles out of rib cages and shoot insults as if they were compliments.

There is a siren that sounds in our small town to announce the curfew. At noon and at 10 p.m. Every time the siren sounds all the sled dogs howl, and I imagine that they think there is a large, loud god dog that rules the land howling. I equate this with religion. A short-sighted and desperate attempt for humans to create reason and order in a universe we can't possibly comprehend. The simple truth is we are simply an expression of the energy of the sun. We are the glorious manifestation of power of the universe. We are the fingertips of the force that drives the stars, so do your job and F E E L.

Our black-haired human pack has decided to hang out by the steps behind the school. Our gnashing teeth and gums hungry for activity, tongues generating conflict and imaginary realities where we were interesting and relevant, not just kids on the school steps. Not part of a boring old town of twelve hundred souls (if you only count the humans, but whoever said only humans can

have the universe living in them?). The back steps are a less conspicuous choice than the front because the summer sun reveals all to prying eyes. There is a large water tank by the back steps; this is good. We can use it to hide behind if we hear the bylaw truck. This is one of our favourite games,

NEW NORMAL WORDS

A selection of new subject headings at the Vancouver Public Library, created between February and October, 2021.

Computer anxiety
Minority women activists
Noncitizens (replacing: Aliens)
Radical Faeries (New Age movement)
Zoom (Electronic resource)
Asian American Jews
Indigenous legislators
Neurodiversity
Self employed people with disabilities
Suburbs in literature
Cake pans
Chemin de fer Congo-océan
Energy bars (Snack foods)
Kookaburra
Optogenetics
Sea bunny
Settler colonialism
African American conservatives
Audiodescription
Bulbuls
Cultured meat
Fathers of children with disabilities
Journalistic errors
Thought insertion
Penetration testing (Computer networks)
Rural gay men
Situational awareness
Critical race theory
Health literacy
Minority judges
Travel with horses
COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020–
Indigenous businesspeople
Older blacks 🐼

hiding from the bylaw enforcement officer. His job is to drive around town and chase the kids home and shoot stray dogs. He wants us to be safe in bed. Are beds safe anyway?

Brightness. Laughter. We are a gangly group of five girls and one small boy. We are stuck in the horrid torrent of awkward crushes and curious sideways glances. Clumsy advances with no goal other than to say someone liked you. The time of wistfully watching the teenagers French kiss by the jukebox and hoping one day we would be free to say yes. In those days I didn't even know how to say no.

All I had was my speed and agility. Alas the boys have just recently gotten faster, stronger, and taller than I and it breaks me because I used to be the best. My ego is in a state of flux. I am powerless now and have lost my flagpole in our social setting. I was the fastest. It's a tough pill to swallow for a tomboy. I miss being able to beat the boys. I used to be a ball-kicker. The one boy hanging out with us this evening is a little younger than the rest of us; cocksure, and small for his age. His skin is dark brown and his eyes so black. I love the way his hair is so black that it shines blue in the sun. He is so very cute, yet his voice has not cracked yet, his balls haven't dropped. The girls want to hold him like a doll. But he's a dick, the way only insecure people can be a dick. He annoys me in a lot of ways, but nothing needles me more than the way he makes fun of me for having a crush on my friend. She doesn't know it, so the boy's adolescent judgment leaves me embittered and confrontational. I've always loved girls, and our insufferable town sees this love as deviance. This little shithead is not helping.

We are picking up stale old cigarette butts and smoking the last puffs off them, burning our lips and fingers on the indignity of it all. There are always plenty of butts around the Bay or the Co-op, but we have exhausted the supply tonight. The high school kids usually smoke around these back steps, so we find some good long ones because the kids have to throw them away when the teachers try to sneak up and catch them red-handed.

The little boy is in a taunting mood. He is yapping about how boys are just better than girls. Boys are stronger, boys are faster, and boys are smarter. Faggots are disgusting and he hates them. He looks like a mosquito to me. I have an idea. I jump down from my perch on the railing and grab him from behind. He is so slight. I wrestle him

easily to the ground and tell the others to help me. We are laughing hysterically. I peel off his shirt. His little brown tummy is so taut. Wiry little six-pack, skinny little arms. We take off his pants too. His ankles are so thin. He is so delicate. He has large black moles peppered on his dark skin. He smells like smoke and panic. He has no hair yet. Two girls hold his legs, one his arms, and I'm pulling his clothes off. It's our turn to be mean.

He is yelling for us to quit it, but we are tickling him, so he is also laughing uncontrollably. We leave his underwear and socks alone for dignity's sake and take his pants and shirt. We run as fast as we can towards Main Street with our bounty as he follows, screaming for us to return his clothing. As we turn the corner onto Main, we see other groups of kids. I assume that he won't dare be seen unclothed, but he bravely turns the corner and simply throws the



other group a toothy smile and keeps sprinting. Gasping breaths and burning lungs, thighs aflame; we let the world own us. Soles flying and hearts pounding, we turn the next corner and see a group of adults. Gleefully squealing, we keep going knowing he will not pursue. He won't risk being seen by adults.

I think of all the times I have been told I was inferior for being a girl. I think about all the times men have touched me when I didn't want them to. I think about how good it feels to be waving the pants of one of the cock boys in the air while he hides behind the corner. We keep running and circle the school. He is waiting for us on the other side, swatting mosquitoes and crying. This is not the last time he will get himself into trouble with bravado that cannot be backed up. He ends up dying that way. 🍌

Snow Day

CALVIN WHARTON

From Three Songs by Hank Williams. Published by Turnstone Press in 2002. Calvin Wharton is the Chair of Creative Writing at Douglas College in New Westminster, BC, and edited Event from 1996 to 2001. He co-edited the poetry anthology, East of Main, with Tom Wayman, and has published a chapbook of poems, Visualized Chemistry; and the nonfiction Rowing, with Silken Laumann.

Even though she's a year older than me, it seems like I've been taking care of Becky all my life. There were the small things: taking the blame for her clumsiness or lack of attention, fixing things she'd broken before Dad found out. But the first time it moved outside our family was the winter I turned nine. A fierce Manitoba blizzard one night meant our school was closed the next day. Most of the kids in the neighbourhood were playing on a monstrous drift that had blown up against the railroad snow fence. I came climbing out of a tunnel and found two boys from her class holding her down, trying to shove snow inside the front of her

pants. I'd never been in a real fight before, but I knew what I had to do.

The first guy I just kicked in the ribs; he let out a whoof of air and rolled off Becky, onto his back. The other one jumped up and shouted, "What did you do that for?" He was large for his age, but so was I, and I remember the astonishment on his face, as if I'd interrupted some sacred rite.

This was a farm kid named Byron Kozak, who walked two miles each morning to come to our school. Maybe his parents didn't even know the school was closed that day. He stood there a moment, his cheeks red from the cold and exertion, and a line of snot trailing down his upper lip. He was broad across the chest and had a large head with a forest of dull black hair; his nickname was Cossack. "That's my sister," I said, and nailed him right in the centre of his looming, Slavic face. My dad had told me the best way to deal with a bully was to punch him in the nose before he expected anything.

The Cossack fell, shrieking, and I wiped my fist on the snow, more worried about having his snot on my mitts than about blood. I ignored the two boys and helped Becky up from the ground. She cried all the way home, and I wondered how much of what had happened I should tell my parents. 🍌

Takeaway

CHANG KUO-LI

From The Sniper. Copyright © 2019 by Chang Kuo-Li. English translation copyright © 2021 by Roddy Flagg. Reprinted with permission from House of Anansi Press, Toronto. Chang Kuo-Li is an award-winning novelist. He has published more than thirty books. He lives in Taiwan.

Never-ending rain, and now even heavier. Keelung was a port town, but Wu was starting to think there was as much water in the air as in the harbour.

The car pulled into the driveway of the Laurel Hotel, on the southern side of the port, just as Wu was draining the last of a large 7-Eleven coffee he'd picked up to revive himself. On the way up, the glass-walled elevator looked out over the port and two Cheng Kung-class frigates rocking at anchor at the naval base.

As he left the elevator Wu saw uniformed officers clustered at the door to Room 917. A sweet stench clawed at the back of his throat as he approached, and he stopped to borrow a face mask.

So, Kuo Wei-chung, Petty Officer First Class on a Kee Lung-class destroyer, had shot himself that morning. The hotel had called the local police, who rushed to the scene and then alerted the CIB.

The deceased was dressed neatly in a blue-grey uniform and was sitting with a view of the ocean. He had shot himself in the right temple. The bullet had exited the left side of his skull, accompanied by various blood drops, brain chunks, and bone fragments that had proceeded to splatter the previously pure white and still creaseless bed-sheets. The gun was a T75 semi-automatic pistol, a version of the Beretta M92F made by the 205th Armory—9 mm, effective range of fifty metres, fifteen-round magazine, known primarily for being out of date and inaccurate. But it was hard to be inaccurate when shooting at your right temple with your right hand.

The local police had sealed off the entire floor and, thirty minutes earlier, informed the Navy, which had sent seven uniformed sailors to stand to attention at the door of the room. But it was still

Wu's crime scene; the Navy could wait.

Wu glanced over the available info: Kuo Wei-chung, thirty-eight, time-served Petty Officer First Class, married, two sons, lived in Taipei. Kuo's wife was on her way to identify the corpse, courtesy of a navy car.

At a full-throated cry of "Attention!" Wu turned to see three naval officers enter the room. The man in front, a captain, wrinkled his nose in disgust as he surveyed the scene.

"Who's in charge here?" the captain asked.

Wu was not pleased. Who had let them into his crime scene? "The name's Wu, Criminal Investigation."

"Let's find somewhere we can talk," the captain said.

They made their way to a window by the bank of elevators. Wu was almost six feet, tall for the police, but this captain was a head above him. Well-muscled too, perhaps a bodybuilder in the past.

"We're shocked that this has happened. There's an ambulance on the way from Tri-Service General to take the body back to Taipei."

Tri-Service General? Wu pulled off his mask. "We haven't finished examining the scene yet, and we're still waiting for the medical examiner."

"Wasn't it a suicide?"

Like hell it was, Wu thought. What he said was: "Maybe not."

"If it wasn't a suicide, then what was it?"

Murder, Wu thought. But what he said was: "We just need to clear up a few things."

The captain scowled. "What things?"

Tamping down his temper, Wu forced himself to explain.

"The handle of the mug on the table in front of the deceased is pointing left. There are two boxes of takeaway food and two sets of chopsticks. A six-pack of beer, one opened and half-drunk..."

"So?"

"He must have arranged to meet someone, and..."

"Keep going," the captain told him, glaring.

"The position of the mug, with the handle to the left. He was left-handed."

"Fine, so he was left-handed. What else?"

There were limits to Wu's patience. "So he's there by himself, drinks some beer, eats a mouthful or two of takeaway. His friend doesn't turn up, or turns up but doesn't eat, and in a moment of



madness Kuo decides to try shooting himself with his right hand, just to see if he's as good a shot as with his left."

"Your name, Detective?"

"For the second time, Wu. That's spelt W-U..."

"Show a bit more respect."

Ignoring the attempted provocation, Wu continued.

"The chopsticks. The deceased's were on the left side, on a plate, and had been used. The other pair were still wrapped and placed on the other side of the table. He was waiting for a friend."

"A friend?" The captain frowned.

"The takeaway packaging in the bin was from a branch of Nanjing Roast Duck on Xinyi Road in Taipei. So he picked up food in Taipei, took the train or bus to Keelung, bought the beer on his way to the hotel, then set the table. Food, beer, chopsticks, hotel mugs... he's waiting for someone. But he's from Taipei, so why is he doing this all the way over here in Keelung and paying for a hotel room? If it was a lover and he was worried about his wife finding out, why's he still in uniform? A towel would have sufficed."

"So, Detective, you think it's murder?"

"Suspected murder, to be precise." 🍷

A Single Sentence

AHMET ALTAN

From I Will Never See the World Again. Translated by Yasemin Çongar. Published by Granta Books and OtherPress in 2019. Ahmet Altan is a Turkish writer and journalist. Altan was accused of sending "subliminal messages" to support organizers of the 2016 failed coup against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government. He was sentenced to life in prison. Following worldwide public outcry, he was released from prison in 2021. Altan wrote I Will Never See the World Again in his prison cell.

We left the building. We got into the police car that was waiting at the gate.

I sat with my bag on my lap. The door closed on me.

It is said that the dead do not know that they are dead.

According to Anatolian mythology, once the corpse is placed in the grave and covered with dirt and the funeral crowd has begun to disperse, the dead person also tries to get up and go home, only to realize when he hits his head on the coffin lid that he has died.

When the door closed, my head hit the coffin lid.

I could not open the door of that car and get out.

I could not return home.

Never again would I be able to kiss the woman I love, embrace my kids, meet with my friends,

walk the streets. I would not have my room to write in, my machine to write with, my library to reach for. I would not be able to listen to a violin concerto or go on a trip or browse in bookstores or buy bread from a bakery or gaze on the sea or an orange tree or smell the scent of flowers, the grass, the rain, the earth. I would not be able to go to a cinema. I would not be able to eat eggs with sausage or drink a glass of wine or go to a restaurant and order fish. I would not be able to watch the sunrise. I would not be able to call anyone on the phone. No one would be able to call me on the phone. I would not be able to open a door by myself. I would not wake up again in a room with curtains.

Even my name was about to change.

Ahmet Altan would be erased and replaced with the name on the official certificate, Ahmet Hüsrev Altan.

When they asked for my name, I would say "Ahmet Hüsrev Altan." When they asked where I lived, I would give them the number of a cell.

From now on, others would decide what I did, where I stood, where I slept, what time I got up, what my name was.

I would always be receiving orders: "stop," "walk," "enter," "raise your arms," "take off your shoes," "don't talk."

The police car was speeding along.

It was the first day of a twelve-day religious holiday. Most people in the city, including the prosecutor who had ordered my arrest, had left on vacation.

The streets were deserted.

The policeman next to me lit a cigarette, then held the packet out to me.

I shook my head no, smiling.

“I only smoke,” I said, “when I am nervous.”

Who knows where this sentence came from. Nowhere in my mind had I chosen to make such a declaration. It was a sentence that put an unbridgeable distance between itself and reality. It ignored reality, ridiculed it, even as I was being transformed into a pitiful bug who could not even open the door of the car he was in, who had lost his right to decide his own future, whose very

name was being changed; a bug entangled in the web of a poisonous spider.

It was as if someone inside me, a person whom I could not exactly call “I” but who nevertheless spoke with my voice, through my mouth, and who was therefore a part of me, said as he was being transported in a police car to an iron cage that he only smoked when he was “nervous.”

That single sentence suddenly changed everything.

It divided reality in two, like a Samurai sword that in a single movement cuts through a silk scarf thrown up in the air.

On one side of this reality was a body made of flesh, bone, blood, muscle and nerve that was trapped. On the other side was a mind that did not care about that body and made fun of what would happen to it, a mind that looked from above at what was happening and at what was yet to happen, that believed itself untouchable and that was, therefore, untouchable.

I was like Julius Caesar, who, as soon as he was informed that a large Gallic army was on its way to relieve the besieged occupants of Alesia, had two high walls built—one around the castle to prevent those inside from leaving, and one around his troops to prevent those outside from entering.

My two high walls were built with a single sentence which prevented the mortal threats from entering and the worries accumulating in the deep corners of my mind from exiting, so that the two could not unite to crush me with fear and terror.

I realized once more that when you are faced with a reality that can turn your life upside down, that same sorry reality will sweep you away like a wild flood only if you submit to it and act as it expects you to.

As someone who has been thrown into the dirty, swelling waves of reality, I can say with certainty that its victims are those so-called smart people who believe that you have to act in accordance with it.

There are certain actions and words that are demanded by the events, the dangers and the realities that surround you. Once you refuse to play this assigned role, instead doing and saying the unexpected, reality itself is taken aback; it hits against the rebellious jetties of your mind and breaks into pieces. You then gain the power to collect the fragments together and create from them a new reality in the mind’s safe harbor.

LOREMBARNAK

From loremarnak.com, a Quebecois swear generator, which can produce increasingly lengthy chains of French-Canadian curses on demand, in the style of the lorem ipsum nonsense placeholder text. Loremarnak (a word made by combining lorem ipsum and tabernak) was created by Henry Myers, a Montreal software developer, and can be added to any Javascript project.

Calisse.

Cossin.

Enfant d’chienne.

Mangeux d’marde.

Christie de purée de crisse.

Viarge de charogne de baptême de bout d’ciarge.

Mautadit de tabarslaque de sacrament de verrat de boswell de saint-sacrament de patente à gosse de colon.

Verrat de viande à chien d’estique de boswell de crucifix d’ostie de mosus de calvaire.

Bâtard de charogne de ciboire de batince de boswell de mosus de sacréce de charrue de batêche de calvince d’esprit de cibouleau de crucifix de sapristi de cochonnerie d’enfant d’chienne.

Batêche de mosus de cibouleau de saintes fesses de calvinouche de charogne de cibole d’enfant d’chienne de sacristi de bout d’viarge de verrat de batince de maudit de crucifix de Jésus Marie Joseph de sapristi de torvisse de crime de purée de sacréce de torrieux de tabarnouche de saint-cimonaque.

Ostifie de viarge de bout d’ciarge de viande à chien de cibouleau d’astie de tabarnane de cossin de sapristi de saintes fesses de crucifix de charogne de calvaire de ciarge de christie d’estique de torrieux de sacristi de batêche de cul de ciboire d’esprit de câliboire de crisse de mosus de torvisse de boswell de tabarslaque. 🍷

The trick is to do the unexpected, to say the unexpected. Once you can make light of the lance of destiny pointing at your body, you can cheerfully eat the cherries you had filled your hat with, like the unforgettable lieutenant in Pushkin's story "The Shot" who does exactly that with a gun pointing at his heart.

Like Borges, you can answer the mugger who demands, "Your money or your life," with, "My life."

The power you will gain is limitless.

I still don't know how I came to utter the sentence that transformed everything that was happening to me and my perception of it, nor what its mystical source might be. What I do know is that someone in the police car, the person who was able to say he smoked only when he was nervous, is hidden inside me.

He is made of many voices, laughs, paragraphs, sentences and pain.

Had I not seen my father smile as he was taken away in a police car forty-five years ago; had I not heard from him that the envoy of Carthage, when threatened with torture, put his hand in the embers; had I not known that Seneca consoled his

friends as he sat in a bath full of hot water and slit his wrists on Nero's orders; had I not read that, on the eve of the day he was to be guillotined, Saint-Just had written in a letter that the conditions were difficult only for those who resisted entering the grave and that Epictetus had said when our

bodies are enslaved our minds can remain free; had I not learned that Boethius wrote his famous book in a cell awaiting death, I would have been afraid of the reality that surrounded me in that police car. I would not have found the strength to ridicule it and shred it to pieces. Nor would I have been able to utter the sentence with secret laughter that rose from my lungs to my lips. No, I would have cowered with anxiety.

But someone whom I reckon to be made from the illuminated shadows of those magnificent dead reflected in me spoke, and thus managed to change all that was happening.

Reality could not conquer me.

Instead, I conquered reality.

In that police car speeding down the sunlit streets, I set the bag that was on my lap onto the floor with a sense of ease, and leaned back. 🌿



Old Seeds

M.A.C. FARRANT

From One Good Thing. Published by Talonbooks in 2021. M.A.C. Farrant is an award-winning author of fiction, reviews, memoir and two plays. She lives in North Saanich, BC. Read more of her work at geist.com.

Dear Helen,

"Boomers are not a dying breed." I read this in the morning paper. "Every eight minutes another boomer reaches sixty-five."

Like a plague of wizened rats cresting a hill, we keep on coming. There doesn't seem to be an end to us. This is the attitude of later generations, even

though boomer births cover only the twenty years of post-WWII prosperity, 1945–1964.

I was born in the first wave, a couple of years after the war. Saying this has become like standing up at a meeting and saying you're an alcoholic. Except there is no twelve-step program I can join to make amends for the fact that my generation got everything—educations, jobs, houses, general practitioners, fresh air, toys, trips, leisure, and often peace.

The article about boomers was in the Business section. It highlighted the continued importance of boomers because they bought 41 percent of the snacks, and 46 percent of the candy in the fifty-two weeks ending in April of last year. "They are single-handedly keeping the economy afloat," the article said.

Here's a mental image of a boomer sitting in an armchair, rereading *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

by Ken Kesey while listening to the Stones' "Sympathy for the Devil" and eating sour-cream and green-onion potato chips. What a time I'm having keeping the economy afloat!

Ooo, who, who. Ooo, who, who.

On that note, I once danced with Ken Kesey at a "Symposium on Freedom," which was organized by the University of Victoria on Vancouver Island at an inn. The dancing was nothing, a random thing on a crowded dance floor. I was twenty-three years old at the time and Kesey would have been around thirty-five. He was a short, muscular man wearing a white shirt, jeans, and cowboy boots with heels, and had bits of fluffy hair here and there on his balding head. He and the Merry Pranksters had arrived at the symposium out of nowhere. It was more of a be-in than a symposium.

At some point during the day, everyone had a look at the Pranksters' famous psychedelic bus

parked in the driveway. I remember feeling nothing much about it, no matter how hard I tried. The symposium was held on a Saturday, the same day, it turned out, that Richard Nixon announced he was resigning as president of the United States.

I think we can agree that the boomer generation has, above all else, been a searching and free-wheeling one. Some of its members are still like that. My friend, Gerald, from high school, for example. Here's an illustration of enlightenment he made not long ago, after years of weed-guided study. It seems to represent a particular experience of the genus *Existentialis weedii*, one that moves beyond astonishment.

"I finally got it right," he said when he showed the illustration to me.

I promised I would pass it around. Here it is.

It has a certain *something*, don't you think? 🌿

FIELD RESEARCH

From Render by Sachiko Murakami (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2020). Reprinted with permission. Sachiko Murakami is the author of four poetry collections, including Render and The Invisibility Exhibit (Talonbooks), both shortlisted for the Governor General's Literary Award for Poetry. She lives in Toronto. Find her at sachikomurakami.com.

I talk about my dreams like there is some factual evidence that will survive the trauma of waking and realizing the truth of my life: its plodding linearity, the plumb line that follows a bullet's path to the next day, and the day after that.

I'm told I should stay present. I'm told there is safety in the out-breath, that there is a space between thought and thinker I would see if only I held still long enough to measure the distance.

Between here and Vancouver, most of a continent. Between a mother and daughter, a sinew stretching city blocks. Pluck it and it twangs at the same frequency as the knotted trapezius, the first note of a dirge you've been humming since early childhood.

Check her breathing. Prepare a plausible story for why you're here, a lie you will tell to tomorrow. When the doctors arrive they will wave the usual instruments over our lives, listening for signals of the past. When does chronic bronchitis become a child you can name, a treatable condition?

My out-breath her in-breath, a chain that follows generations backwards to the first woman leaning over, heaving out sorrow into a man's empty bed. I lie down with my mother on a single mattress. Lions reach into me, following the lines I laid out for them, on her dresser.

We sleep for days, a litany of Tuesday mornings marching past window, facing courtyard, a place where exhaled sleep gathers. I dream I read her diary and uncover all the secrets that will answer all the questions. I stand poised and ready to ask. 🌿

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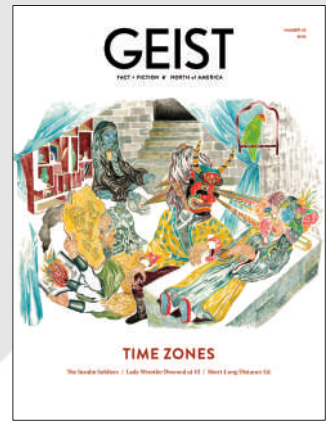
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The Insulin Soldiers

KRISTEN DEN HARTOG

*Patients who'd fallen ill during wartime were given free treatment
that had taken on the qualities of a miracle*



Just a few years before his famed co-discovery of insulin as a treatment for diabetes, Dr. Frederick Banting was at war, serving in a field ambulance in France, guns thundering in the near distance. A graduate of the University of Toronto's medical school, his studies had been condensed because of the need for doctors to treat massive numbers of wounded, and in 1917, he went overseas with the Canadian Army Medical Corps. As he amputated limbs and stitched gunshot wounds near the Front, he couldn't have imagined the turn his work would take once the war ended, nor the effect it would have on a group of veterans under his care. He had little awareness of diabetes, and no idea how widespread it was. The disease affected the body's ability to control blood sugar, which in turn harmed the organs, blood vessels, and nerves. There was no known cure, though newspaper ads sometimes suggested otherwise. One testimonial claimed, "I'm sure I would be in my grave today, but for Dodd's Kidney Pills. ... [They] have done so much for me that I feel like recommending them to everybody." In reality, a diagnosis of diabetes was devastating news. In later years Banting wrote that it was "a disease that people did not talk about. ... It was usually a family secret known only to the doctor."

Back in Canada in 1919, he was posted to the Christie Street hospital in west-end Toronto, where the patients had missing limbs or grave facial wounds, gas poisoning or tuberculosis. The building itself was a hastily renovated cash register factory, with extra storeys added to its simple, boxy shape to accommodate some nine hundred men. It was

situated along a rail line in what was then an industrial part of town, but it provided a community of sorts, for most of the staff and patients had served overseas and had a shared understanding of war. Together they ate in the huge dining hall in the basement, and gathered in the auditorium for shows by the latest stars. They could also visit the rooftop ward, where patients with spinal tuberculosis basked in the sun as heliotherapy treatment for their illness. The hospital was like a village in a way, and some of its people—staff and patients—would still be there when the next war started, or for the remainder of their lives. Fred Banting's stay was short, though, and when he was discharged from the army six months on, he probably didn't think he'd return to the halls of Christie Street. The war was over, and he was finally a young civilian doctor embarking on his career.



He set up a practice in London, Ontario, supplementing his income by lecturing at the university. Teaching was stimulating, since the reading he did to prepare his talks furthered his own truncated education. One of the articles got him contemplating the role of the pancreas in diabetes, and he became fixated on the idea of investigating the possibilities in a laboratory setting. Visiting Toronto for the wedding of a Christie Street nurse, he asked some medical colleagues what they thought of him giving up private practice for research. "They all advised against such a radical move," he later recalled. But Banting pushed ahead with his plan, and by spring 1921 his famous work with Charles Best had begun at the University of Toronto, and would soon involve patients at the Christie Street hospital.

It was already understood that the pancreas played a role in processing sugars, and that when a person became diabetic, something must be amiss with that organ. The goal was to isolate what researchers suspected was an internal secretion within the pancreas that regulated metabolism, and use it to treat dogs who'd been rendered diabetic by pancreatectomy. In the early experiments by Banting and Best, dogs' pancreases were removed and ground up to make a serum that hopefully contained the mysterious secretion. Having an adequate supply of dogs was a problem and eventually, the pancreases were obtained from cows and pigs at slaughterhouses.

Walter Campbell, a specialist in diabetes and a colleague of Banting's, later wrote that "before the First World War, there were only two types of diabetics, those who died quickly and those who stuck around deteriorating for a long time." Dietary controls were the main form of treatment, but by no means a cure. People slipped into comas or died of starvation—the most effective approach was a liquid diet that starved the patient until sugar disappeared from the urine. The patient could then begin to eat in small but increasing quantities, with all food strictly weighed and recorded, until the sugar reappeared. This determined the patient's glucose tolerance level, and the diet that would need to be followed.

The doctor Joseph Gilchrist, a friend and classmate of Fred Banting's during medical school, would have understood his prognosis better than the average patient when he was diagnosed with diabetes in 1917. By then he was part of the Canadian Army Medical Corps, having reported for duty, like Fred and the rest of their class, immediately after graduation. His yearbook entry states that he "plodded through the darkness of Arts into the light of Medicine, where he will bask when the war is o'er." But he never made it overseas with his fellow young doctors. Around the time that Fred set sail, in March 1917, Joe experienced his first symptoms: extreme thirst, frequent, abundant urination, a craving for sweets, weakness, and weight loss. Tests showed sugar in the urine, and though his symptoms cleared up when carbohydrates were removed from his diet, they came raging back when he returned to eating normally. "Immediately after eating even a slice of bread," one doctor noted in his record, "he shows 2% sugar in the urine." The recommended treatment was rest, fresh air, exercise

and an “anti-diabetes diet” that quickly turned him gaunt and rangy.

Postwar, Joe Gilchrist continued following these principles, his health slowly worsening until October 1921, when he contracted severe influenza that shattered his glucose tolerance. The pounds began to fall away. He was thirsty and hungry; sugar was always present in his urine samples, and sometimes his breath smelled of acetone—a sharp, acrid, rotting fruit scent and a clear sign of dangerously increased acidity in the blood and a poorly functioning metabolism.

At first he had no idea his illness coincided with his old classmate’s obsession, but shortly after his bout with influenza, news of Banting and Best’s research began traveling in medical circles. They gave a talk at the University of Toronto in November and another at Toronto General Hospital in December, and somewhere around this time, Joe approached Fred and asked to try the serum. Even if he hadn’t been diabetic, he would have thought the work exciting, but his own medical history added a profound layer to his interest in the research, and he was eager to be what he called a “human rabbit” for the cause. He was given an oral dose, probably because the extract hadn’t been tried on humans yet, and injection was considered too risky. But the outcome was disappointing. Fred wrote in his notes, “Dec 20. Phoned Joe Gilchrist – gave him extract that we knew to be potent. – by mouth. empty stomach. Dec 21 – no beneficial result.”

Within a month, though, the extract was given by injection to a teenage boy at Toronto General Hospital. Weighing 65 lb. on admission, Leonard Thompson was considered so near death that even the wildest experiment gave him more of a chance than doing nothing. The boy reacted badly to the first shot, but there was major progress when the extract—tinkered with and vastly improved by a biochemist named James Collip—was tried again. To see a body so utterly transformed was astonishing. It was as though a magic potion had brought him back to life. As the serum was tried on more patients in more places, the amazement spread, and pressure mounted to make the medicine widely available. American diabetes specialist Elliott Joslin likened the serum’s effect to “near resurrections,” and had high hopes for his own patients, who were wasting away on starvation diets in a diabetic clinic in Boston.

These were thrilling times for people involved in the development and production of insulin. The sense of urgency around the affair sparked plenty of collaboration, infighting, selflessness and ego as the work evolved and various doctors and scientists helped perfect, produce and deliver the treatment. A hundred years later, the spotlight still shines brightest on Fred Banting, though he was far from the lone player: along with doctors, academics, and pharmaceutical companies, the drama unfolded nurses, orderlies, dietitians, patients, and patients’ families—and also veterans newly returned from World War I.

By spring 1922, a clinical trial at Christie Street had been arranged, and diabetic soldiers were being recruited. Joe Gilchrist was a supervising doctor as well as a patient participant. Medicare was still years off, so the patients were lucky their illness had surfaced in wartime, for those who’d fallen ill during service were entitled to free healthcare, which in this case meant a treatment that had taken on the qualities of a miracle. As soldiers, they knew what it was like to be hungry, cold and tired, and then to have that discomfort compounded by illness. And yet, knowing the treatment was experimental may also have made them wary. Each patient signed a declaration stating that the treatment had been thoroughly explained to him, and that he understood it hadn’t yet reached “a stage of finality”—the work involved an element of risk, and “it is not yet fully known just what the treatment will do.” But for the most part the men at the Christie Street clinic were severe diabetics with bleak futures. One man was already in a coma when admitted, and another weighed a frightening 76 lb.

The men ranged in age from twenty-five to fifty-three. Following a physical and the establishment of individual diet and insulin levels, they were monitored by doctors and nurses, and also Christie’s trio



of dietitians: female university graduates whose profession was just coming into public awareness. Ideally, the men received their injections three times a day, though at this early stage, producing enough of the extract and obtaining a pure, effective product was difficult. When they could get their shots, many patients developed large, excruciating abscesses at the injection site. A strong extract caused more severe side effects, but a weaker one required large doses that were more painful to receive. As the doctor-patient, Joe Gilchrist took the first sample of each batch, according to Banting, and followed up with regular blood sugar tests. "I doubt if there is a person in the world who has had his veins punctured so many times. He had abscesses at the site of injection on very many occasions, but he took his injections regularly and persistently." The pain and the inconsistency of the treatment made men reluctant to join the study as it inched forward. "But then an event occurred," wrote Banting, "which surprised and encouraged everyone... One of the faithful lads asked for leave. This was a most unusual request. He also wanted insulin to take with him. He was intelligent and could look after himself & his requests were granted. On the following Monday morning he returned all smiles. 'For the first time in three years I am a man again,' he told everyone. Severe untreated diabetics lose all sex desire. With insulin the desire and power returned. By night every diabetic in the hospital was asking for insulin."

Jim Ostrom was one of the younger patients. After the Battle of Vimy Ridge in April 1917, he came down with an illness that doctors couldn't pinpoint. He was nervous and tired—not surprising considering his placement at the Front and his rank of signaller. Signallers kept the communication flowing to and from the front lines, laying cables in the trenches and repairing them when they were blown apart by shellfire or broken by soldiers' boots. Signallers also encoded and decoded messages, or carried them in person, travelling through the trenches when the technology failed. For defensive purposes, trenches were dug in a zigzag pattern, making short distances much longer. Sometimes these missions

took a soldier into the wide open, where he risked sniper fire or burial by a shell explosion; or he travelled further afield, crossing territory he didn't know and memorizing the landscape for the return trip. A man had to have stamina and good instincts for such potentially dangerous missions.

Fit and healthy when he'd enlisted, now Jim experienced palpitations, vertigo, and "air hunger," meaning he gasped for breath on the slightest exertion. He was invalided to England and diagnosed with "disordered action of the heart," also called "soldier's heart," an ailment thought to be caused by stress and exhaustion rather than organic disease. He was moved to a convalescent home in Bushy

Park, which neighboured the splendid Hampton Court Palace on the outskirts of London. If he felt well enough to enjoy it, this was surely a wonderful place to be, with a river that fed cascading pools and a waterfall, deer roaming beneath chestnut trees, and birds chirping in the woodlands.

The hospital specialized in heart cases, who mostly responded well to treatment that involved convalescing on the verandah and engaging in physical therapy. But after forty days at Bushy, Jim hadn't improved. "General condition not good. He has not reacted well to exercises." He returned to Canada, and back in Toronto an examination revealed "man cannot walk one mile without resting at intervals." Running for a streetcar set his heart racing and his lungs heaving for air. A family story says that he was a young, fit man when he went to war, that he was buried in a shell explosion, and that his rapid decline made it seem that war had caused his illness.

The timing of his diabetes diagnosis isn't certain, but by 1921 he was living just west of the Christie Street hospital, working as a mail clerk. His health was poor and his thirst was insatiable. He'd fill a big glass milk bottle with water before bed, and by morning he'd have drunk it all. Despite his illness, the period must have been joyful, for he'd fallen in love with a woman named Grace, who lived nearby and worked at Eaton's department store. Jim's descendants suspect Grace's family didn't approve of the match, perhaps because Jim was unwell and his future in question. But you wouldn't guess at his



Supervising doctor and patient participant Dr. Joseph Gilchrist, ca. 1920s.

Courtesy of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

frailty on seeing a 1920 photo of Jim and Grace: Jim wears a flat cap and civvies, his sleeves rolled up; he's lifted Grace to one shoulder, and she perches there, smiling and leaning into him, hands folded at his collarbone. They married a week after the emaciated boy, Leonard Thompson, received his transformative injection of insulin, and in the following months they must have felt hopeful that what the press was calling "one of the most important discoveries in modern medical research" would make a difference in their lives. As medicine for a debilitating disease, insulin seemed miraculous, and many believed it might be a permanent cure—that with enough injections, the body might relearn the ability to regulate blood sugar.

The dose was hard to get right, especially at that time, when the qualities of insulin being produced were variable. Around Christmas in 1922, Joe Gilchrist delivered a lecture describing a case of hypoglycemia brought on by the administration of too large a dose. The man—Jim Ostrom—had received his injection in the late afternoon, then gone down to the hospital dining room and eaten a hearty meal, "but by 8 o'clock he evinced a strong desire to climb up the walls of the ward." Gilchrist described the first sign of a hypoglycemic reaction as a mixed feeling of anxiety, restlessness, and dread. After that, the patient would start to sweat and crave food—lots of anything would do. Then the trembling would begin; the skin blanched, the pulse raced, the pupils dilated. As the blood pressure dropped, the patient would feel faint and lose the ability to concentrate and call up names and ordinary words. Without the ingestion of glucose to relieve the symptoms—which Jim quickly received at Christie—convulsions and coma could follow.

Some of this was known because of experiments on animals. When the *Toronto Daily Star* reported on Gilchrist's lecture, it also detailed experiments done on rabbits that had been intentionally sent into convulsions with overdoses of insulin. They grew so hungry they devoured wood shavings; their eyes bulged; they panted and jerked themselves around; they stiffened and lost consciousness. The experiments confirmed that sugar was an effective antidote. When news of the story

reached an animal rights' activist, she contacted the local Great War Veterans' Association and urged them to join the antivivisectionist fight and protest the inhumane treatment of soldiers at the hospital, which in turn prompted the *Star* to investigate.

Joe Gilchrist invited the reporter to visit the Christie Street clinic and meet the patients himself, nine of them at that time. One—a man named Doherty—claimed he'd been close to comatose when he'd entered the hospital, and "almost literally a mass of skin and bones." The doctors thought he'd die within a few days, but since then he'd gained 25 lb., and his skin, once "dry and brown like that of a

mummy," was now fresh and pink. "His eyes sparkle, and he declares that he is fit for anything." All of the men spoke of weight gain and renewed energy, but also a sense of hope. Said one man: "It's given me a chance for my life."

Jim Ostrom had been discharged from Christie Street by this time, but the *Star* reporter went along to his home to ask about the overdose that had sent him climbing the walls of the ward. "Mr. Ostrom admitted having had certain pronounced reactions, but added: 'I would be willing to climb the CPR building if I could get the benefit that I got from the treatment.'"

The cash-register-factory-turned-hospital had become a centre of innovation in its few short years of existence, with X-ray and electric therapy departments, the rooftop ward for heliotherapy, and a team of specialists devoted to the new field of plastic surgery, rebuilding chins and noses. Now, in a specially equipped laboratory, the men of the diabetic ward learned how to test their own blood and urine for sugar levels, check the strength of the insulin, and administer their own doses. They knew to always carry a bit of candy, and to carefully monitor their diet. Men who'd struggled to climb a flight of stairs could soon walk two or three miles a day with no trouble. With other patients at Christie Street, they took field trips to sprawling High Park, or travelled by streetcar and ferry to the Toronto Islands. They had renewed energy but also enthusiasm, and



joined in the hospital's beading or basketry workshops, trying to outdo each other with their creations. The effect of the insulin was so noticeable that strangers who visited the ward—medical experts from other cities and countries—said they could tell at a glance who had begun receiving injections and who hadn't started their treatment.

Nevertheless, there were losses. Some of the men were so unwell when they arrived that there was just no saving them. They had weakened hearts or tuberculosis, or other complications that persisted even when the insulin worked. The deaths must have been a blow to both the caregivers and the fellow "rabbits," who would have worried about their own chances for survival.

Ogden Besserer was twenty-eight when he was conscripted in 1917. He'd been managing the fur department of a popular shop in Ottawa; he wasn't married, and he was young and seemed relatively fit, according to his medical examination. On his paternal side, he was of German ancestry, but his family, mixed with French-Canadians, had been in Canada for generations, and his grandfather had owned great swaths of land in Ottawa, and had named streets after family members. By WWI, the area that had once been Besserer property was a bustling neighbourhood called Sandy Hill. When his younger brother Theodore voluntarily enlisted in 1915, Ogden kept on with his job, perhaps because he knew his health was fragile. At age twenty-two, just before the war began, another brother had died in a diabetic coma, and a family history of diabetes was noted in Theodore's service record. The first great loss had happened in Ogden's childhood, when his mother, also a diabetic, died at thirty-two.

Ogden travelled overseas early in 1918. He was a driver, charged with delivering ammunition to the front line, and though he made it through the war unscathed, just before Christmas—when he was still in France—he complained of double vision. The problem had come on suddenly and persisted. In medical terms, it was called "diplopia," and while it was sometimes noted in shell shock cases, it can also be a symptom of diabetes, when damage to circulation causes a palsy in the muscles that control eye movement. The muscles of one eye stop working, so the two can't align together to send a cohesive message to the brain. If Ogden was still working as a driver at this time, the symptoms would have been especially dangerous and frightening. But "with treatment"—probably rest and a

patch over the eye—the vision problems subsided during the next six weeks, and Ogden returned to Canada. It's impossible to know if he suspected diabetes, but it seems likely. During his time in the army, he requested a portion of his earnings—separation pay usually reserved for wives and family—go to a woman named Laura Blake, listed only as "friend" in his record. Laura was a single woman who worked as a government stenographer. Did they hesitate to marry because of Ogden's illness?

After his discharge from the army, he returned to his old job at the furrier's, where he'd begun at the age of fourteen. But over the next year, he developed sores on his chin and the back of his neck, and he grew weak and thin. Doctors diagnosed diabetes, and he was hospitalized in Ottawa as his disease quickly progressed. At one point he received less than four hundred calories a day, "obviously way below his body requirements," but necessary, the doctors thought, to control his metabolism. He suffered recurring attacks of diarrhea and edema, a swelling in his face, legs and ankles. His symptoms were so persistent that one doctor wondered if someone was sneaking in food for him, since "the mathematics of diabetic feeding" just didn't add up. The doctor added that "the man's morale is badly shaken and this idea should not militate against him." The Ottawa doctors felt they couldn't offer him the specialized care he needed, nor monitor his condition closely enough, but there was little improvement after a stay in Elliott Joslin's Boston clinic. Joslin would go on to become a world leader in the treatment of diabetes, but at this time he, too, implemented the starvation treatment, training patients to manage their condition by diet. The work was heartbreaking, and he followed news of encouraging developments in Toronto from the earliest days. "Naturally if there is a grain of hopefulness in these experiments which I can give to patients," he wrote in a 1921 letter to Banting's supervisor, "... it would afford much comfort, not only to them, but to me as well, because I see so many pathetic cases."

By spring 1922, Ogden Besserer was "markedly undernourished" and weighed 110 lb., 40 lb. less than when he'd left the army a few years earlier. News of the insulin trials must have offered a welcome spark of hope. "Arrangements are being made," states his record, "to have this man admitted to Christie Street hospital, Toronto, so that Dr. Banting's treatment may be tried."

In June, Ogden joined the rest of the men on the diabetic ward. He was in rough shape upon admission, with clusters of boils, skin infections and abscessed gums. Though emaciated, the swelling in his legs and face persisted. To add to his discomfort, the hospital's proximity to a railway meant that the building shook when trains shunted past. He didn't sleep well, and sometimes suffered night sweats that soaked his pyjamas and made him cold and clammy. Despite his placement in a pioneering trial, he continued to falter. Joe Gilchrist jotted down that Ogden's muscle mass had diminished, and that he experienced "loss of memory, loss of interest in things generally." Doses of the extract seemed to help some days but not others, and by September he was so unwell that injections were stopped, and he was moved to a private ward. He ached all over. His vision blurred. He was unable to distinguish between people he knew, though the record doesn't specify if family or the friend named Laura were among his visitors. By the time of his death at age thirty-three—around the age his mother had died—he weighed 96 lb. The secrecy around the illness, which Banting wrote about in later years, shows in the obituary that appeared in the *Ottawa Citizen*: Ogden had been undergoing "special treatment" at the Christie Street hospital, the piece said, but "died as the result of illness contracted by over-exposure at the front during the war." The word *diabetes* was not mentioned.

Ogden was the last of four diabetics to die at Christie that month. Of the earlier deaths, two were recent admissions to the hospital; the third, a brewer's labourer, left behind a wife and five children living in poverty. Following a sweltering city summer with major problems in insulin production, these losses must have demoralized the whole diabetic team. That first summer during the clinical trials at Christie Street, Banting wrote to Best that "worse than the heat as a disturbance is that diabetics swarm around from all over and think that we can conjure the extract from the ground." Desperate souls even showed up at the lab, hoping to get insulin, though at that time the sporadically

available doses were all going to the veterans. Soon the trials expanded further, to Toronto General Hospital and the Hospital for Sick Children, and the work continued at Christie Street, with Joe Gilchrist in charge and Banting and Best in high demand elsewhere.

By the summer of 1923, insulin was being used in the United States, England, the Netherlands, China and Australia. There were articles raving about patients being "brought back from the very threshold of death," so it was not surprising when, later that year, Banting and John Macleod, his supervisor at the University of Toronto, received the Nobel Prize in Medicine, and in turn shared the award with Charles Best and James Collip. The discovery made the men famous, and could have made them rich, too, but rather than profit personally, the team sold the patent to the University of Toronto for one dollar, and the university set up committees that would oversee its use internationally, avoiding monopolization and ensuring the drug was affordable and widely available. The system remained in place until the 1950s. Today, even in Canada, many diabetics can't afford the full cost of their treatment, and ration their use of insulin.

Banting didn't live to see the changes. In 1941, he died in a plane crash, making headlines once again as a hero and a "great benefactor of mankind." In 1934, he'd been knighted for his accomplishments—a doctor, a Sir and a Nobel laureate all at once. One wonders how Joe Gilchrist felt during Banting's glory days, remaining in the shadows, yet having played such an integral part in the development of a medicine that would save so many lives worldwide. "It was on him," Banting himself had written shortly before his death, "that we tried not only new batches of insulin ... but also many experiments that had to be carried out, for example, the time in relation to meals, the distribution of dosage, the treatment for overdose."

In 1951, Joe was admitted to Sunnybrook Hospital, originally a veterans' hospital built to replace the old cash register factory on Christie Street. Never a



purpose-built facility, Christie had become overcrowded when WWII soldiers began arriving, and though described in the press as “the best of its kind on the continent” and “a Mecca for doctors who rejoice in modern scientific improvements,” by 1945 it was labelled a disgrace, and a group of Toronto women took it upon themselves to push for new accommodations. “[Christie Street] is old, cockroach-infested and rat-ridden,” one woman wrote to the pensions minister, “and sick and wounded men are suffering there needlessly.”

The second war was over by the time patients were moved into Sunnybrook, so the building—a “palace of healing” according to *Maclean’s*—was only a few years old when Joe Gilchrist was admitted, this time just a patient and not a doctor in charge. He was in his late fifties, his legs, arms and buttocks scarred from years of insulin injections. His pension record states that he’d controlled his diabetes well on his own until shortly before his admission, when he started having chest pain and shortness of breath that caused him to speak “in gasps.” The record also notes a separation from his wife, and an ongoing battle with mental illness following his years at Christie Street. “Since the early 30s, he has been over active mentally and physically having an obsessive-compulsive behaviour with grandiose ideas. ... He is very talkative and keeps on referring about his research he did back in the early 30s. He has the true mental activity of a manic depressive. His thought processes are disjointed and mixed with delusions of importance and influence with occasional paranoid ideas.” Joe rallied for a time and was discharged, but returned to Sunnybrook that same year, “in gross cardiac failure.” He died soon after, of heart disease caused by diabetes. A *Globe and Mail* obituary acknowledged that he’d been “the first walking diabetic patient to receive the insulin treatment,” and also “a personal friend of Sir Frederick Banting and Dr. C.H. Best.” There was no mention, though, of the clinic he’d run at Christie Street, and his vital role as both patient and doctor.

Unlike Joe Gilchrist, Ogden Besserer, and so many other diabetics the world over, Jim Ostrom lived a long life, raising two sons with Grace in a pleasant neighbourhood in Toronto. He continued to work as a postal clerk, and took excellent care of his health, eating well and rising early each morning to boil his single insulin needle. His now ninety-five-year-old son Ron recalls that his father always carried butterscotch candies when they went on

drives, and that he had his own mini-laboratory in the basement of their home: as taught at Christie Street, he’d pee into a test tube, heat the urine and a chemical reagent over a Bunsen burner, and measure his glucose level by the colour the solution turned, which told him how much insulin he needed. Despite scrupulous self-care, he sometimes went into diabetic shock: as the family sat at the dinner table, “the knife and fork would start rattling,” Ron recalls, and Grace would have to get Jim to the floor and “get the OJ into him.” Half an orange usually sufficed when he had an insulin reaction, but occasionally he worsened and slipped into a coma and had to be rushed to hospital.

And yet, Jim outlived Grace, who suffered two massive strokes and died in her fifties. He stayed on alone in their home for a while, but once, in the throes of an insulin reaction, he started hammering on the wall shared with his neighbour, who phoned Jim’s son Lloyd in a panic. After that, Jim had a live-in caregiver for a time, but eventually moved into Sunnybrook, where he remained until his death at almost eighty years old.

Coincidentally, the son, Lloyd, worked at the Christie Street hospital site when it became a city-owned long-term care facility after the veterans’ departure. For many years, he was a bookkeeper there, managing financial accounts for the residents. Every year, he’d take his children to the corner of Christie and Dupont to watch the Santa Claus Parade go by, and then the family would go for hot chocolate in the cafeteria where Jim and the other patients had once taken their meals.

Jim’s granddaughter Anne—the daughter of Lloyd—remembers her grandfather well, and says that like most veterans, he didn’t really talk about the war. But perhaps he did at Sunnybrook, where he lived with others who’d been soldiers and his memories had a different context. Every Saturday Lloyd would travel out to Sunnybrook, pick up Jim and bring him home for a roast beef dinner and a game of cribbage. “I think of him whenever I smell a cigar or have an Orange Crush,” says Anne. And when asked if she knew of Jim’s early involvement with insulin, she answers yes: “I would not be alive if not for the discovery.”

Kristen den Hartog is a novelist and non-fiction writer whose most recent book, The Cowkeeper’s Wish, was co-authored with her sister Tracy Kasaboski. She lives in Toronto. Read more of her work at geist.com.

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FIRST PRIZE

Greyson Scale: Forgiveness

REBECCA FREDRICKSON

They had all these NDEers in a swimming pool because so many near deaths involve water—and not just the drownings. A woman on deck, at the five-foot mark, asked us to picture the moment we left our bodies and found some unearthly world.

There were maybe fifteen of us. Something had malfunctioned with the chemicals that morning. Our eyes tingled. Our arms clasped kickboards and our legs hung, half-bent.

“I saw my father,” said the man beside me. “He was an infant in the mouth of a blue spiral.”

People rubbed their eyes and placidly kicked in different directions, drifting around like lake ice cracking apart. These fifteen who had breached the veil, returned, now floating in crooked lines over bending light.

I didn’t drown. It wasn’t water. Unless the clouds count. I was buckled (dry inside bolted-metal walls and Plexiglas) and flying from Fredericton to Whitehorse in a snowstorm.

December dark: out of YVR in a connecting Airbus. Half the Gin Buck from a plastic highball cup spills trying to get to my lips.

Not another soul knows I am flying. Not another, except the man who will stand in arrivals. I saw him last in 2003, but I know that he parks at the meter, pays nothing, and leaves his Nissan running.

He’s wearing a bomber made of some silky fabric. His sandy hair curls and recedes at the temples. He plans to say, to do, something when we’re alone under luminous green cracks.

Behind me, peanuts spill from Ziploc to palm. The itch and clamp at the back of my mouth. I reach for a button but

can’t call. Ice cubes fall onto my jeans. My eyelids sting from the histamine. I am grasping for, bunching in my fist, the sleeve of the one next to me.

Then, touching and fumbling along the floor with bare hands, I find a platform, a stage. Halogen floods me and the world (360° and all-seeing) is, to me, utterly obscured. On a platform, I am seen. I am well-lit from every flooded angle.

The platform is in a pool. I somersault into the water at the five-foot mark, the drop-off, and hit my head on the edge.

I feel my way with one bare foot to this edge, and I see a woman glowing in the world’s darkness. “The witch is in for tea,” she says.

She means me, means that I am the witch. I gasp water. I am seen on this stage and this stage is landing between small purple mountains, killing the lift in YXY.

Paramedics gape at the gate. They see me. The screens on the walls see me, and they see me back in New Brunswick on screens of their own—me, in these white sheets and northern lights—they see me and wave. They know where I am (and how and why I came), and everything is going to be okay.

*Rebecca Fredrickson is a writer, teacher and visual artist. Her work has appeared in the anthology *Against Death: 35 Essays of Living* (Anvil Press). She works at Thompson Rivers University and lives in Williams Lake, BC, located on the traditional and unceded territory of the T'exelceme within Secwépemc'ulucw.*

SECOND PRIZE

Fidelity

BILL ENGLESON

1969 – TABER

You drink enough beer, and the floor isn't so bad. We had shekels enough for a motel but our new buddy, Charles, offered us tolerable accommodation. Lonnie got the couch. I got the air mattress. That was a moment. My well-oiled body loved that air mattress.

2020

I haven't moved from this chair in fifteen years. Hyperbole, eh! But I spend a ton of time here. Pouring out reminiscences. Bits and pieces. Moments. Can't believe they have kept so well. It's all so clear.

Clear as a virus. Clear as memory.

Where was I?

1969 – A DAY LATER

The best thing I could say about Lonnie's beater was that it was demolition derby worthy. And that's being kind. An early fifties Austin. Or a Hillman. Brit jobbie, anyways. Burned oil like a tramp steamer. Conked out in the pretty little town of Wolseley. We dumped her on the main drag, scurried back to Highway 1, and hitched our way to the Peg. Lonnie knew a chick. Pardon me—a young woman. Dora. Figured we'd crash at her place. Catch a bus when we were good and ready. Once we settled into Dora's digs, it turned out Lonnie wouldn't be good and ready. They had history. First kiss. Age twelve. He was—she was thirteen. Older woman blues clung to him like a cobweb.

2020

I watch the travel shows these days: Beachfront Hullabaloo, that sort of show. Seaside condos. Getaway places. Even during this pandemic, people are trying to get away. Not me. Once, maybe. Cuba.

1969 – TWO DAYS LATER

Spurged on a train ride. Safer. Easier. Lonnie said, "I can't leave her again." Travelling companions. Men of the road. Harpooned in Winnipeg. Too young. In my head, I was off

to Cuba. Help Castro bring in the crops. No real plan. Just a big fat dream. Caroline and Pat were friends of friends. Caroline and Trish were once simpatico. Trish was acey-deucey. Sexually, I mean. Is that the term? Anyways, Caroline said, "Sure, bunk in. Love to have you." A little apartment above a grocery store. Yonge St. No air mattress, though. A pullout couch. I adapted. Beggars can't be ... can they?

2020

I could count the number of years if I had enough fingers. My little joke. The years count themselves, don't they? They're relentless.

1969 – SUMMER

I couldn't seem to find my feet in TO. Aimless, I suppose. Lazy. Early August, C and T left for Woodstock. Had the place to myself. They said, "Come with us. It'll be a blast." I said, "Saving to go to Cuba."

That was a big lie.

I lingered on. In October, I headed back to the coast. Stopped off in soon-to-be Winterpeg.

"Lonnie's gone," Dora wailed. "He left me for Cuba a month ago."

She looked broken.

2020

Lonnie and I keep in touch. Close, but distant, you know. Never quite adjusted to Dora and me. Here she comes. Bringing me my evening tea. Better wrap this up, pay her some attention.

Bill Engleson is a retired child welfare social worker. He writes fiction, non-fiction and poetry. He is the author of the novel Like a Child to Home and the collection of essays Confessions of an Inadvertently Gentrifying Soul (Silver Bow Publishing). He lives at engleson.ca and on Denman Island, BC.

THIRD PRIZE

Dave Standard Time (DST)

MORGAN DICK

Jacinda dons a cool expression, a veil between her and her husband, and time uncoils. She is twenty-three again, scuttling into a Saskatchewan courthouse in pink eyeshadow and a wedding dress one might guess was made of mascarpone cheese. The memory leaves a sour taste.

“I need you to do something,” she says, in the present, where sunshine pelts a brownish backyard, and a lawn sprinkler spurts doggedly.

Dave does not look up from his tomato plant. “Shoot.” After flooding the planter, he swaps the watering can for a pair of shears from the dusty patio table and tramps across the yard to snip away at a raspberry bush, which has bowed to the sun.

“I’ve got work tonight. Sancho needs his pill at six. He has to take them twelve hours apart, remember? It *has* to be at six.”

“Jacinda, girl. You know me,” Dave says, and half the raspberry bush amasses at his feet.

Yes, she thinks. *Yes, I do.* “This is about our dog.”

“But I don’t believe in any of that.”

When Dave renounced working, he also renounced time. He obliterated his watch with a hammer. He covered the microwave clock with hockey tape. He began eschewing social invitations, insisting that in *his* time zone, Dave Standard Time (DST), nobody made plans.

Jacinda, who follows Mountain Daylight Time (MDT), breathes some calm into her voice. “I’d ask Joe”—the next-door neighbour, a sinewy, widowed carpenter, sometimes offers his sawdusted shoulder for Jacinda to cry on—“but he’s out tonight. My sister can’t come. There’s nobody else.” She beams a soldering look at the back of Dave’s head. He still has not met her eye. Instead, he finds a trowel and scoops soil from the flower bed for no apparent reason.

Jacinda pulls a battery-powered alarm clock from her purse and slams it on the patio table. “I set this for six. You don’t have to look at it. You don’t even have to think about it. All you have to do is hear the alarm, go inside, and give Sancho his medicine.”

“But then I’ll *know* what time it is, which defeats the whole point.”

“*The whole point.*” Jacinda’s back prickles with sweat.

“It’s a matter of principle. *Principle*, Jace. Everybody’s got somewhere to be. Everybody’s rushing.” Dave waves his trowel through the air, hurling clods of pale, overbaked earth as he speaks. “Everybody’s keeping time, but nobody’s got any. Explain that one to me.”

A basset hound lumbers through the open backdoor, ears and belly fat swinging, and tucks himself beneath the table. His eyes are cloudy, his knees distended. A fist tightens around Jacinda’s heart.

“Alright,” she says. “What’s it gonna take? Cookies? Pie?”

Dave’s eyes flash upward.

“Pie it is,” Jacinda says.

“Saskatoon berry?”

Jacinda can’t believe it’s come to this. “Saskatoon berry,” she says, and turns on her heel.

“Don’t forget the timer,” he calls after her. “You always leave it in too long.”

Morgan Dick has been a finalist for Room magazine and Alberta Views’ fiction contests. Her non-fiction writing has appeared in the Globe and Mail and CBC News. She was selected as an apprentice for the 2022 Writers’ Guild of Alberta Mentorship Program and is currently working on a novel. She lives in Calgary.

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Don't Worry, Leonardo Has a Plan

K'ARI FISHER

*Getting drunk at the Golden Fleece is the opposite
of being an archetype of human potential*

Darlene is giving her paycheque the finger again. “Honest to God,” she says. “What a bunch of shit.” I watch her flip the paycheque off hard like it’s a sleazy face. “Uh-uh-uh,” she grunts with each middle-finger jab.

“Boo.” She smacks the cheque with the back of her hand and shoves it into her apron, sweeping the pocket until locating a chocolate bar.

Faded wrapper, likely stolen from the glass display case under the cash register.

We’re leaning against the wall beside the outside washrooms. Darlene’s eyes skip blankly from oil stain to oil stain across the cracked parking lot as she unwraps her chocolate. Gator-skinned, the truckers call it. I watch her slide the bar in, not even bothering to snap the squares off at the grids. She sighs through her nose, nostrils flaring, deep-sucking chocolate off her teeth.

I hate to say it, but Darlene’s sort of supersad. One thing’s for sure, I’ll never be Darlene, working this job for the next millennium. Because I’m perpetually self-improving, getting ready for the real world, for when I’m out of high school. Similar to Leonardo da Vinci, who taught himself to juggle to focus the mind-body. From that foldout I read in Nan’s *Wonderland of Knowledge* encyclopedias: Da Vinci, “an archetype of human potential.” This is why I never write down my customers’ orders. Unlike Darlene, they’re committed to memory, thus freeing the order pad for observations about chocolate bar stealing and general humanity.

I take out my order pad and pen.

“Christ, Nancy,” Darlene says. “Your fifteen’s up.”

Darlene is so bossy. Furthermore, she’s always telling me my break is up. Last I checked, Darlene, your word isn’t law. Of course I’m not about to argue with a middle-finger-thrusting adult. Instead, I’ll put another Darlene complaint in the suggestion box, cleverly disguising my own handwriting. Or I’ll unlock the dog flap going into the buffet area and feign innocence when one of Monsieur Paternoster’s bichons frisés escapes into the kitchen, putting the suspicion on Darlene, the only other day waitress.

Paternoster’s bichons are strictly forbidden in the restaurant. People around here spend a lot of time talking about this: dogs should be left outside; dogs are dirty; dogs don’t know how to stop barking, or whimpering, or licking their balls.

Yet everyone is willing to ignore all that during the Sunday seafood buffet. On Sundays, Paternoster’s trained them to trot in with napkins in their mouths. He stands at the kitchen door and claps them off their nest wad of hairy tablecloths and into the dining room in a neat line where they circle the tables and daintily drop napkins into the hands of each customer. Everyone loves this, even Mrs. Humphreys.

Years ago, Mrs. Humphreys stink-eyed me when I didn’t take one of her Victoria Day chocolates. It’s not that I don’t like chocolate, but she was singing *Earthen Vessel* at the top of her lungs—and with the opposite look one would expect, less like enraptured joy and more like that time Uncle Rodrigo’s organs contracted all at once after he got back from Vegas.

Darlene said that Paternoster originally thought the napkin delivery would be a way to warm locals



up to having dogs in the restaurant. “In France, dogs are under every table,” she said. “Sometimes they even get their own chair and dish, like children.”

Right—as if *Darlene* has ever been to *France*.

*

I started working at the Golden Fleece a month ago, at the beginning of summer break. The first thing Darlene told me was how she can always tell a good waitress by her eyes. The eyes should never be still; even when you’re talking they should be roving for a low coffee cup or an empty plate. And you have to pick, she said—but no picking with my regulars. She had dibs on a handful of truckers who made the weekly run. Most long-haulers are lonely, she said, get a smile and pick with them—you know, put your hand on their shoulder and make them feel like it’s nice to see them again, like this is home.

Like this is home? I’d thought. The Fleece has the same big-rig wallpaper as a little brother’s bedroom. There’s a shelf above the faux-wood panelling where model trucks with stuttering tail lights are plugged into an overloaded extension cord. It’s a full-service stop, which means that behind the restaurant and pumps, away from the groan of air-brakes, are a half-dozen private bedrooms attached to

shared bathrooms decorated with pinups of women in frayed jean shorts and bikini tops standing by cabs with sprung hoods. Mind you, the lacy curtains are a homey touch—like a grandma’s house. I figure the Fleece is probably more like a fantasy home for truckers. But Darlene is right, most of them look like they could use a little cheering up.

*

Later that evening I’m sitting on a patch of grass by the garbage bins on my break and I overhear Darlene talking to Warren. She is so obvious—leaning against Pump 4 and literally adjusting her bra straps. Everyone knows Pater-noster hates it when Warren is distracted. My first day he told me the pumps were the money-makers and the restaurant operates mainly off gas profits. Yet there’s Darlene, messing with the guy manning the pumps. And Warren, only being polite. Although there are some observations: Warren shifting his wiener, but privately, when he turns to flick the meter valve.

I take out my order pad and pencil. *Warren hot for Darlene?*

“She’s no Gina Vanderham,” Darlene says.

Gina left for college in June. She’s talking about me again, Gina’s replacement. It’s so obvious Darlene focuses on the wrong stuff.



Darlene lets a bad tip ruin her whole day, rolls her eyes when I spend a microsecond at the pick-up window trying to balance three plates on one arm, yet consumes two hours a day rubbing her feet beside the milkshake maker.

I search Warren's face. Who could ever be hot for Darlene? Darlene with her corny feet, who obviously throws her uniform in the laundry with the nametag still attached, whose break is over and now bleeding into mine.

"But who else is Paternoster going to get to work this dump?" her voice clear over the reefer trucks cycling. Lately she's been taking more verbal chances, because Paternoster's made some changes. He cleaned out the pantry and when the seafood truck rolled in, unloaded a large tank of murky water. At first it looked like a tank of old shoes, but inside were two lethargic carp. A couple days later, a freakishly thin man no one had ever seen before, wearing a bandana and rubber boots clonked in with a black garbage bag full of wild mushrooms. Paternoster took them out back to dry on an old bedsheet behind the bulk propane refill tower.

"What the eff," Darlene had said after returning from the tower for her smoke break. "How the hell are we supposed to work in this environment?"

For the next two hours she served tables while growling "shroom shroom" and pretending to be an eighteen-wheeler climbing a steep incline, picking her regulars into weak smiles.

*

"It's been a month since he's changed the fry oil," Darlene says as she sniffs the cook's station and I load the dishwasher. She's convinced Paternoster's laundering his money. "What else could he be doing with it? He's obviously not using it to pay us. He's sending it back to France. To some overseas bank account." For the rest of the day, money laundering is all Darlene talks about.

"Who ever heard of a Frenchie running a truck stop anyway?"

"They don't have truck drivers in France?" I ask.

"What? The hell should I know." She glares at me. "The Golden Fleece, what kind of a name is that anyway? Know what this place should be called? Bone Daddies. That's the type of name that spells success."

I'm cashing out while she's laying down menus at a new table and I hear her say, "Welcome to Bone Daddies, how can I get you started?"

Darlene should just get another job. Stuck in a job she hates—and we all know how that happens: the world poops on you. And then you spend the rest of your life squirming for freedom because world-poop is like quicksand. Quicksand, the ruthlessness of nature, the more you struggle the stronger it sucks you down.

One day, while vacationing, quicksand is on the to-do list. The exact location where Xena Warrior Princess was shot, the scene where she saves her trusted sidekick from peril. Being a warrior princess is a lot like being an archetype of human potential, like Leonardo. Xena had pure mortal blood status; all it took was some martial arts training and a moral one-eighty when she decided she no longer wanted to be a power-hungry warlord. All those slave girls she saved from assured doom.

I take out my order pad and pencil.

See that girl at Table 5 playing with the straw? She loves that straw because it reminds her of her pet rabbit at home who is a chronic pot smoker. Every time she tries to tell her rabbit to quit smoking pot, he says to her—You need to relax, maybe you want a hit too? Take the edge off? But the rabbit doesn't know any better; his parents had perpetual glaucoma and they essentially hot-boxed the cave until the pet rabbit was addicted before he could even hop. The little girl has no friends because her parents live in the woods and only come into town once a month to buy bags of powdered milk and dried beans. They leave her alone all day so they can pick rocks that they sell for five cents a bag. One day she steals that bong and uses it for something more practical than hot-boxing a rabbit. She uses it for science. She uses it for progress. Leonardo didn't even have bongs, all he had were insights into the internal organs. She attaches gears and a vacuum and makes it into a robot that crushes loneliness or at least picks rocks while everyone relaxes.

Don't worry Table 5, Leonardo has a plan!

*

The next morning Darlene and I are taking trash out to the Dumpster when a dusty taxicab pulls up to Pump 3. First off, where did a cab come from? Second off, could the woman unloading suitcases be Paternoster's wife?

"Bonjour," the woman says as she walks up to the door. "Hello."

"We know what bonjour means," Darlene says.

Madame looks at her appraisingly. I should warn her not to mess with Darlene. She hasn't seen her finger-jabs, or the way she can make your life miserable when she shows up in the morning still a little pickled and then eats an entire pie à la mode while calling everyone she works with a dipshit. Just then Paternoster emerges from the building, his hair slicked into a new wave.

Madame is staring at the Travel Plaza sign that advertises gas pump prices in numerals with several segments burnt out; the faded FREE BREAKFAST WITH 100GAL MINIMUM; the blinking arrow on the side of the road pointing to the twelve-foot-tall sheep covered in chipped gold foil. She lingers momentarily on the sheep's head—an eroded oblong onto which two uneven eyes were thickly painted.

"Jesus, Louis," Madame says under her breath, her eyes still fixed on the sheep. She blinks heavily and turns towards the road: the bare, single-lane artery that links the Fleece with the rest of the world, the expectant raptors squatting on power lines scanning the ditch for roadkill. "Where are my dogs?"

Paternoster whistles. The dogs reel around the corner, powder-puffed, ears lifting in the breeze of their tear-ass, pink bowties, tongues lolling in the dry heat of summer, all eyes trained on Madame—until one of them trips over a loose flap of gator skin and goes down. "Non, non, non," Madame Paternoster yells, running over. She scoops him up and shoots Monsieur a murderous look.

*

The truckers love Madame Paternoster.

She wears long silky jackets that waft behind her as she tops up coffee cups and hums old show tunes. It's only been two weeks and already she's ordered new uniforms and rewritten the menu, adding items like *Steak au jus*. Everyone has heard about the improvements,

and the restaurant has been crammed.

Darlene keeps saying how “*au jus*” is just Bisto instant gravy mix and how could everyone be so frickin’ moronic and Madame Hooch-ass should basically *au revoir*. She hasn’t even bothered to wear the new uniform and continues to come in with the same greased one with the nametag barely hanging on.

Darlene’s just pissed because her picking is no longer effective. In the presence of Madame Paternoster, Darlene’s picking makes her regulars sigh; their eyes blink slower than usual, whereas they follow Madame from the rim of their coffee cups.

Darlene blames Madame for the shitty tips she’s been getting, but she has *been* shitty lately. She doesn’t bother working on Madame’s laminated duty checklists and instead slumps over the cash register during the afternoon lull, lighting her Zippo over and over on her forearm.

*

A couple weeks later, the Paternosters are in town putting an ad in the paper for another day waitress when Darlene accidentally spills a milkshake on the counter and wipes it back into the cup with her hand. She slams it down in front of Arjun, one of her better tippers. He

reads Louis L’Amour while he eats and stacks his tip loonies in a neat pile by his plate. His signature, Darlene calls it. Once Darlene left the loonies balancing for an afternoon just to see if the rumble from a Rocky Mountain Double Roller would knock them over when it pulled into the pumps. For the past hour she’s been popping in and out of the pantry for no reason.

I’m in the back refilling the coffee pot when I hear a crash in the pantry and some loud cursing. I cautiously open the door to Darlene, slumped in the corner drinking Sunset Blush.

“Just look at me,” she says, spreading her arms wide so I can digest the whole picture. “It’s that fucking douchewad Julio. Have you met my man? R.E.S.P.E.C.T., show you what it means to me.” She holds out her mug, “Slurp?”

Getting drunk at work is definitely the opposite of being an archetype of human potential. She turns the spigot on the Sunset Blush box to refill her cup and a purple splash hits the carp tank.

“He used to be so nice. Have I ever told you about May long weekends in Oswagootchie? Oswagootchie by the coast? All that fresh air that made us go savage? I swear to god there was once a time when that man would grab my ass out of the blue. Once, we were hitting it



hard and this little yellow bird landed beside us and chirped, and Julio stopped because he didn't think it was right to keep banging because it was perverting nature."

I don't want to hear about Oswagootchie.

"But you love them no matter what, am I right?"

Mom used to reminisce like this before Dad left and it always made me nervous.

Now we live with Uncle Dwayne, Nan and cousin Tippy. And it's not Nan's fault she can't run around after Tippy all day because she had five kids of her own and doesn't feel inclined to do it all over again—especially not for a little brat who takes off and gets his foot caught in the floorboards of Mr. Boyjack's expensive machinery shed that Boyjack swore was locked and how does a six year old know how to pick a lock, anyway? Well, I'll tell you, it's from his Uncle Dwayne who's been on unemployment since being run over by a dump truck and blood squirted out of his eyes and now he isn't able to see far away, only close up and somehow, he swears to god, this makes his eyes especially excellent for things like lock picking.

Mom works laundry at the hospital but lately she's been stiffed shifts by her bulljive boss. I could never imagine working in that bleach hole, spending all day stuffing puke sheets and pee sheets and shit sheets into the industrial washer. Mom was once probably good-looking, but now when you look at her all you see is the years of bacterial sanitizer and nervous exhaustion.

"I'm really killing this wine," Darlene says, looking into her cup. "New day waitresses," she mutters. "This place used to be great." She pours another drink.

"You know," she says, suddenly on her feet. "You should hit that Warren."

I pretend I'm in the pantry only to fetch a box of butter pats and leave. Flirting with Warren is how you get stuck waitressing at the Fleece for the rest of your life, Darlene.

A half-hour later and she's over by fluids using the bug-wash tower to hold herself upright while Warren's on the payphone trying to find someone to pick her up before the Pater-nosters return. Finally a jacked Toyota skids in. A man climbs out, grabs Darlene by the arm and leads her into the cab. Two kids dangle their arms over the side of the truck's box. When the

truck screeches out, they lift their arms and roll back in with the momentum.

I take out my order pad and pencil.

See that young man at Table 6? He is having a secret love affair with an older mermaid. The world is your oyster, she told him; you can have anything you want, including me. It seemed like a good deal. He had a mother who never bugged him. She was born without any arms. And is it the mermaid's fault the Ocean King doesn't love her anymore and instead pokes her with his pitchfork whenever she comes near?

By the time he realizes the King hired a hitman, it's too late. They were found in her clam bed, not a plush pink one, but an old grey rubbery one similar to those currently drowning in Madame's carpy "mother sauce" in the buffet.

"Help," the young man cries, but the only things that come out of his mouth are bubbles. Some bubbles are lethargic, he notes, while others are angry or greasy or slim. His curiosity has been jolted! He harnesses the angry ones and uses them to fight neglect. Or at least float himself out of the oyster shell and away from the King's hitman.

Don't worry Table 6, Leonardo has a plan!

*

The next day Darlene comes in a full ten minutes early for her shift, blurry-eyed and pale. For the first time, she's wearing her new uniform with the truck airbrushed across the back. Her nametag's on straight, and not the old one but the Madame-inspired version with Darlene arched above a tiny sheep.

She doesn't even bother working front of house and instead spends her entire morning plugging quarters in the jukebox, washing down Pepto with coffee and singing along to "Barracuda" as she peels about twenty pounds of potatoes for mash without complaining.

Madame doesn't notice the Darlene transformation. She's spent the morning with the dogs, conceptualizing a new Sunday buffet half-time show.

“It’s not that they don’t like dogs. It’s the pioneering influence of this country,” she says. “The early émigré. People here think dogs are for work.” She had a series of costumes designed for the bichons. Some of them have felted miner’s hats that tie underneath the chin while the others are wearing starched white bonnets and ribbons in their ears. Madame trained dogs for a living in France, mostly for television before she branched into something called French Ring Sport. I watch Bruno doggie-dance on his hind legs, yips squeezing from his delicate jaws with each tiny hop. She tells me how training builds their confidence and makes them interact better with their environment.

“Tricks are important for dogs,” Madame says. “Mental stimulation equals a richer life experience.”

It’s exactly like that foldout from Nan’s Wonderland of Knowledge encyclopedias. And this is when I see it: Xena and her sidekick straining in the quicksand and the bichons in the trees barking—not in a hysterical way, but in a communicative way. They’re barking out a plan to lower vines down to the quicksand by passing them one-by-one with their mouths. Leonardo is there too, with his back to my mind’s eye, building a lever mechanism using an animal tusk and a coconut, his tunic blowing out behind him due to the inherent breeze of his brainpower.

It’s decided, I’m going to build something for the dog show.

*

It makes me pensive, this decision to make something for the show. For the rest of my shift, I’m distracted as I bus tables and take orders. I lean on the counter by the till and watch people chew and imagine them pointing at my invention and whispering, *This shall bend paradigms*. I smile serenely at myself in the pie-case glass like I would at the crowd, *I am at your service; my brain dispensed to all humanity*. When I focus back on the floor, there’s a customer burning at me, pissed because I screwed up.

But I figure it’s irrelevant in the larger picture and I offer him a complimentary piece of pie. This is temporary, because soon I’ll have scholarships and let my hair go full-Einstein and I’ll never have to do dishes or sleep on

stained sheets stolen from the hospital or pretend to like Uncle Dwayne’s jokes or remove a disgusting packrat den from under Nan’s trailer or watch Cousin Tippy eat Hot Pockets or pretend I don’t hear Mom muttering and crying in her bedroom.

All I’ll have to do is think.

*

Later at home, it’s just Mom and Uncle Dwayne and Tippy. Uncle Dwayne’s sprawled on the sofa with the dog at his feet, watching Sunday Beatdown. He’s got his shirt yanked up and a smug look on his face like he’s just invented penicillin. He’s pouring salt into his bellybutton to use as a dip-hole for his celery sticks.

I grab a snack and walk to Nan’s shop next door. Her shop is full of stuff she uses when she contracts an artistic outbreak. Lately, she’s been working on a scale model of the neighbourhood. There’s a piece of plywood on the workbench where she’s paved a miniature road and formed trees from pine bits and the mud bog by Pauling looks like real mud but it’s actually Smooth-on.

There’s a miniature Fleece and the graveyard by Uncle Rodrigo’s trailer and the houses that lead to the highway, the boarded-up post office, and derelict subdivision by China Nose Mountain.

I’ve decided to build a chuckwagon for the dog show, which is basically a modern-day single-axle Euro trailer. The dogs, in their bonnets, can pull it behind them with little leashes.

I spend all evening working on my wagon, deeply involved with each detail from the wheels to the pots and pans secured with rivet nails to the bed. Eventually I fall asleep with my head on the workbench and wake up early with paint chips stuck to my cheek.

*

I pull into the Fleece with the wagon bungeed to the rattrap on my bike and prop it against the side of the building. I’m on my first break when I run into Madame crouching beside it, poking it cautiously with a stick.

“What do you think it is?” she asks.

Slumped against the building, it doesn’t look much like a wagon. The wooden slats and the stretched canvas tarp painted brown make it



appear less like a wagon and more like a loaf of bread with wheels.

“That?” I say, shrugging. “Maybe one of the oil crates?”

“Merde. Did it get run over by a semi hauler?” She kneels and gently jabs it with her finger as if to wake it from a nap. “Maybe Louis can fix it,” she sighs.

I take out my order pad and pencil.

See that man at Table 9? The one with the tight suspenders and the hairs burnt off his forearms and his hands resting on his round stomach. He stares at that stomach as if patiently waiting for it to answer a question. Usually these truckers are jittery in the restaurant, like they don't get the value in sitting without rolling. But this man has been searching for something his whole life. It was something his grandmother lost when she bent down to scratch her leg. It rolled into the ditch, but which ditch was never documented because the item was so valuable she croaked immediately due to remorse.

Now the man spends every weekend in ditches with his pointer stick, sifting through chip bags and tossed cigarettes. Once he came across the love of his life sitting cross-legged but he didn't recognize her because he had just hoisted a rotten tire full of mould and thought he saw a corner of his grandmother's thing under the severed hand and soiled underwear.

One day he catches trench foot and despair while crawling in the ditch near the dump where the teenagers party. He becomes feverish—feverishly inventive. And while squatting he begins to investigate the science of water. He uses this to calculate how far something can roll away before one forgets about it.

Don't worry Table 9, Leonardo has a plan!

*

I've been finding it harder to be an archetype of human potential ever since Darlene came to work with a spray-painted boulder in the back of her truck.

“It's a gold nugget,” she said.

“A nugget!” Madame exclaimed to Paternoster.

“Oh, happy day,” Paternoster replied. Madame ordered him to drag it into the buffet room and slide it under the chafing dishes.

Now Darlene struts around the place spurning new ideas like, “How about we change the slogan to *Life’s too short for average food*. Or, how about we name a menu item *King of the Road*?” And she keeps petting the dogs and snuggling them and giving them random French names that are mostly English names pronounced with a fake French accent.

She isn’t even complaining about the magnetic chit board with the days of the week and every employee’s smiling face glued to each stupid chit. It’s obviously because her chit isn’t on cleaning duty. Instead, it’s permanently stuck on floor manager. In what universe does the Fleece need a floor manager?

*

The night before the show Madame empties the suggestion box and the two of them spend an hour laughing over the notes.

“Someone’s in love with you,” Madame says. “C’est amour.” She tosses another of my comments onto the messy pile on the table.

They’re lounging at a booth with their shoes off, squinting through the lacy curtains at the sunset as it quivers off the parking lot. I button my coat as a brand new International LoneStar eighteen-wheeler pulls in with pneumatic grace: pearly blue enamel, shiny chrome gas tanks, a blush of running light hovering below like a noontime shadow.

The light lengthens and glints off a windshield, flaring momentarily before being absorbed by the dropped sun visor of a parked chicken transport. Sometimes the universe sends you a sign, like when you’re at the beach and a whale breaches.

*

It’s the day of the show and my magnetic chit is on cleaning the washrooms again. I take the buckets and the yellow gloves and scoop the pucks out of the urinals—the pastilles, Paternoster calls them. Even from here I can hear the cheers in the buffet room and Mrs. Humphreys laughing hysterically. It’s the part when Leo and Pierre jump onto the gold nugget and bark out the first bars to *Old Dan Tucker*. Chairs screech

back as everyone stands to applaud.

I look in the mirror. My nametag is crooked. There’s another mirror hanging on the wall opposite and my face repeats itself over and over for eternity. I wonder if Leonardo had mirrors and that was how he dreamed up perspective. Getting fired from your first job isn’t being an archetype of human potential. I pull on the gloves. What would Leonardo do? He was in worse places than the men’s—the morgue, for example. I remove the gloves and put the bucket on the floor.

I take out my order pad and pencil.

See that young woman in the bathroom?

Who knows what she will do—maybe she’ll get sucked into world-poop and invent a new snorkel on the way down.

Or maybe she will become a veterinarian’s assistant and wear a stethoscope. In the waiting room, she’ll feed the dogs biscuits and offer words of encouragement. Even though they are weak and arthritic and on buckets of medication, she will listen to their flubbery hearts and they will sound like a moose’s mating call but she will smile like it’s the best music in the world. As if listening to all of life’s satisfying sounds at once: bottles popping, fires crackling, rain on a roof when going to sleep. With their last effort, the dogs will thump their tails on the examination bed paper cover and with their rheumatic eyes, say:

You are special!

You are special!

You are special!

K’ari Fisher has been published in the Malahat Review, Prairie Fire and Riddle Fence. Her story “Mercy Beatrice Wrestles the Noose” was nominated for the 2015 Journey Prize and appeared in the Journey Prize anthology, published by McClelland and Stewart and the Writers’ Trust of Canada. She is currently completing a short story collection. She lives in Victoria.

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Reheated Races

STEPHEN HENIGHAN

Dividing and conquering local populations confines them to manageable administrative units

When I was a graduate student in the early 1990s, refugees fleeing the war in former Yugoslavia began to arrive in England. I told an acquaintance, who had grown up in Yugoslavia, that the guy sitting next to me in one of my classes was Bosnian. “I would call that a Yugoslav,” she replied. “If you’ve been driven out of your hometown for being a Muslim,” I suggested, “it may be understandable that you define yourself as a Bosnian, not as a Yugoslav.” In saying this, I did not mean to deny the tragedy of the disintegration of Yugoslav identity. From its shaky outlines in the post-WWI Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes—a title that omitted Bosnian Muslims, among other ethnicities—to its more uncompromising articulation in Marshal Tito’s socialist yet anti-Soviet Yugoslavia of the Cold War era, the Yugoslav idea represented an attempt, however authoritarian, creaky and flawed, to overcome interracial strife.

The ideology that blew Yugoslavia apart in the 1990s, shattering a medium-sized country into what would eventually become seven small states, was that of racial difference. In *Bosnia: A Short History*, Noel Malcolm writes that most scholars believe the Serbs and Croats who settled the territory that became Bosnia when stable Slavic populations first settled in the



region in the seventh century issued from the same stock. They spoke in ways that were sufficiently similar that until the 1990s, Serbo-Croatian was regarded as a single language. Today speakers of Serbian, Croatian, and even Bosnian and Macedonian, assert their identities as separate languages that belong to different ethnicities. Little linguistic justification exists for such distinctions. The prevalence of people of shared ancestry who regard themselves as essentially different should make us question the concept of race. As a Jamaican-Canadian biologist said to me, “There are no species differences among human beings.”

Constructing new races by renaming languages is an old European habit. After the early Middle Ages, the

Galician language, when spoken south of the Minho River, became known as Portuguese, and its southern speakers, by extension, became Portuguese. The Dutch and the Flemish are identified as different peoples, and the common language they speak goes by different names on opposite sides of the border, in order to prop up the precarious national identity of Belgium. By contrast, some people of similar appearance speak different languages. Between 1649 and 1652 some of my maternal ancestors joined the troops of their neighbour in East Anglia, Oliver Cromwell. They invaded Ireland and slaughtered Irish peasants; in response, my paternal ancestors, who were those peasants, took to the countryside of the west of Ireland to wage guerrilla warfare against the invaders. These two peoples, who spoke different languages, perceived each other as alien races; yet a basic DNA test assimilates my East Anglian and western Irish ancestries into the single category of “British Isles.”

The historian Donald R. Wright points out that European colonizers projected their nationalism onto Africa, parcelling people whose identities had been fluid and free of rigidly demarcated boundaries of territory or ethnicity into

“tribes.” Europeans invented these ethnicities, dividing and conquering local populations and confining them to manageable administrative units, as they imposed their concepts of race and nation on Africa. Over time, some Africans absorbed this ideology. Speakers of the three most widely used Bantu languages in Angola—Ovimbundu, Kimbundu and Bakongo—have been encouraged by some of their leaders to see their linguistic differences as equivalent to immemorial ethnic fissures even though their languages are very closely related and the three communities assumed their present forms only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as a result of population transfers and intermarriage caused by European colonialism. As in Europe, some Africans see themselves as different even when they speak the same language. In Rwanda, the Hutu and the Tutsi, whose assertions of difference fuelled a genocide in 1994, both speak Kinyarwanda.

Early decolonizing movements took aim at the ideology of race. José Martí, a nineteenth-century Cuban poet and journalist, attacked race as a divisive fiction that would hobble independent nations. In his groundbreaking 1891 essay “Nuestra América” (“Our America”) Martí called for a Latin America in which, “There is no racial hatred because there are no races. Feeble thinkers... rehearse races found in bookstores (*recalientan las razas de librería*, in the original) which the objective traveller and the sympathetic observer seeks in vain in Nature. The soul emanates, equal and eternal, from bodies that are diverse in form and colour.” José Vasconcelos, the Minister of Education of revolutionary Mexico in the 1920s, wrote an influential book entitled *The Cosmic Race*, in which he posited that humanism and socialism would prevail when the world’s population had intermarried to the point of becoming a single race. While my Bosnian classmate might have reason to doubt this optimism, the writings of

Martí and Vasconcelos suggest that South America, Central America and Mexico, as regions where the majority of the population is the result of racial mixing that has occurred in the last five hundred years, have historical experiences that may be useful to North America and Europe in our mixed-race futures.

In Africa, it is striking that most of the anti-colonialist movements that came to power in the racially mixed terrain of southern Africa—the African National Congress in South Africa, the MPLA in Angola, FRELIMO in Mozambique, SWAPO in Namibia—made multiracialism a central plank of their political ideologies. “Down with tribalism!” Samora Machel, the first president of Mozambique, would shout in his speeches repudiating the colonial legacy. During the Obama presidency in the United States, idealists spoke of a post-racial future, yet without addressing sufficiently the persistence of race-based oppression and violence. There can be no post-racialism without an end to racialization. As José Martí understood, inequality will always rehearse the races found in bookstores. The recent collective trauma of coexisting with a United States president whose dominant creed was racism may cause us to underestimate the speed with which we are advancing towards a world defined by mixing, in which most identities will be complex and mingled, and each society’s challenge will be to create sufficient opportunity for all to prevent a resurgence of race.

Stephen Henighan’s most recent book is the novel The World of After. His English translation of the Angolan writer Ondjaki’s novel Transparent City, originally published by Biblioasis in 2018, is forthcoming in a British edition from Europa Editions. Read more of his work at geist.com and stephenhenighan.com. Follow him on Twitter @StephenHenighan.



STANDOFF
Why Reconciliation Fails Indigenous People and How to Fix It
Bruce McIvor

McIvor’s message is consistent and powerful: if Canadians are brave enough to confront the reality of the country’s colonialist past and present and insist that politicians replace empty promises with concrete, meaningful change, there is a realistic path forward based on respect, recognition and the implementation of Indigenous rights.

“Canada’s vision of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples is crap. It’s nice to see a book that shares this view. Read it and learn.”
 —TIM FONTAINE,
Walking Eagle News

“As a masterful scholar, advocate and Indigenous thought leader, Bruce McIvor has for decades been at the forefront of dismantling Canada’s colonial legal system and the mindset that sustains the continued denial of the rights of Indigenous peoples. In all this work, Bruce embraces cultural humility and defers to the voices of his client, bringing wisdom and collaboration in each step of this arduous journey.”
 —MARY ELLEN TURPEL-LAFOND
 (AKI-KWE)

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Dismantling the Myth of the Hero

CHERYL THOMPSON

In a world dominated by heroes, difference is not tolerated

After writing my second book on the cultural mutation of the fictional-character-turned-racial-epithet Uncle Tom, I began to reflect on other enduring mythological figures that are ubiquitous in our culture. The hero is one of them. In the 2021 HBO biopic *Tina* for instance, which drew 1.1 million viewers to the career and music of Tina Turner, I was reacquainted with her 1985 hit song, “We Don’t Need Another Hero” from the film *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*. (The 7-inch single for “We Don’t Need Another Hero” is nestled somewhere in my record collection). Turner’s hit was one of many hero-themed film soundtrack songs during the decade. Bonnie Tyler’s 1984 ballad “Holding Out for a Hero” (featured in *Footloose*) and “Wind Beneath My Wings” (sometimes titled “Hero”), first recorded in 1982 but attributed to singer and actress Bette Midler and the 1988 film *Beaches*, are two other examples.

Action films of the eighties also created dozens of cinematic heroes. These figures, most of whom were white and male, were either in a war, or veterans whose violence seemed justified in a world of turmoil. For the heroes in these films, unrest—past or present—was always personal. I still remember the first action film of my childhood, *Rambo: First Blood*. Originally released in 1982, and starring Sylvester Stallone as Vietnam War veteran John Rambo, this film was followed by others like *Missing in Action* (1984), *Platoon* (1986), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), *Hamburger Hill* (1987), *Good*

Morning, Vietnam (1987), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), to name a few. Black male heroes who appeared in the 1980s and 1990s were also produced through the media industries, however, the storytelling around their heroism was quite different than the white male heroism projected onto the silver screen. The case of Michael Jordan is one such example.

While there were African-American sports heroes before him—such as sprinter Jesse Owens, boxer Muhammad Ali, baseball player Jackie Robinson and fellow basketball player Kareem Abdul-Jabbar—Jordan was the first Black male hero to be born of a consumer brand. In 1984 as a twenty-one-year-old rookie who had not yet put on his Chicago Bulls uniform, Jordan signed a five-year endorsement deal with the apparel company Nike, not to endorse a new Nike shoe, but to have an entire brand built around his image—the Air Jordan 1 (AJs).

Significantly, the AJs hit the market at a time of contradiction. In contrast to the proliferation of nostalgic war movies with a white male hero protagonist, hip hop culture with its urban settings, Black masculine motifs, and anti-policing/government lyrics moved into the mainstream. A whole new generation of white youth were suddenly taking their cues from and idolizing Black men who were the anti-heroes to Jordan’s consumer heroism. Stated otherwise, their mission was not to make

the world a better place through consumer culture, corporate endorsements, and middle-class respectability; instead, they turned a spotlight on the myth of the great American hero. The Black man in “da hood” with something critical to say became a threatening force; the rapper was so threatening to mainstream America that in 1992 Republican Vice President Dan Quayle called Tupac Shakur’s debut solo album *2Pacalypse Now*—considered one of the greatest hip hop albums of all time—a disgrace to American music. Meanwhile, Black men like Jordan, who projected a safe “buddy” masculinity and who were right at home in capitalist structures with their nonthreatening affability began to take up space within the popular culture as appealing heroic figures. Today, violent white male heroes on the big screen have discursively been framed as endearing and charming; meanwhile, Black male heroes are put into a position where they must project the “right” image—on and off the screen. These heroes can never be violent because no Black acts of violence are seen as justifiable—even protests in response to Black death at the hands of police or white supremacists. Nothing about this duality is natural; it is made by people, not naturally occurring historical events. The myth of the hero is part of a systemic tunnel vision that dominates in Western culture, wherein people are unable to see the societal structures that maintain collective oppressions.

The hero is not born of mere folklore; the archetype of masculinity, perpetuated on the big screen, in sports and in popular music for decades, has its roots in the nineteenth century. In his lectures *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841), Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle was one of the first to argue that only the hero had the vision to see history as it happened. For Carlyle, the viewpoint of the ordinary person was obscured by “the specters and phantasmagorias of emancipation.” Meaning, where the “ordinary person” (e.g., non-whites, the poor, and women) was believed to be a passive observer of history without agency, the hero, according to Carlyle, stood at the vantage point of being able to grasp the full scope of history—as it happened and in retrospect—with citizenship rights and unrestrained ability to act. With his unbounded vision, the heroic figure had both a present existence and a defined past: only he could envision the future.

In *On Visuality*, New York University professor Nicholas Mirzeoff explains that Carlyle created a new form of heroism in which “the visualized hero was both the true source of Enlightenment and its primordial origin, a temporal jump that only could be understood in a visualized form of writing as picture.” The Age of Enlightenment in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, a time marked by rationality, reason and scientific progress, helped to create the mythical hero that came to dominate twentieth-century visual culture. To *see* in the nineteenth century was to imagine a world from the point of view of white European men. In a world dominated by heroes, difference was not tolerated. Instead, it had to be explained through a prism of Otherness. Hence, the

emergence in the nineteenth century of theories of eugenics, “survival of the fittest” and beliefs in the innate superiority of Anglo-Saxon Protestant white men. If the hero was born out of visualizing history, anti-heroes, especially Black men, were configured, imagined, seen, and represented as everything the hero is not—a threat to Enlightenment notions of freedom and liberty.



Carlyle coined the term “visuality” to explain the visualization of history; that is, the state of being visual, making sense of the social world through vision and visibility, such as creating a “mental picture” of something, or the use of images to represent the material world. This concept has been taken up by

contemporary Black scholars who have unpacked its implication; as well, many scholars have explained why the visual hero narrative cannot be applied to Black men. In *Picture Freedom: Remaking Black Visuality in the Early Nineteenth Century* (2015), Jasmine Cobb argues that theories of Black visibility must focus attention on how the visual practices of slavery constructed a racialized social order that suppressed the Black gaze—one’s ability to see and be seen. Denying the very possibility of such a gaze was a key strategy in the colonial construction of Black people as visible objects under slavery, not as authorized subjects. When Carlyle dissociated vision from corporeality—

meaning he thought of sight not as a universal experience but as an act dependent on the skin you are in—his theories supported the construction of Blackness as pure embodiment, not of reason and thought. In other words, Black people were deemed to lack a visual history.

Black emancipation, as a result, was viewed through the prism of anti-heroism. For instance, in 1831 when Nat Turner, a highly literate enslaved preacher, set off a two-day uprising by both enslaved and free Black people in Southampton County, Virginia, authorities responded with a violent crackdown. Turner was captured, convicted and later hanged.

Obviously, he was not a hero to Virginian authorities but in the annals of history, Turner’s actions provide us with the ability to critique the visualization of history.

When African-Americans escaped enslavement, they were labelled “fugitives” because the visuality of the time could only allow their bodies to be viewed through the eyes of white authorities. For African Americans,

Image: Anna Binta Diallo, *Black Cowboy*, 2020. Collage printed on Photo-Text Adhesive Fabric. 23 x 13 inches. Courtesy the artist and the Towards Gallery in Toronto, ON.

escaped slaves were “freedom seekers,” renegades and liberators. This explains why Harriet Tubman was known as the “Moses of her people,” but in the visuality of the nineteenth century, she was a “dangerous” criminal. Today, we have the ability to see Tubman and even Turner as heroes, fighting against the unjust institution of slavery, but the lasting impact of their anti-heroic visuality is that even today, Black acts of civil disobedience are rarely interpreted through a lens of Black visuality, but instead, we assume the point of view of white authorities.

Writing in 1995, cultural theorist Stuart Hall observed that “in liberal ideology, ‘freedom’ is connected (articulated) with individualism and the free market; in socialist ideology, ‘freedom’ is a collective condition, dependent on, not counterposed to, ‘equality of condition,’ as it is in liberal ideology. The same concept is differently positioned within the logic of different ideological discourses.” Freedom, in other words, is a subjective concept dependent on ideology but also historical context. When people who challenge Western notions of “freedom of speech” and “freedom of expression” are accused of political correctness or so-called cancel culture, the presentist concerns of primarily white individuals are often put above collective histories. For example, in fall 2020 when a letter written in French and entitled “Libertés surveillées” or “Monitored Freedoms” and signed by thirty-four University of Ottawa professors disagreed with how a white professor who used the N-word in their class had been treated, they argued that not using the N-word in classes put academic freedom at risk. The fact that that word has been used for centuries as a weapon of violence against Black people did not matter to the signatories of that letter. Instead, they took on the role of the authorities, coming to the defence of an individual’s right to speak and define

academic freedom, ignoring those who have been historically (collectively) harmed by its use. If those professors could see through the eyes of their Black students, would they continue to defend using that word? Would they continue to view freedom through an individualist lens?

The media, as Hall once noted, is one place where ideas about race are articulated, worked on, transformed and elaborated. The media does not teach us how to feel or hear, it teaches us how to see and what to see. It gives us our viewpoint, our perspective. For example, in *Seeing Through Race: A Reinterpretation of Civil Rights Photography*, author Martin Berger argues that civil rights photographs from the 1960s often reduced the complex social dynamics of the civil rights movement to easily digested narratives, prominent among them white-on-Black violence. How have complex and challenging problems been oversimplified through a visuality of white heroism and Black anti-heroism? How do centuries-long modes of seeing still shape how we see and what we see?

Bob Adelman’s iconic photograph of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivering his “I Have a Dream” speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC on August 28, 1963, captured King striking a heroic pose as he gestures toward the sky against the colossal columns of the Lincoln Memorial behind him. While King is considered a heroic figure today (as we look back on the past), in the 1960s, many white people and the media—looking forward into the future—loathed King’s insistence on disrupting the status quo of white America. He was an anti-hero to many. As such his speech is not remembered in its totality, especially the parts where he rebukes segregation and white racism; instead, the visuality of his recollection of a dream is what is remembered. Nowadays, it has even been reduced to hashtag-able moments.

In 2013, in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the March on Washington and King’s speech, NBC News asked all Americans to share their “dreams” by using the hashtag #DreamDay and completing the statement, “I have a dream that [fill in the blank].” As Americans responded with posts on social media, some of the submissions which were featured on NBC’s flagship news programs were nothing more than individualist dreams about people’s lives and families; there was little recognition of the continued fight for social justice and the eradication of racism. For instance, in a video posted to YouTube, Ivanka Trump said, “I have a dream that educational equality will become a global reality. This is incredibly important to me as I have a young daughter and another child on the way, and I hope they grow up in a world where that comes to pass.” This “dream” does not mean anything to an individual who has no discernible social justice platform to speak of. The superficiality of the hashtag #DreamDay renders invisible the imagined future of King’s dream.

The prospective of visualizing a Black future is deeply rooted in conceptions of freedom. I believe that to hope, you must dare to question the things you have taken as essential truths. You must question notions of freedom, emancipation, and equality because they are at the centre of understanding how everyone, not just white male heroes, has experienced challenges in the Western world. What it means to be Black and free is not and has never been the same as what it means to be white and free. Dismantling the myth of the hero would help us move conversations about race and anti-Black racism away from being almost entirely located in a binary framework of good versus evil, and most importantly, right versus wrong. Instead, we would be able to have nuanced conversations that are rooted in historical context and complexity.

In *Black Is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics* (2016), Paul Taylor argues that questioning aesthetic theory is one way to move us toward asking deeper questions about the status or meaning of the concepts employed in the representational world. Questions like What is art? and Are judgments of human beauty really about beauty, or are they about something else? Since heroes are not born but are produced through our visual culture and they are always dependent on seeing and vision, how can we create heroes who are representationally different from those who have been produced since the Age of Enlightenment? How can we let go of the visualized hero? Ultimately, part of the process of unpacking the hero, especially the tightly constrained Black male hero, begins with understanding the concept of Black futurity, which asks that we think about our language—what we say and how we say it.

In *Listening to Images* (2017), Tina Campt argues that futurity is not a question of “hope”—though it is intertwined with the idea of aspiration. For Campt, futurity is about “tense.” What is the “tense” of a Black future? There is no tradition of placing Black heroes in history. Prior to Jordan, and apart from King, there have been no Black male figures who have captured the collective public’s imagination as a hero. While we are still inundated with white male heroes on the big and small screens, and in popular culture in general, there is arguably no living Black hero who has replaced the aforementioned. (While former President Barack Obama is often labelled a hero, he has many critics such as Dr. Cornel West who would staunchly disagree). Today, Black martyrs—from Trayvon Martin to George Floyd and the dozens of unarmed Black men and women in the United States, Canada and elsewhere who have died at the hands of police—have become the new heroes for the ways in which their deaths have spawned a social justice

movement for change. Echoing the fate of Uncle Tom who, in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s nineteenth-century novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, died a martyr’s death at the hands of a white plantation owner, why is death still the predominant entry point for Black male heroism in the twenty-first century?

The slogan “Black Lives Matter” is much bigger than just anti-Black racism in policing. It is arguably the first metaphysical demand of this century to challenge the binary logic of hero versus anti-hero. Black Lives Matter is about an embodied, visual demand for Black freedom that is not embedded in an individualist narrative that positions one solitary man with the vision to see—past, present, future—but to also save everyone. All Black people can become heroes. Ava DuVernay’s Netflix series *When They See Us* (2019) echoes this egalitarian demand in that it not only anticipates a future where Black men are seen and heard, it also unpacks a complicated past, moving the viewer beyond aesthetics and the individualist narrative of a heroic visuality.

Films that move us to see a collective lived reality that is both past and in anticipation of a future help us get one step closer to realizing King’s dream. We need an imagined future where historical oppressions are understood as relevant to our present moment, not as something we need to “get over.” We need a new visuality that enables everyone to see history as it is, not as the 1980s action hero would have us see it.

Cheryl Thompson is the author of Uncle: Race, Nostalgia, and the Politics of Loyalty (2021) and Beauty in a Box: Detangling the Roots of Canada’s Black Beauty Culture (2019). She also writes cultural commentaries for several Canadian news and popular culture sites. In 2021, Thompson was named a member of the Royal Society of Canada’s (RSC) College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists. She lives in Toronto.

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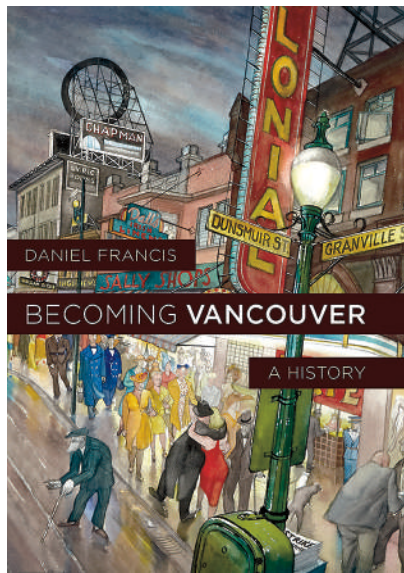
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ENDNOTES

REVIEWS, COMMENTS, CURIOSA

THE BECOMING OF VANCOUVER

Cities ask to be compared: we go from one city to another and feel immediately the strangeness of the new, of the not-yet-known. But the nature of that strangeness is hard to pin down. When I visited Toronto at the end of the last century I discovered that seats on the buses (and the streetcars) were lower than seats on buses in Vancouver by an inch or more: it was necessary to make an adjustment to avoid falling while lowering yourself into place; a week later I discovered that escalators in Ottawa move at a terrific rate (compared to escalators in Vancouver), and can threaten to topple the unwary. Daniel Francis, eminent historian of the Canadian (eg: the Fur Trade, the Whale Fishery, the Sex Trade, the Imaginary “Indian,” the CPR, etc.), has now published **Becoming Vancouver: A History** (Harbour), which is set to become the definitive account of the city known variously as the Gateway to the Pacific, the Liverpool of the West, and the Sunset of the Dominion. Now and for the first time, the story of Vancouver is laid out in a clean narrative that begins with the Indigenous stewards of the land and carries on through the usurpation of Indigenous land and culture, the struggle to erase non-British immigrants, the transformation of the earth into real estate owned and administered by the CPR and Queen Victoria, and on to the present



day, as the Indigenous struggle for place begins to re-shape the city. Much of the “official” Vancouver story was the work of Major Skitt Matthews, City Archivist, defender of the Union Jack (as opposed to the Maple Leaf), and promulgator of the romance of a city built by sturdy British Empire men and women in an empty wilderness given to them by God. August Khatsahlano, a Squamish elder whose family was uprooted from their home a few blocks from the house that Matthews built on land purchased from the CPR, offered to share with the Archivist his account of the traditions and practices of his forebears—resulting in an invaluable record of pre-CPR times that forced Matthews to enlarge his genesis myth to include non-British cultures, and allows Daniel Francis to find a scaffold-

ing for his multi-faceted narrative. The story of Vancouver has many byways and Daniel Francis, in this excellent history, has illuminated many of them. Of course there are still accounts to be rendered of the money launderers and fentanyl-purveyors whose manipulations help to fuel the rise in home prices and the numbers of homeless people stranded in its streets. This is a valuable and necessary book. —*Stephen Osborne*

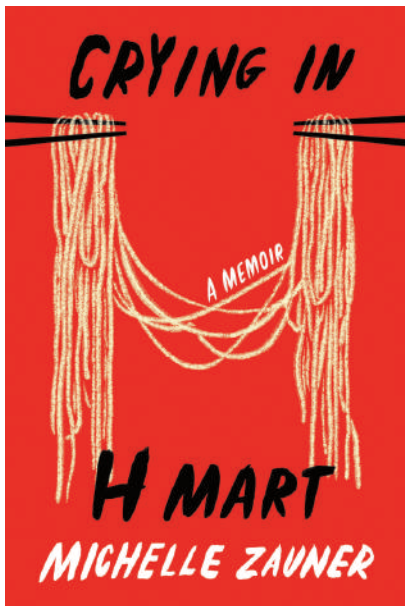
OLDER AND BETTER

A Rob Thomas review in *Broken Pencil*, of Ray Robertson’s **The Old Man in the Mirror Isn’t Me** (Exile Editions), was so intriguing and complimentary that I had to rush off and order a copy. Once again I proved to myself that book reviews are an underrated, sure-fire medium of promotion. I wasn’t disappointed: Robertson’s minimalist poems, or “Last Call Haiku” as they’re subtitled, are both vibrant and entertaining. The author prefaces his collection with an essay called “Why I Am Not a Poet,” presumably because he’s published eight novels, four collections of nonfiction, and no previous poetry. This essay alone is worth the \$18.95 purchase price, because it doubles as a self-help lesson for people stopped up with writer’s block. To illustrate, Robertson’s depiction of a successful poetry reading can make even the most ill-fated poet feel like a winner: “You showed up, you hoped there were more

people in the audience than there were on stage, and if you were lucky, you might even go home with some beer money.” In one section where the author sets down his literary influences, he mentions Richard Brautigan in a mostly dismissive manner, but poems such as “Waiting for the leaves to fall,” “The world wakes up with a hangover” and “In front of the men’s shelter an empty beer can” evoke some of Brautigan’s basic themes from *The Tokyo-Montana Express* (1980). Robertson’s strong point is how he suspends moments of time in his micro-poems. An example is this archetypal portrait of a rural Dad, who seems to span the generations: “My father doesn’t need to be happy / To be happy / The first sniff of spring and errands outside all day.”

—*Jill Mandrake*

KOREAN SUPPER



I approached Michelle Zauner’s *Crying in H Mart: A Memoir* (Penguin Random House) with the tentative awareness that I am her target demographic: an aging millennial, the result of a biracial marriage, a former “indie kid” with a propensity for the sentimental. Zauner spends much of her debut memoir examining the world through this same lens: the half-Korean

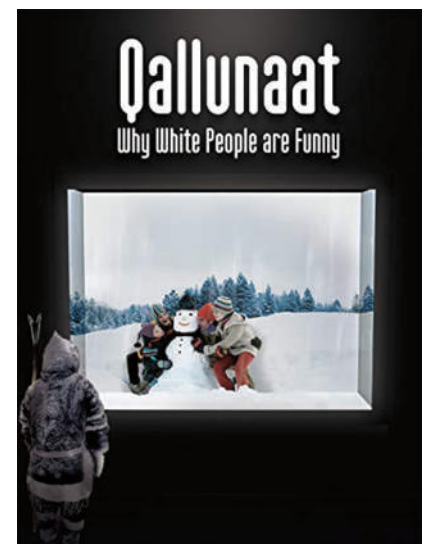
songstress (Zauner records under the name Japanese Breakfast) delves into questions of identity and representation, but what I did not expect to identify with most is the sadness that fuels her artistic journey. The source of Zauner’s tears is the terminal illness of her mother, whose battle with cancer brings Zauner into her own maturity. In reading her story, I saw the struggles of my own parents, and found a new appreciation for the type of silent love offered to children of immigrants: all the Saran-wrapped meals left to turn cold on the kitchen table; the rearranging of financials to pay for school; the mastery of reading even the most subtle emotions from afar. Zauner’s skill is identifying these minutiae, the silent love which remains even after death, intangible but real as air. She reifies this invisible devotion and brings it to the fore: the meals prepared for us without our presence, the faith that our delinquency will be outgrown, and the private hope that, although our parents’ love can never fully be returned, it will one day be appreciated. —*Jonathan Heggen*

TREE LIT

Printed on the back of the title page of Richard Powers’s *The Overstory* (Vintage) is a note stating that “by using recycled paper in place of paper made with 100 percent virgin fiber, the paperback first printing has saved: 169 trees, 13,000 gallons of water, 73,200 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions, 580 pounds of solid waste.” That’s a lot of grateful trees. *The Overstory* is, in many ways, a fairly conventional multi-generational saga, telling the stories of nine Americans and their descendants over a period of about 150 years. What makes *The Overstory* unconventional—and fascinating—is that it is essentially a work of natural history in novel form. The stories of its characters are told through their relationships with trees: Nicholas Hoel’s great-great-great-grandfather plants a chestnut tree on an isolated

homestead in Iowa, thus preserving it—for a while, at least—from the blight which destroys the vast chestnut forests farther east; Mimi Ma’s father plants a mulberry tree in his back yard in California to honor his father and the silk industry, through which the family made their fortune back in China before his emigration; Watchman and Maidenhair spend more than a year suspended in the branches of a giant redwood named Mimas, hoping to save it (and others) from being logged. Powers weaves tree facts—and history, and science—into the narrative of *The Overstory*. The result may be a polemic, but it is a persuasive and engaging one. It could—and should—become a foundational “tree lit” text, a touchstone for those who would camp at the Fairy Creek blockade, or elsewhere on the frontlines of the battle to save our remaining stands of old growth trees. —*Michael Hayward*

WHY WHITE PEOPLE ARE FUNNY



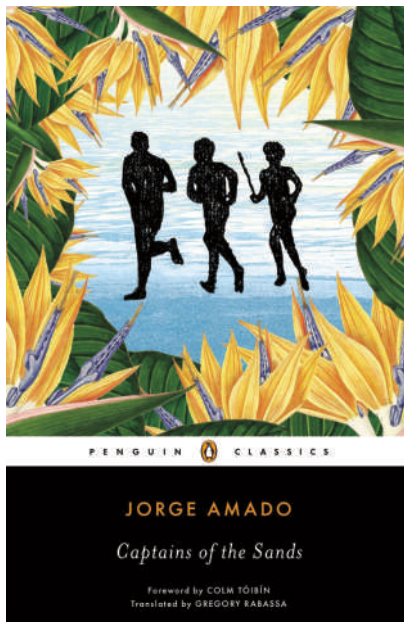
In the documentary *Qallunaat! Why White People Are Funny* (NFB) by Zebedee Nungak and Mark Sandiford, white people are the subjects of study by Inuit who, for several hundred years, have themselves been the subjects of study by settlers. *Qallunaat* is the Inuit

word for white people, but it refers less to people of a certain skin colour and more to people who exhibit odd behaviours, like obsessing over private property, always being in a hurry, jumping to conclusions, plus ignoring local knowledge and needing to be rescued when they “explore” the north. At the Qallunaat Studies Institute (QSI), lab-coated Inuit measure the heads of white people and use a Qallunizer (a vacuum-like contraption) to determine whether a person is qallunaat, all while speaking rapid Inuktitut to their uncomprehending subjects. At the Department of White Man’s Affairs, officials discuss how to keep track of the qallunaat, because there are so many of them and they have such “hideous” names. Later we see a lineup of qallunaat receiving their Q-numbers—a new identification tool—and traditional Inuit nicknames like “sagging pants” and “always cold.” Less funny are the patronizing commentaries from old newsreels about the “primitive” people in the Arctic who are good at learning “imitative skills,” but will need a settler education in order to be functional in the modern world. Near the end of the film, Zebedee Nungak, a journalist and filmmaker, and part of the first generation that received a qallunaat education, talks of being a beneficiary and a victim of that education. While looking at an old photo of himself, he reflects that what he sees is “a young boy who is just skimming through his boyhood to take his place as a man among men” in his community. That trajectory was broadsided by “civilization.” *Qallunaat! Why White People Are Funny* has a lot of laugh-out-loud moments, as well as cringe-worthy scenes (at least for the qallunaat audience). It is streaming for free on the NFB website. —Patty Osborne

VOYEUR GALORE

My friend Erik warned me about Jorge Amado’s *Captains of the Sands* (Pen-

guin Random House), a novel that follows a defiant gang of street children in northeastern Brazil. According to him, *Captains of the Sands* is despised by a lot of Brazilians, especially those in the south, who refer to the book as nothing but “poverty porn.” Erik has a point. The cover of my copy of *Captains of the Sands* is voyeuristic: jungle fronds frame a scene of silhouetted boys running on a beach. When I read *Captains of the Sands*, I had just come from Rawi Hage’s world of war-torn Beirut, as depicted in *De Niro’s Game*. I couldn’t help but see similarities: both Amado and Hage flood their pages with



visceral and high-impact scenes, translating destitution for shock. With Amado, it’s rags galore. With Hage, it’s bombs. In such settings, characters act with chutzpah, but sometimes their gall leads to cruel indifference, a lack of curiosity in their fellow sufferers. In *De Niro’s Game*, the main characters, Basam and George, do not see the women in their city—they simply use them to get by. This could be literary realism, but it could also be described as “war porn.” In *Captains of the Sands*, there is at least more nuance and commentary, even if it is indirect. One of the greatest tragedies in the novel is when a boy, the leader of a gang of street children,

rapes a poor girl. Afterwards, she forces him to see the horror of what he did, and the power he’d always felt instantly melts away. He realizes that she’s just a child, and moreover, that he is just a child as well. While I can see why Amado is disliked by some, I have to say that his writing is more than “poverty porn.” —Anson Ching

DANCING ABOUT ARCHITECTURE

David Mitchell is cursed with having written a cult-classic novel: his *Cloud Atlas* (2004) is a multi-layered dazzler of a book constructed from six narratives nested one within another like Russian matryoshka dolls. *Cloud Atlas* was nominated for several prestigious awards, and was eventually made into a big-budget (but so-so) film featuring Tom Hanks. The reason that such an achievement is a writer’s curse is that every subsequent novel will almost inevitably be seen to fall short of the earlier peak. And so it (unfortunately) proves to be true with Mitchell’s latest novel, *Utopia Avenue* (Penguin Random House), which tells the story of a fictional 1960s-era British rock band of that name (the band’s manager is Levon Frankland, described, somewhat redundantly, as “a very nice guy. A Canadian.”) The late ‘60s and early ‘70s was a rich period for rock music, and Mitchell evidently holds the era very close to his heart. Unfortunately, “writing about music is like dancing about architecture” (a quip that Mitchell attributes to Charles Mingus), and the activities of singer Elf Holloway, bassist Dean Moss, drummer Peter “Griff” Griffin, and “guitar virtuoso” Jasper de Zoet, quickly breeds a host of clichés. Many famous names from the world of ‘60s rock make cameo appearances in *Utopia Avenue*. It’s a risky move, particularly when Mitchell gives these icons speaking parts, their dialogue presumably derived from their public personas and known utterances.

Here's David Bowie commiserating with Jasper: "I've been the Next Big Thing since I left school, but I'm *still* broke." At one point, in the Chelsea Hotel in New York, Elf Holloway shares an elevator with Leonard Cohen, who introduces himself as "Lenny" (Mitchell is being coy, since *we* know who Lenny is, while Elf is forced to play the naïf); later, Janis (Joplin, of course) observes world-wearily to Elf that "guys" inevitably capitalize on their encounters with her: "I know Janis. She gave me head on the unmade bed. I hate it." This feels like gimmickry, and these "real" characters, presumably intended to lend verisimilitude to Mitchell's tale, behave like stiff-jointed holograms of themselves; the resulting text becomes little more than a pastiche.

—*Michael Hayward*

PURVEYORS OF ELECTRIC FANS

Clyde Fans (Drawn & Quarterly), a graphic novel from Canadian writer and graphic artist Seth, tells the story of two brothers, Abe and Simon Matchcard, who have inherited a business founded by their father, Clyde: a storefront which began selling oscillating fans on Toronto's Queen Street West in 1939. The story opens in 1997, and Clyde Fans has fallen on hard times, a victim of technological change: in the era of air-conditioning, oscillating fans are no longer in demand. The Queen Street store has closed, and Abe, the elder brother, lives alone above the shop, wandering among the bric-a-brac and memorabilia of a lifetime, talking to himself. Abe is the classic salesman; in his eyes the only true mark of success is one's ability to close a sale. His younger brother Simon, therefore, has been a source of disappointment. Simon is a dreamer, a collector of novelty postcards; he is completely unsuited to a life in sales. Reading *Clyde Fans*, I became completely absorbed by

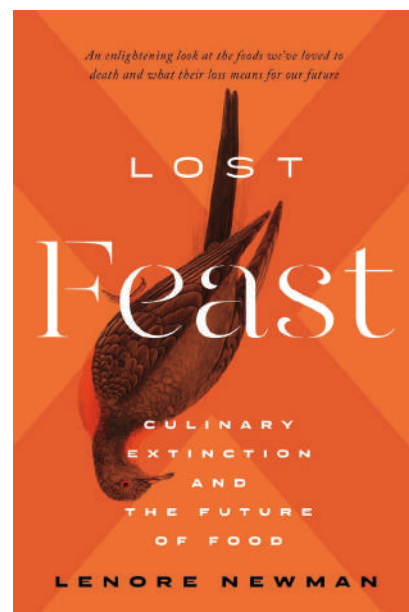
the interior lives of these two characters—their thoughts and feelings, their dreams—and by the complexities of their relationships. What more could one want from a novel, graphic or otherwise, than to look up from the page and find that time has passed, and that you've been transported? Seth is a master of this hybrid form, blending the visual and the literary arts, and using techniques borrowed from cinema: close-ups, dream sequences, varying camera angles, and the cut to black. Seth's *Clyde Fans* is a powerful demonstration (to anyone still in doubt) of the full potential of the graphic novel form. —*Michael Hayward*

POUTINE PILGRIMAGE

Shimokitazawa is located in the heart of Tokyo, a mere five minute train ride away from Shibuya, home of the famous four-way pedestrian crosswalk. The area is comprised of record stores with musty vinyl, used clothing stores solely patronized by English-speaking expats, and twisting streets that intersect seemingly at a whim. Nestled in-between is a little hole-in-the wall restaurant named "Robson Fries" and in front of it, waving against the bright blue backdrop of Tokyo's sky, is the red and white Canadian flag. C and I had been living in Tokyo for some time and had become homesick; I had been clicking on so many Vancouver-related links that I started receiving ads from Tourism Vancouver. So when we came across Robson Fries, I was overcome by the feeling that it was my Canadian duty to taste and assess the authenticity of what they had to offer. We ordered a pulled-pork poutine and when it was ready, we quickly snapped some photos and dug in—what's worse than a cold poutine? I was happily surprised to find that the fries were crisp, the gravy was flavourful and the cheese was a melty goo of deliciousness. However, my keen Canadian senses noted that it was

inauthentic; the cheesy goo was mozzarella rather than the traditional cheese curds. As we paid for our meal, I saw a sign on the wall informing visitors that the owner takes yearly pilgrimages to Vancouver to trawl for the newest poutine innovations. I thought of telling him I was from Vancouver. I thought of telling him that authentic poutine needs cheese curds, but I really liked his version anyway. I thought I would tell him that most Vancouver poutine is bad and that he needs to go to Montreal because I heard that's where all the good poutine is. Instead, I said thanks. We returned to Vancouver four months later and have yet to eat poutine since. —*Sylvia Tran*

EATEN TO EXTINCTION



Lost Feast: Culinary Extinction and the Future of Food by Lenore Newman (ECW Press) explores how the extinction of food species affects the cuisine we eat, and how the globalization of the current food system threatens culinary diversity and localized delicacies. In each chapter, Newman provides a history of a food that humans have eaten off the planet (what she calls "culinary extinction")—including the

mammoth, the Ansaunt pear, the passer-pigeon and the ancient Roman herb silphium—and she prepares a complimentary feast with friends inspired by the lost food item. Her accounts of these feasts add levity to the grim news that humans have lost most of the varieties of foods we had previously cultivated; for example, we have lost 97% of asparagus cultivars through modern industrial farming. Zooming in, Newman examines the rise and fall of individual foods, such as the history of human intervention with the pear from the decline of the Roman empire, to the gardens of Versailles, to the pear craze of nineteenth-century England and America. Newman makes the case for localized eating, and travels around her home (the Lower Mainland in BC) to speak to local farmers and scientists, and try fresh-from-the-tree (and sea) foods. There is an undercurrent of

urgency as we move from story to story of delicious varieties of foods dying out, being eaten to extinction, or threatened by territory encroachment and ecosystem disruption, usually due to human action. Lest you think this book is all doom and gloom, Newman's writing is engaging, often hilarious, and her clear delight in discovering new (and, in some cases, previously lost) tastes is infectious. The focus on foods that humans have desired so much they've eaten them to extinction is an approachable access point to her real argument: that the current food system must adapt to become more sustainable and avoid the further extinction of both known and unknown species. We're invited to consider how we, personally, can make changes to our eating habits so we can continue to enjoy the cornucopia of the modern table far into the future. Since finishing *Lost Feast*, I can't

stop thinking: which food is next?
—Kelsea O'Connor

POSTAL LIT

In **Long Live the Post Horn!** (Verso Books; translated by Charlotte Barslund) Vigdis Hjorth turns her tightly crafted and propulsive writing style to the subject of Norwegian postal workers, their labour union and the media consultancy group hired to help the union members fight the implementation of the EU postal directive in their jurisdiction. The result is an odd story, driven by public opinion experts and their self-doubts, personal tragedies and existential crises swirling amidst the politics of big labour, the exquisite belief of the postal workers in the value of their work as a social good, and the cold, fearsome inevitability of progress within global capitalism.



SPRING STIRRINGS...

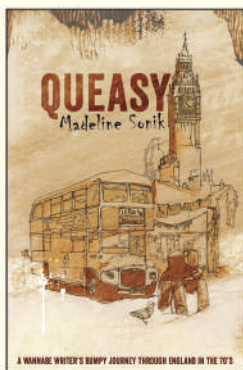
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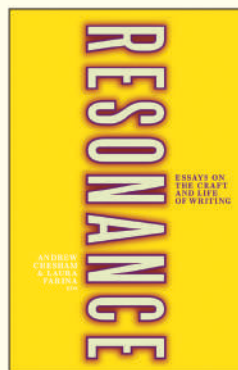
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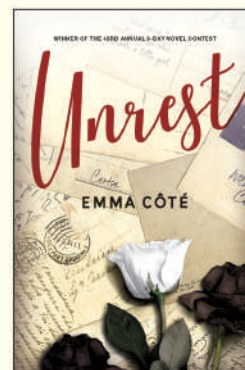
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While everything else in the world is falling apart, there is one thing left to count on: the profoundly honourable and personal work of interpreting handwriting, turning dead letters into living ones and uniting Norway and its citizens through an adequate, affordable and reliable postal system. Hjorth excels at presenting the machinations behind a seemingly bland piece of legislation—one hardly worth looking up from your phone for—and establishing an understanding of its dire consequences for society. If we allow the post to be destroyed, we allow ourselves to be destroyed, too. —*Shylla Seller*

**A LONGING TO
BE FAR AWAY**

I became a fan of Teju Cole’s work after reading his 2011 novel *Open City*, which many compared to the writing of W. G.

Sebald. Cole’s “side hustle” is as a monthly columnist for *The New York Times Magazine*, writing on photography. His latest book is **Fernweh** (MACK Books), a large-format photobook that presents a selection of his photographs, “the result of a half dozen trips to Switzerland between 2014 and 2018.” The title is a German word, “an antonym of *heimweh* (homesickness). A longing to be far away.” What a perfect word for these COVID-19 times, when images of distant lands serve as substitutes for the inaccessible originals. Turning the pages of *Fernweh*, the images float on generous white backgrounds as if emerging from clouds. In one image we see a restaurant’s interior, with a glimpse of Lake Geneva partially visible through gauze curtains and reflections in glass; another frames an almost-abstract scattering of blue and white card-

board cartons; another shows wind-blown sheets, hung to dry, with a distant mountain barely noticeable in the background. Some of the photographs are faced with fragments of text arranged like lines of poetry, excerpts from an 1872 Baedeker guide to Switzerland: “in no country / is the weather / more capricious”; “the utmost / order and / decorum / are preserved”; “when Pontius Pilate / was banished from Galilee / he fled hither.” In a brief afterword Cole points out that Switzerland “is one of the key places where nineteenth-century travel photography was developed,” and that as a result, “few places are as close to their perfected image as Switzerland is.” Cole’s photographs offer an alternative to those too-perfect images, and a welcome counter-balance to the clichéd travel narratives often found in glossy magazines. —*Michael Hayward*

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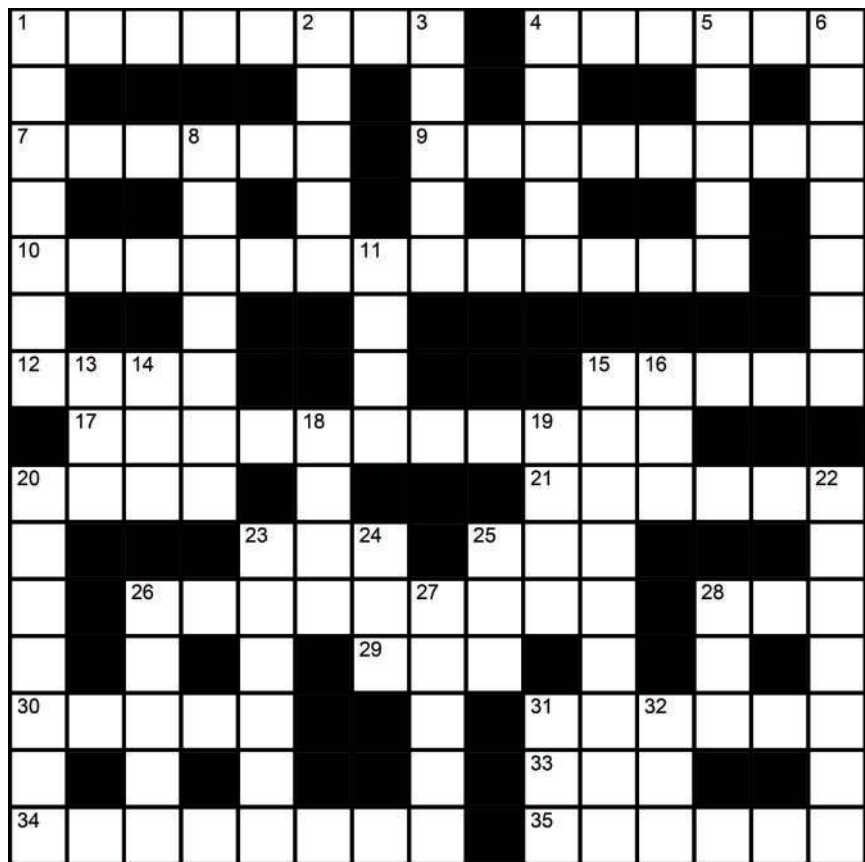
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A winner will be selected at random from correct solutions and will be awarded a one-year subscription to *Geist* or a *Geist* magnet.

ACROSS

- 1 Did that bum reply to my question about the toilet?
- 4 Sounds like his poor circumstances made you vomit
- 7 I use acoustic music to pull out the stops
- 9 It's true, my platter did crash when I gave it the boot (2)
- 10 Hurry up and replace those old pipes! (4)
- 12 I didn't raise my children to be in the last row!
- 15 I heard it was on the left coast, a ways out of town (abbrev)
- 17 When washing up, that little plastic puppy is a necessary troublemaker (2)
- 20 That young fart sure knows his Greek alphabet!
- 21 John's son isn't much of a union member, is he?
- 23 Sounds like you should start with the cowhide dress
- 25 I hope the official game does not involve a submachine gun
- 26 Was Eddy being a pill or who went round there?
- 28 The key is to keep him on a short chain
- 29 For sure, the meaning has been shortened (abbrev)
- 30 When Bruce drove cab, his old movies made me sleepy
- 31 Where are all the players when they're not at home? (2)
- 33 In the past, Art was always home on the grange
- 34 If you get mixed up, both taps are needed to avoid complete darkness (2)
- 35 That souped up roadster was unreal!



DOWN

- 1 The diver was a real sucker for taking risks
- 2 From above, she eyed the two under there
- 3 Did you see the way he testified in Hebrew?
- 4 I tried to read that weird rag but it's too strung out
- 5 The tie on that beer bottle made me shout
- 6 That old horse could see that he was going to be cut
- 8 My analysis might be a good read (2)
- 11 Sounds like the Vikings' plan went a little pear-shaped
- 13 His organ sounds corny
- 14 Where Swedes feel at home on the range
- 15 Some unions seem to connect better than others
- 16 Mr. McDonald was apparently into this (abbrev)
- 18 When did that worldly lover rule the left coast?
- 19 Let me show you how
- 20 We can't stop the flood until we control the regulators
- 22 No trading in this game, Bro
- 23 In that vein, get one of the Leafs to go down the centre
- 24 At 16 he felt ancient
- 25 Up country, we learn en français (abbrev)
- 26 Holy mackerel, that shrub is on fire!
- 27 He sat there in the branch office and ate fish.
- 28 And some hairstyles are worth returning to
- 31 In the winter, they'll pay for this security! (abbrev)
- 32 She likes to slant a digital nail

There were no winners for *Geist* 118.



PERIPHERAL REVIEW



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Toronto Hates Art tote by
Lucas Regazzi & Laura McCoy

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Toronto Hates Art is a tote bag commemorating sentiments around the unlivable cities of the 21st century. Once beacons for human connection and activity, cities now serve as investment grounds championed by legislation that cares more about profit for a few than housing for all. Dense and homogeneous, Toronto wants you over-worked and isolated, competing for scarce resources.

The extreme cost-of-living for artists means that many young people are not able to take part in producing culture and living creative lives. It's literally like those t-shirts that came out a few years ago that unapologetically stated, "Toronto vs. Everybody." We think Toronto Hates Art. How foolish of it! Beautiful makers, projects, initiatives

and conversations are abound in the country's largest town.

We want this tote to critically ask: *What would it look like if our city were to prioritize art?*

Laura McCoy (b. 1981 Cambridge, Ontario, Canada) is an artist who has lived and worked in Toronto for the past 20 years. Currently she paints and performs and her work is concerned with reducing control and finding an abject heartbeat in trite gestures. She is queer and disabled and lives with a roommate and her 8 year-old dog.

Lucas Regazzi (b. 1995 Toronto, Ontario, Canada) is an artist who runs *april april* with his husband in Brooklyn, NY.

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