

GEIST

NUMBER 124

\$12.95

FACT + FICTION • NORTH of AMERICA

NOW MUST SAY GOODBYE

SHORT TALK ON SUMMER ENDING
THE BUSINESS OF SALVATION



GOOD WITH WORDS?

**LAUNCH A CAREER AS
A PROFESSIONAL EDITOR**



PART-TIME EDITING CERTIFICATE


- Learn from experienced working editors
- Take fully online courses on a flexible schedule

SFU CONTINUING STUDIES

sfu.ca/editing

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING GEIST!

A big and heartfelt thanks to the following donors for their generous contribution to the Geist fundraising campaign. Every dollar from the fundraising campaign goes right back into making *Geist* the weird and wonderful magazine loved by readers all over the country.



Anonymous (11)	Godolphin-Henderson Family	Marc Mullo
Caroline Adderson	Leni Goggins	Peter Murphy
Ken Alexander	Jim Lowe & Brian Goth	Kelsea O'Connor
Dilin Baker	Deborah Hackett	Mary-Lynn Ogilvie
Robin Baugh	Mark Halpern	Patty Osborne
Barbara Baydala	Michelle Hart	Yves Paillon
Alejandra Bertorini	P.E. Holmes	Lauren Pratt
Joan Bevington	Jane Hope	Peter Raynham
Barbara Black	Alison Hughes	Jason Rehel
Kriss Boggild	George K. Ilsey	Judith Riddell
Nancy Campbell	Taslim Jaffer	Fred Ringham
Wendy Chin	Janet Jury	Laura Robinson
Rebekah Chote	Lynda Kerr	Adonna Rudolph
Scott Andrew Christensen	Ken Klonsky	Renee Sarojini Saklikar
Barbara Collishaw	Hanna and Piotr Kozlowski	Shyla Seller
Sarah Colquhoun	Shelley Kozlowski	Rosemary Sidle
Dennis Cooley	Jocelyn Kuang	Jeffrey Simser
Susan Crean	Connie Kuhns	Roni Simunovic
Charles Crockford	Bill Kummer	Hans-Peter Skaliks
Ross Crockford	Ken Lythall	Gwen Soper
Jane Claire Crosby	Jodi MacAulay	Carol Harvey Steski
Susan Cubitt	Donna Macdonald	Linda K. Thompson
Sandra Currie	Ian Macdonald	Brenda Thomson
Kim Deane	John D. Mackenzie	Carmen Tiampo
Robynne Eagan	Emily MacKinnon	K. Timewell
Brian Eckert	Ron Macnab	Aritha van Herk
David Elenbaas	Erin MacNair	Adelina Vlas
Cary Fagan	Rick Maddocks	Lorenz von Fersen
M.A.C. Farrant	Toby Malloy	Peter Warren
Frank Ferrucci	John Manning	Trish White
Daniel Francis	Émile Martel	Wendy C. Williams
Jack Garton	Patricia Mason	Andrew Wooldridge
Michele Genest	Thad McIlroy	Linde Zingaro
Helen Godolphin	John Millard	Chris Zuberec
	Kathryn Mockler	

To learn more and to join this list of generous people, visit geist.com/donate.

GEIST

Volume 31 • Number 124 • Fall 2023

FEATURES

THE BUSINESS OF SALVATION

David Huebert

*The app does not concede that a god can be dammed,
that spillway might strangle an eel*

27

POSTCARD LIT

*Winners of the 18th Annual Literal Literary
Postcard Story Contest*

35

THE BROCH

Eleanor Panno

*My mom exists outside of time,
or maybe in-between it*

38

NOW MUST SAY GOODBYE

Christine Lai

Perhaps love is the found object par excellence

45



GEIST

Fact + Fiction, North of America

NOTES & DISPATCHES

Ian Roy
My Body Is a Wonderland
7

Margaret Nowaczyk
Metanoias
9

Molly Cross-Blanchard
Here's the thing
10

Sara de Waal
Little Women, Two Raccoons
12

Owen Torrey
Short Talk on Summer Ending
13

FINDINGS

14

NorthMart
Coffeetable Sex Books and the
Words of Gods
Theft



Dead Listener
The Magic Door
grief map 2
Detritus from the House of Rage

and more...

DEPARTMENTS

MISCELLANY
4

ARTISTS IN THIS ISSUE
6

ENDNOTES
52

PUZZLE
60



COVER: *All the Little Fires We Could Not Contain*, 2022, oil on linen by Kyle Scheurmann. A note from Kyle Scheurmann, July 2023: "This painting is from my exhibition, *Hold On*, presented at the Bau-Xi Gallery in April 2022. I am currently heading back east after a month on Vancouver Island, scouting forest fires and clear-cuts. Last night I drove through rainy ash, and today I'm driving in a smoky haze—so this painting is still very relevant. We need to protect ancient forests as the old-growth trees store water, regulate the climate surrounding them, and act as natural breaks against forest fires. More ancient forests means fewer forest fires. Unfortunately, we're never going to get back those ancient forests already lost to wildfire or industrial logging. But hopefully—with action—this will be as bad as it gets."

GEIST

PUBLISHED BY
The Geist Foundation

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
April Thompson (outgoing)

MANAGING DIRECTOR
Oluwatoke Adejoye (incumbent)

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Emma Cleary

MANAGING EDITOR
Sylvia Tran

DIGITAL PROJECTS
Michelle Ha

LAYOUT & DESIGN
Michał Kozłowski
Eric Uhlich

DISTRIBUTION
Magazines Canada

PROOFREADER
Helen Godolphin

BRAIN TRUST
Stephen Osborne, Mary Schendlinger
Co-founders, Consulting Publishers

FIRST SUBSCRIBER
Jane Springer

MOST VALUABLE PUZZLERS
Jim Lowe & Brian Goth

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Debby Reis, Roni Simunovic,
Mindy Abramowitz, Kelsea O'Connor,
Michael Hayward, Patty Osborne,
Anson Ching, Randy Fred,
Stephen Osborne

SUPPORT THE GEIST FOUNDATION:
GEIST.COM/DONATE
WWW.GEIST.COM

MISCELLANY



PORTALS

This comic is inspired by the paintswatch cover of Jennifer Zilm's book of poems, *First-Time Listener* (Guernica, 2022). These circles allow us to frame small moments and capture our impressions. We've used this colour map to gather hues from across the issue, but you could use this method to document your summer or respond to an artwork:

1. Focus on a place you visited recently—a road-trip, garden or familiar walking route—or take a notebook out with you. Fill a page, writing down observations, memories and sensory details.
2. On the next page, draw four empty circles. Read over your notes and choose four moments to fill the circles with.
3. Gather some coloured pencils and map these moments inside the circles, assigning colours to particular materials, emotions, sounds and so on.
4. Label the colour maps with some of the language you wrote for step one.

Send us your creations. —The Editors

A WORK OF ART

Years later, just as good or even better on the second read. Such a beautifully crafted story of love, life, the value of art, and how to live an artful, loving life defined by one's own sense of value. The world needs more like this. —Nadine

Thanks to Nadine for sharing the love for Cary Fagan's short story, "My Father's Picasso," first published in Geist 97 and available to read at geist.com.

GEIST IN DIJON

No. 119 looking chic in the Place François-Rude, Dijon. Sent to us by Lindsay Vermeulen.



OVERHEARD



July 1, Ellison Park, Vernon, BC. Overheard by Roni Simunovic, comic by Roni Simunovic. Find out more at geist.com/overheard

ASPIRING READS

We've been discussing the state of our To-Be-Read piles at Geist HQ, and dreaming of enough time to read our way through them. Here's a list of the top-tier TBR books from our personal collections:

- *After Realism: 24 Stories for the 21st Century*, edited by André Forget (Véhicule Press)
- *Leave the World Behind* by Rumaan Alam (HarperCollins)
- *Any Other City* by Hazel Jane Plante (Arsenal Pulp Press)
- *Brown Girl in the Ring* by Nalo Hopkinson (Grand Central Publishing)
- *Mary John* by Ana Pessoa (Arquipélago Press)
- *Undoing Hours* by Selina Boan (Nightwood Editions)
- *The Spirits Have Nothing to Do with Us*, edited by Dan K. Woo (Wolsak & Wynn)

IN MEMORIAM

"I turn around, wipe the prism with my handkerchief, move closer to the window in order to get more light and, when the picture inside the little prism finally becomes clear and sharp, I am not surprised to see my father. He is sitting in the corner, smiling,

and when he notices me, he raises his arm and waves to me."

—"My Father's Hands" by David Albahari, *Geist* 63

This issue is dedicated to David Albahari, a long-time correspondent and friend of *Geist*. Albahari's writing for *Geist* includes pieces on leaving and returning to the Balkans, the art of renaming the world, and his father's Kodak camera, among other subjects. Albahari is remembered as one of the most important contemporary Serbian writers, and we deeply appreciate his contributions to the magazine.

WRITE TO GEIST

✉ Thoughts, opinions, comments and queries are welcome and encouraged, and should be sent to:

The Editor, *Geist*

letters@geist.com

Snailmail:

#210 – 111 West Hastings St.

Vancouver BC V6B 1H4

Letters may be edited for clarity, brevity and decorum.

Geist is published four times a year.

Contents copyright © 2023 The Geist Foundation. All rights reserved.

Subscriptions: in Canada: \$35 (1 year); international: \$50. Visa and MasterCard accepted.

Correspondence and inquiries: subs@geist.com, advertising@geist.com, letters@geist.com, editor@geist.com.

Include SASE with Canadian postage or IRC with all submissions and queries. #210 – 111 West Hastings St. Vancouver BC Canada V6B 1H4

Submission guidelines are available at geist.com.

ISSN 1181-6554.

Geist swaps its subscriber list with other cultural magazines for one-time mailings. Please contact us if you prefer not to receive these mailings.

Publications Mail Agreement 40069678

Registration No. 07582

Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: Circulation Department, #210 – 111 West Hastings St. Vancouver BC Canada V6B 1H4
Email: geist@geist.com
Tel: (604) 681-9161, 1-888-GEIST-EH;
Web: geist.com

Geist is a member of Magazines Canada and the Magazine Association of BC. Indexed in the *Canadian Literary Periodicals Index* and available on ProQuest.

The Geist Foundation receives assistance from private donors, the Canada Council, the BC Arts Council, the City of Vancouver and the Cultural Human Resources Council.



Funded by the
Government
of Canada

Canada

RENÉE SAROJINI SAKLIKAR
**BRAMAH'S
 QUEST**

THOT
 J
 BAP



**AN EPIC FANTASY
 IN VERSE**

THE HEART OF THIS JOURNEY
 THOT
 J
 BAP
 BEARS ALL PATTERNS

Bramah's Quest is the ambitious second instalment of Renée Sarojini Saklikar's epic fantasy saga in verse—THOT J BAP. It weaves poetry with politics as it follows a time-travelling locksmith and a boy playing an eternal game of chess that will determine the future.

**"THIS IS THE FIRST
 EPIC POEM OF
 CLIMATE CHANGE:
 THE FUTURE
 IS ALREADY
 BEING SUNG
 INTO THE
 RECORD."**

—STEPHEN COLLIS

THOTJBAP.COM
 NIGHTWOODEDITIONS.COM

Kristina Corre uses collage to bring together disparate images, materials and stories to consider her positionality as a Philippine-born arrivant on Turtle Island. Her practice asks: Where did I come from? What did I bring with me? Who am I in relation with? What futures will we nurture together? Find her at kristinacorre.com and on Instagram @kristinasees.

Alyson Davies's images from *The Blue Earth Tarot*, her second tarot deck, can be found throughout this issue. In her work, she studies moments of connection with nature intertwined with personal histories and autobiographic storytelling. Her multidisciplinary practice focuses on painting, cyanotype printmaking and ceramics. Her work has been shown across Canada and the United States. She lives in amiskwaciwâskahikan, Treaty 6 Territory (Edmonton, AB). Find her at alysondavies.com.

Caro Dubois is a visual artist. She started working with collage later in life, but it quickly became the bridge connecting her other artistic practices including dance, music and writing. In her work, she likes to take a character out of its natural context to bring it back to life in an abstract world of dreams and fantasy. She lives in Montréal, QC. Find her at carodubois.com and on Instagram @carocollages.

Kablusiak is an Inuvialuk artist. They work with a variety of media including soapstone, permanent marker, felt, fur and words. Their work explores the dis/connections between existence within and without Inuit Nunangat, the impacts of colonization on gender and sexuality expressions, and tries to

make people laugh. They live in Calgary, AB.

Julie Liger-Belair is a collage artist who enjoys working with pieces, parts and fragments. She finds beauty in the act of dividing up an image into countless parts and reassembling them into new stories. She finds delight in the endless possibility of new narratives and the re-contextualizing of imagery. She lives in Toronto, ON. Find her at julieligerbelair.net and on Instagram @julie.liger.belair.

Eleanor Panno (she/they) is a queer, non-binary writer and editor living and working on the unceded, ancestral territories of the x̱w̱məθkʷəy̱əm, Sḵwx̱wú7mesh, and səlilwətał Nations. When she's not writing, you can find her watching scary movies in the dark.

Andre Petterson is a multi-media artist whose work utilizes combined elements of photography and painting to create an aura of mystery. His current work explores the reality of climate change, with imagined scenarios of a watery world in which the direction of the tides is ambiguous. He lives in Vancouver, BC. Find him at andrepetterson.com and on Instagram @pettersonart.

Kyle Scheurmann works in studios located in remote, wooded places to document the incremental approach of climate change. He simultaneously works on conservation and activism efforts by directing his art and efforts toward systemic and legislative approaches for permanent environmental protection. He lives in Ontario. Find him at kylescheurmann.com and on Instagram @kylescheurmann.

My Body Is a Wonderland

IAN ROY

Maybe my doctor has two patients named Ian Roy, and I've been sent the other Ian's file



I'm looking at an MRI scan of my brain. Right there on my occipital lobe, circled in red, is a small black spot where no black spot should be. Even before I understand what I'm

looking at, I don't like it. I double-check the name at the top of the page to see if there's been some kind of mistake and I've been sent the wrong file. I'm sure this is the case.

I'm so sure that I smile and shake my head as I glance at the top of the page. I think: Someone's going to get in trouble for this. But no, there's my name in the top right corner. So it is my brain I'm looking at, or rather, a scan of my brain. And that black spot represents an infarct. I don't know what this word means and I have to look it up. I'm disheartened by its definition: necrosis, dead tissue. I am discovering, here, alone in my bedroom, that there's a part of my brain that is damaged, and will forever remain so. I look away from the image and read the rest of the file that accompanied the scan—a file that, for some reason, I have received before my doctor.

In clinical terms I don't at first comprehend, I'm being informed that an ischemic stroke is what caused the infarction. This is already a lot to process, but there's more. I am also being informed I have something called a *patent foramen ovale*. I have to look this up, too, and I soon discover I have a hole between the left and right atria of my heart. A hole in the heart sounds poetic; a romantic affliction for those of us who are unlucky in love. I should be so lucky as to be unlucky in love. In my case, a blood clot slipped through the hole in my heart and blocked an artery leading to my brain, depriving it of oxygen, and thereby causing that black spot. It all begins to feel like too much. I glance again at the top of the page. Maybe my doctor has two patients named Ian Roy, and I've been sent the other Ian's file. This seems plausible to me. I think: This is obviously a mistake because wouldn't I know if I'd had a stroke? My next thought: Maybe that's

precisely what someone who has had a stroke would think. The same sort of someone who also has an infarct and a patent foramen ovale. That kind of person might have all kinds of mixed-up thoughts.

I'm reeling—which is how I felt when this all began. Weeks earlier, a serious bout of vertigo knocked me to the floor. It felt like I was sinking, like I'd been encased in cement and thrown into the ocean, spinning the whole way down. If I moved even a limb or opened my eyes to look at the floor, I would vomit. When it was over—hours later, maybe—I was so exhausted I couldn't lift my head off the floor. This happened two more times. I saw several doctors, and when they asked me to describe how I was feeling, I said the same thing every time: I feel fucked up.

I put the file down and close my bedroom door. So this is it. I've had a stroke. I have permanent brain damage. I have a hole in my heart. And now I am going to die. I think: I had a good run, but now it's over. I decide right then that I won't tell anyone about this. I won't tell my wife, and I won't tell our sons. I won't tell my mother, my grandmother, my siblings. I won't tell my friends. I will keep this to myself. I will be like an animal that crawls away and dies in a hole in the ground or in the rotted, hollowed out trunk of a dead or dying tree. I convince myself that I will be doing this as a favour to those around me. If there was an ice floe upon which to float away, I would float away on it. For reasons that aren't clear to me at the time, I begin humming a Joni Mitchell song. I start crying. Sunlight refracts through the suncatcher my wife has hung in our bedroom window and dances on the walls all around me. The window is open and I can hear the trilling song of a sparrow, children playing in the yard next door. I think: The world is beautiful and I'm going to die.

My wife comes into the room and I blurt out that I've had a stroke and there is permanent damage to my brain. And also, I have a hole in my heart. Then I remember I wasn't going to tell anyone. My wife is calm, eerily so. Does she not care? Did she not hear what I said? I say it again. Stroke. Necrosis. Hole in my heart. She says, too calmly for my taste: I heard you, my love. You're going to be fine. I know you are. She uses the word *neuroplasticity*, and it feels like I'm hearing this word for the first time, which in a way, I am. While none of this reassures me, I shut up and take deep breaths as she has instructed me to.

Days pass like this, weeks, months even. One day I open my eyes and a nurse is shaving my groin. I remember this like a dream I awake from before it has ended. In that moment, I allow myself only two thoughts: I will give myself over to this experience, and I will put my trust in these people. A doctor makes two incisions in my body: one on my inner left thigh, one on my right. A video camera will be inserted in one and a titanium patch threaded through the other. I remain awake for all of this, but high on the drugs they've given me. Before inserting the patch, the doctor asks if I want to see it. Totally, I say. I totally want to see it. He shows it to me. It's a mesh screen, so not a patch exactly. My heart tissue will grow over and around it. Soon, the doctor is inserting the thing that is not exactly a patch inside of me. My only thought while I watch this happen on the giant screen next to me is: It's very cool that I will have a titanium patch in my heart. Again, I am very high. At some point, I fall asleep.

The next time I open my eyes, I'm in a different room with two nurses checking the incisions on my thighs. One of the nurses might be the same one who shaved me earlier. I can't be sure. My incisions won't stop

bleeding. The nurses are doing their best to look like this is normal. I am still high, but not so high that I don't see the look that passes between them. I feel weak, not quite right. The part of my brain affected by the stroke is the part that processes visual information. My eyes are slow to focus and refocus. I look past the nurses to the yellow curtains that surround my bed. They are pale and worn thin like the gown I'm wearing. Through an open space where the curtains don't quite meet, I see a man, like me, waiting to be wheeled to the operating room. Looking at one thing and then another puts a strain on my eyes and brain and leaves me feeling fucked up. Looking down at my bloody thighs and then up at the nurses puts a strain on my eyes and brain, and leaves me feeling fucked up.

I don't know how much time passes, but the bleeding eventually stops. My thighs are itchy and bruised, and will remain so for weeks. I will watch in horror as the bruising spreads and shifts through a rainbow of yellow and blue and purple hues like motor oil in a puddle. My heart, now minus one hole, feels no different than it did the day before. Or the year before. It feels no different than it ever has. This is both a relief and a disappointment.

The entire experience is both a relief and a disappointment. I am relieved to live in a time when a doctor can slide a video camera into my thigh and patch my heart with titanium. Not that long ago, I'd have died by now. I will still die, but I haven't died yet. I am disappointed in my body, and it takes a while to get over this. *You let me down*. I whisper these words with my head bent forward as if speaking to my own heart. But then I remind myself that my heart is still beating and my brain is busy reorganizing itself by forming new neural pathways to work around the necrotic tissue. I become

the kind of person who tells people unselfconsciously that life is beautiful and we are amazing creatures and our bodies are wonderful and complicated machines. My body is, I tell anyone who will listen, a wonderland, and so too is yours. I am unaware these words come from a song until

I've said them a hundred times and one of my sons points this out. I stop saying it. But I don't stop thinking it; I will never stop thinking it.

Ian Roy is the author of five books, including a children's novel called The Girl Who Could Fly. He lives in Canada.

Metanoias

MARGARET NOWACZYK

The names we learn in childhood smell the sweetest to us



“The bluebells had not faded yet, they made a solid carpet in the woods above the valley, and the young bracken was shooting up, curling and green.” So reads a sentence in the middle of

Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca*, as the unnamed narrator walks through the Happy Valley to the cove. Bracken has appeared several times earlier in the pages of the novel, yet it is only

the verb “curling” that evokes an instant recognition in me: fern. Fern is bracken? The English word echoes brackets and brackish. How do those spiky, rectangular and sea-salty words connect with the fern? A plant I have loved as the underbelly of my childhood forests, the magical *paproć*. That held me in thrall because it blossomed only on Midsummer night and brought luck to those who found the flower, as the Polish folktales of my childhood foretold.

My world shifts, and the landscape surrounding aristocratic, haughty Manderley becomes familiar and known.

How do you do, bracken. Nice to meet you.

Mushroom was easy to remember when I was learning English because it reminded me of *muchomor*, the Polish word for the red-capped, white-spotted *Amanita* mushroom of the deep Białowieża forests and fables. Deadly, even if it does serve as a house for forest gnomes, the danger only adding to its mystery and appeal. Once, foraging for blackberries in the forest behind my primary school, crouched among the brambles, I watched a fly crawl on the *muchomor*’s scarlet dome, seemingly immune to its toxin. I tapped the cap. Was my fingertip now poisonous? The English word would have taught me right away that the fly was doomed: Does “flybane” sound as ominous to English ears as “*muchomor*” does to mine?

The summer evenings of my Polish childhood were scented with Matthias-flower—*maciejka*, a profusion of tiny, long-petalled flowers in pink, white, or purple. By June, the fragrance floated through our open windows from the garden of one of the neighbouring houses dwarfed by our five-story concrete apartment building.

I forget about it until twenty-odd years later, when one summer evening, sitting on the deck in my own

garden, I realize something is missing. The scent. From the recesses of my olfactory memory, maciejka wafts into my consciousness. I wonder what it's called in English, and whether it would grow in southern Ontario. The name—evening stock—disappoints. It

may have the same romantic connotations to the English speaker, but to me it is dry, scentless.

I still haven't planted it. Just like its English name, I'm afraid the poor little flowers and their scent will fail to live up to my memories. It's easier to leave

it in the past than to face a disappointment. Maybe if I ordered the seeds from Poland, it would be different.

Here's the thing

MOLLY CROSS-BLANCHARD

Tonight I went to the grocery store for a steak and on my way dropped the garbage in the garbage compactor. It was still sunny. I wore shades on my head and listened to Lizzo while trying to find the bean aisle, strutted around Buy-Low like the can of cannellinis were my birthright. Grabbed a cheap red blend with a twist top, didn't get carded. At home, with the Burnaby skyline filling all my windows, I put the popsicles in the freezer, salted the steak and fed the dog a scoop of kibble. Up to the roof then, 18th-floor metropolitan panorama. There's a garden and a three-by-five-foot square of my own possibilities. The carrots had popped up. The marigolds lost their heads to lucky crows. I borrowed a watering can from the communal storage box, filled it from a magic spout in the ground, soaked my seeds. Back downstairs, steak in the pan with butter and garlic. Chunky yams in the air fryer. Beyoncé on the Google Home was in the mood to fuck something up. Tossed arugula with lemon, oil, parmesan. Watched *White Noise* while I ate, that new Noah Baumbach, and giggled a lot, said things like *whaaaaaaaaat* and *so cool!* Blood dripped down my chin. The light left. After, I googled what it all meant—death, capitalism, Steffie's stuffed bunny—and inevitably landed on this podcast clip of some porn stars singing Manuel Ferrera's praises. So right there, on the living room couch with all those windows open, I watched him tenderly fuck so many different kinds of women, and I touched myself and came seven times, and I guess what I've done tonight is as close to freedom as it gets. Earlier today a student wrote in an email *you're my favourite prof* so maybe that's enough.

Molly Cross-Blanchard is a white and Métis writer living on unceded Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh territory. She teaches creative writing at Kwantlen Polytechnic University and her book of poetry is Exhibitionist (Coach House, 2021).

A brown streak alights on my bird feeder and resolves itself into a rufous-crowned sparrow. Thanks to the Audubon guide to North American birds, I also greet a white-breasted nuthatch and a tufted titmouse. Naming the species gives me a sense of accomplishment, but when I look up their Polish equivalents a wide grin breaks out on my face: *kowalik* and *sikora*. These two—along with many other birds—populate traditional poems and songs, occasionally flitting onto the winter windowsills of my childhood. Only after I read their Polish names do I feel I know them, these birds from Jan Brzechwa's children's poems—although I notice the North American titmouse does not have the canary-yellow belly and the jet-black cap sported by the Polish *sikora*.

In grade 8 Polish I learned that *poziomka*—wild strawberry—was so named because its tendrils stretched *po ziemi*—over the ground. Is strawberry called so because it grows on the straw of last year's grass? Buttercup is *kaczeniec*—duck flower—because of its brilliant duckling yellow, but why “duckweed”? The Polish *rzęsa wodna*—water eyelash—is so much prettier. Other English names are self-evident: lily-of-the-valley grows in ground depressions, tiger-lily for its vivid colour. But even if I understand the etymology of the English nature names, only the Polish names resonate in the centre of my being. The difference between feeling and knowing, living and learning.

Memories live in the deepest grey matter nuclei in the brain, the amygdala (named so because it resembles an almond) and the hippocampus (shaped like a seahorse). These two structures belong to the

limbic system, the most ancient, most primitive part of the brain, the seat of instincts and impulses and hunches, the one we have in common with reptiles. The olfactory lobes are also part of the limbic system, and that's why scents and smells elicit memories so strongly, even the most deeply buried and hidden ones. Like the maciejka, returning to me on a summer night after more than twenty years.

"A rose by any other name would smell as sweet," claims the Bard. I beg to differ. The names we learn in childhood, the ones that grow with us and with use, that acquire layers of meaning, smell the sweetest to us. They hold memories and stories in ways that names learned later in life do not; people who don't share your experiences or language or culture may not fully appreciate those associations and feelings. They have their own associations, their own hidden meanings

curled inside those common nouns. It can be like sharing a secret, or a sort of magic, the act of translating them for one another. Is there a word for this kind of intimacy?

And what of the bracken? It turns out it's not the paproć of my childhood or the shady recesses of my garden slope after all, but a particular species of fern common in England and Scotland. I'm surprised to learn that in Polish, the plant is named *orlica*—the term for a female eagle. It is so named because of the evocative shape of the unfurling frond in the springtime. First clutched closed, then partly open, it suggests the movement of an eagle's claw. *Orlica* is a striking word, rough and powerful, with nothing to suggest the soft curved fronds of the paproć; it belongs on rocky outcrops where only eagles dare to soar and nest.

The soaring maple tree in my garden—strong and limber enough to withstand the derecho thunderstorms that felled five trees around it last year—is footed in a sea of ferns. These are the ferns of my childhood, gracefully lifting their fronds from the earth. Here, every July, I watch fireflies dance on currents of warm air as they send their love-struck light signals. I have never seen fireflies in Poland even though I knew their name—*światliki*. They belong to the forty years of memories of my summers on Georgian Bay and in my Hamilton garden, to the new memories I have made with my husband and my sons.

Margaret Nowaczyk is a pediatric geneticist and writer who lives in Hamilton, ON. Her memoir Chasing Zebras was published in 2021. "Metanoias" is part of her forthcoming collection of essays from Wolsak & Wynn.

vallum

contemporary poetry



The Vallum Chapbook Award

DEADLINE: APRIL 30, 2024

Send 12-30 pages via Submittable

\$25 entry fee

Winner receives \$300 and publication as part of The Vallum Chapbook Series.

Details: VallumMag.com/Submit

Little Women, Two Raccoons

SARA DE WAAL

Hit everything dead on, even if it's big



The word raccoon comes from the Algonquin *aroughcun*, meaning *he who scratches with his hands*. I learn this while fact-checking middle school reports on mammals, highlighting the definition given by the student, *little hands*, and offering another. The urgency of “scratches” evokes the scored bark of climbed trees, or the pried lid of a shellfish or garbage can. In my dad’s Dutch, the word was-*beer*, or *wash bear*, contains a gentler reference—the raccoon’s habit

of immersing food in water before it eats. Because I like raccoons and the student who wrote about them, I’m tempted to give the report a better mark than it deserves.

I’m twenty-nine now, with three sisters, all younger, but all adults. We still eat with our parents on Sundays, so someone will slap our hands when we pick the sugared pecans from the salad. Sometimes Dad is there, and sometimes he’s somewhere south,

hauling oranges or lumber or paper cups to places that don’t make their own paper cups. Important work, he says, meaning the opposite, and making it impossible to respond in an affirming way.

I know Mom still tries to protect us when Dad starts talking about not wanting to live, and she takes him off speakerphone. Hearing my father prefer death has become like reading by the window at dusk. It’s always darker and it’s never dark. We all just keep reading. Some chapters are better than others.

I recently joined an Almost 30 book club. Everyone’s almost thirty, except for Craig who is sixty and wants to read almost thirty books before December. We call him Dad, and we do it fondly, and he likes it. Last month we read *Man’s Search for Meaning*. According to Viktor Frankl, if you are having trouble falling asleep, you should try to see how long you can stay awake. I’ve thought about trying the inverse while driving tired. Maybe if I try to fall asleep, I’ll stay awake.

It’s because of Viktor Frankl that I purposely imagine hitting animals with my Volvo. As long as I’m imagining the fur stuck in the grille, maybe it will stay out of it. But sometimes I forget to worry. On a Tuesday, I’m driving back from Greta Gerwig’s *Little Women*, and I’m thinking of Beth dying, so I forget to worry about killing a cat or a squirrel or a deer.

The sound of hitting an animal with your car is only like itself. “If you’re going to hit something,” Dad told me when I learned to drive, “don’t swerve. It’s better to speed up than swerve. Hit everything dead on, even if it’s big.”

Sometimes I worry that because I’ve stopped worrying that my dad will

end his own life, he'll really do it. And doing it means he won't do anything else.

When I get home from watching Gerwig's *Little Women*, I don't check the grille. It's raining, and though I'm almost thirty I don't know if rain, even heavy rain, is heavy enough to clean an animal off the front of a car. I've now seen five different versions of *Little Women*, and Beth dies in all of them. Eliza Scanlen as Beth dies better than Margaret O'Brien and worse than Claire Danes. In the 2018 modern retelling, Allie Jennings swerves: a bad death, protracted and mawkish. In the 2017 mini-series, Annes Elwy hits it dead on.

I can't find a language in which raccoon means *he who wears a mask*. And wasbeer, however pleasing, is inaccurate. When I was six, Dad told me it's a myth that raccoons wash their food before they eat it. Rather, they immerse each item before eating because their hands are highly sensitive in water. The nerves become like taste buds, gathering information, finding out, is this good? Is this safe?

I'm living in a new place again, and all the pictures in my apartment are level. Every time I move, Dad brings his hammer and his drill and re-hangs everything I ask him to re-hang. It's a decent apartment, except after I shower, I have to plug in the blow-dryer in the living room or else I'll blow a fuse. Even though it's no good for my frizz, I like to blow-dry my hair into its Bride of Frankenstein style. The warm halo is worth the pain of brushing it out after. When I emerge from the sweet singe, I'm staring at four staples Dad put in a shelf to make it stick together. It's one thing to imagine a person gone. It's another to imagine a person not putting staples in things ever again.

There were two raccoons. The first one I missed, the second one, I hit. There is no word for raccoon that means *one who tried to lead the other across the dark road, but failed*. What did the first one do, after?

Dad keeps a fan and a dehumidifier in the back of his truck to dry out the flooded basement apartments of his little women. There's been so much rain this winter and none of us can afford to live above ground. When I discover a swampy patch of carpet in my closet, I pick up the phone.

"The good news—" I say when Dad answers. "I blow-dried my hair without blowing a fuse."

"Progress," he says. "And the bad news?"

"My carpet needs you." I give him the details, the size of the swamp. He tells me he's on his way.

"I like to drive around with my fans," he says. I laugh. I can hear the rattle of his truck through the speakerphone.

"I'll be here all night," he says.

I try to keep worrying he won't be.

Sara de Waal is a writer and teacher residing in Sioux Center, Iowa. At age nine, Sara wrote, "Friends are books and books are friends." She still thinks this is true. Sara's first picture book, 48 Grasshopper Estates, was published in 2021; her second, The Biggest Smallest Thing, is forthcoming in 2025.

Short Talk on Summer Ending

OWEN TORREY

Even air now said to have something in it called fall. Clear and unoriginal the fact that seasons won't change these days quite like they used to. Each just sort of is always both itself and the next. In this city I can't begin to count the number of streets that change names midway. Avenue-University. College-Carlton. You and I tried. We tried walking down a street once in fall. It was night, half light, we found ourselves finding a small diner with booths throughout and slouched against one another making pen marks on our hands. At work I find myself taking the side of those editors who miss missing periods, meaning what was meant to be two thoughts are now set down forever as one. I think of this always each time I take my mouth across the four words inked into your knees. Each time you push into me. Through the air. The air that fall is in. It comes through the window. You walk across the room in the city in the air you pull the sheets back up over me over you

Owen Torrey is a writer from Toronto, ON. His poems have recently appeared in the Literary Review of Canada, Canadian Literature and the Malahat Review, and have been longlisted for the CBC Poetry Prize. He works in book publishing.

FINDINGS



NorthMart, 2018, archival pigment print, and Boot Lake Road, 2018, archival pigment print by Kablusiak. Courtesy the artist and Norberg Hall. These images belong to the project *akunnirun kuupak*, where Kablusiak recreates and builds on their performative ghost series by returning to the Inuvialuit Settlement Region after a

Coffeetable Sex Books and the Words of Gods

NICK THRAN

From If It Gets Quiet Later On, I Will Make a Display by Nick Thran. Published by Nightwood Editions in 2023. Nick Thran is a writer, editor and bookseller. He is the author of three collections of poems. He lives on the unceded and unsundered territory of the Wolastoqiyik in Fredericton, NB.

Book It had been an institution on Main Street for thirty years, thriving when Main Street was still the place to be downtown, on foot, after 5:00 p.m. Best little restaurants, owned by immigrant families from all over the

world. The best bars, run by upstart kids with dyed hair and coke nails. Record stores. Sex shops. Used books. New books. People would come down from the towers like bats at dusk, browse around the store before or after drinks, sometimes before *and* after drinks. Then the big boxes and chain restaurants came in, and the landlords, with dollar signs in their eyes, started indiscriminately jacking the rent, hoping to land a Sapling Electronics or Thai Fry Supreme on their ground floors. Then the jobs in the buildings themselves all blurred into an omnivorous cell of energy extraction, tech and speculative wealth. Only the twenty-four-hour 200K suits could afford to live there, and all they really seemed to want to do was to doom-scroll on their phones over bowl after bowl of same-every-time pad thai.



long absence—their first time as an adult. From their perspective of an urban Inuvialuk living outside of Inuit Nunangat, Kablusiak’s ghost series serves as a tool to understand and process the binaries of North and South—the invisible and hyper-visible.

Well, that was only part of the story. Book It hung on for so long because it had two shelves that, no matter the changes, mattered: books with pictures of people fucking, and books with the words of various gods. The dance of the customer every evening usually took one of two forms: the customers who wanted coffee table books of people fucking would come in and make an exaggerated show of their initial presence. A cursory two- to three-minute browse of the other 95 percent of the shelf space would occur, but usually only so far as the new arrivals and discount tables. Then they would be there, a metre away from the register, but miles away in their quiet, browsing the oversized pages of fists in orifices, of leather, of clenched teeth, of blazing eyes. This one. This one... Some evenings two or three purchases of this kind accounted for everything on the tally.

But as the world wide web got wilder, and the noise-cancelling headphones got better, even the life on that shelf started to slow.

The people who wanted the words of gods always knew exactly where they were in the store, and made no show of pretending to be interested in any Ishiguro or Munro. Mostly they came in, walked right across the front of the register to the shelf with the Bibles, the Qurans, the Bhagavad Gitas, barely acknowledging G’s presence, barely acknowledging the neighbouring section of pleasure, pain and pleasures in pain. They bought one book and one book only. Or they stole the book if you weren’t careful. No shelf simultaneously accounted for more sales and more lost inventory.

But the time had come now to reckon with what had been evident for a long time. Neither

sex nor religion could keep the booksellers where they were. The owner laid out the deal for G in plain terms. The new and sudden rent increase was criminal, and they were going to fight the landlord like the bookish pirates they were. A team of twelve people would appear in the store at midnight the following Monday, hydrated and ready to box up everything in the store, to pull posters from walls, etc. At 2:00 a.m. a truck would appear outside with its hazards on. They'd load the boxes in quickly, then they'd drive to Book It's flagship location in the Riverpath district. The hours of that store would be pushed later into the night, and as the longest-tenured member of staff, G would get those hours if he wanted them. The Main Street store was closed.

G *did* want those hours. He needed them. The evening of the move was a thrill. They were moving the inventory they already owned, from a neighbourhood that no longer wanted them, so it wasn't a heist (not exactly). But to be up late with a team of part-timers and friends of staff, working up a sweat over a two-hour period under

the cover of night, it felt something like those days when he'd lock up the store on a summer evening to go talk with his co-workers about the new Bernadette Mayer over dollar beers at the Albion Moonlight, occasionally getting drunk enough to let their guards down and go dancing at the Mutual Aid, where all people and all bodies were celebrated, where the booksellers would sometimes surprise themselves with their moves.

Boxing the books, they started from the top shelves, two people per section. Names of novelists, historians and philosophers that he hadn't thought about in five, ten years flashed before his eyes. The tape guns stretched out and bit down. As the truck drove off he felt the wind on his long but thinning hair, and promised he would take the new gig, its reduced hours and late nights, with less cynicism, with more gratitude. He would move lightly through the entire store, dusting off old bits of knowledge, and put the two heavy shelves that had anchored him here for so long out of mind, maybe for good.



I AM FROM...

Written by Eva Forde as an epigraph to her collection of short stories, The Dragon's Library, which her family helped her self-publish just before her passing in February 2023 from osteosarcoma. She was twelve—young at heart with the spirit and fortitude of a magnificent dragon. Her creativity and enthusiasm for writing has inspired The Dragon's Library Collection, a publishing initiative for local elementary writers. She lived in Vancouver, BC. Find the collective at dragonslibrarycollection.ca.

I am from down east breakdancing, and busy streets. My plum tree, waving hello in the breeze. I am from the library, a long walk but worth the effort once you're there. I am from dragons, scales, fire, and wings.

I am from the trails to the wild, kayaking, archery, and bears. I am from the folders of lost memories, the burritos, and no wheat. I am from my small boots, and my shoes with the lollipop stick crammed into the sole. I am from the "I need a break," "Why are you still up?!" and the "You're so weird."

I am from the "the big glasses," and the "four eyes." I am from my broken arm, my strange experiences and wild rides. I am from the books I've been writing for years and that I have finally finished, my notebooks filled to the brim with drawings of monsters and dragons.

I am from novels and stories torn and read through and through, Wings of Fire, Harry Potter, and Murder Mysteries. I am from the storytellers and imagination. I am from fairy tales, witchcraft, and sorcery. I am from the moments of magic, the spring breeze and bookstores.

The Special Canadian Edition of Summer Camps

RIKA RUEBSAAT

From My Paddle's Keen and Bright. Published by New Star Books in 2023. Rika Ruebsaat is the co-author of Soviet Princeton (New Star Books) and the co-creator of seven music albums. She lives in Princeton, BC.

One of the pivotal organizations in the history of summer camps in Canada was the Boy Scouts. Its potent combination of militarism, Christianity and engagement with the natural world epitomized what summer camps have been about for generations. This is particularly true of the camps in the countries of the former British Empire, such as Canada.

Robert Baden-Powell was an officer in the British army during the Second Matabele and the Boer wars. During the siege of Mafeking, white boys under fighting age, who formed the Mafeking Cadet Corps, carried messages and assisted in hospitals. Baden-Powell's experiences with these boys was part of what motivated him to write *Scouting for Boys*, which was published in 1908. The book was an immediate success and inspired the formation of scouting groups throughout England and the British Empire. In 1910 Baden-Powell and his sister Agnes introduced the Girl Guides, a parallel movement for girls.

My copy of the 1950 "Special Canadian Edition" of *Scouting for Boys* opens with "The Scout's Promise":

On my honour I promise that I will do my best—

To do my duty to God and the King.

To help other people at all times.

To obey the Scout Law.

The Scout Law encourages qualities such as honour, loyalty, helpfulness, brotherhood regardless of social class, courtesy, obedience, good humour under stress, thriftiness and cleanliness in thought, word and deed. There is even a section in the book about the evils of masturbation, which Baden-Powell calls "beastliness."

Historically, most Canadian summer camps were directly or indirectly Christian-oriented. They were also patriotic, at least to the extent of

flying the Canadian flag and, in the case of the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, the Union Jack. The values of the Boy Scouts were very close, if not identical, to those that informed the formation of summer camps in this country.

Scouting for Boys describes a series of activities, such as plant identification, fire-building, shelter-building and camp cooking, that have been the mainstay of summer camps for generations and are a reflection of the longing for a simpler life closer to nature engendered by increased urbanization. One of the ways this longing for nature expressed itself in the larger society was as a fascination with the "noble savage," outlined in books by James Fenimore Cooper in the United States and E. Pauline Johnson and Grey Owl in Canada. Summer camps followed suit with what Canadian historian Sharon Wall calls "playing Indian."

*The incorporation of so-called Indian traditions was part of a broader anti-modernist impulse in twentieth-century Ontario. Like the summer camp phenomenon as a whole, it reflected middle-class unease with the pace and direction of cultural change, with a world that appeared to be irrevocably industrial, decidedly urban and increasingly secular.**

One might assume that in BC, where nature is visible and accessible, there would be less of an impulse to "play Indian." I found during my interviews, however, that this was not the case. Some of the people I interviewed described "Indian" or pseudo-"Indian" rituals at camp. None of the people I interviewed identified as Indigenous and almost all of them attended summer camp before First Nations issues formed part of public discourse. My ex-campers' participation in these rituals would thus have been experienced through the blind, uncritical lens with which First Nations were viewed at the time, although I'm pleased to say that some of the "playing Indian" I came across was actually informed by and respectful of local First Nations.

I believe the formation of summer camps in BC was spurred not by a desire to get back to nature but, rather, by a desire to propagate the sensibilities of the more "civilized" parts of the Empire. When I went to school in BC's Interior during the 1950s, the only "Indians" we learned about were the Hurons, Algonquins and Iroquois, and their roles in Canada's early history, all of which was, of course, entirely from the settlers' point of

view. We knew all about the torture undergone by Father Brébeuf but nothing of what might have precipitated it. We learned next to nothing about BC history except that the province joined confederation in 1871. In 1958 we celebrated the centenary of the Fraser River gold rush, which brought about the formation of BC as a crown colony. The logo for this anniversary, a character named “Century Sam,” was a cartoon illustration of a white-bearded, gold pan-wielding prospector who bore an uncanny resemblance to the Warner Brothers cartoon character Yosemite Sam. What all of this demonstrated was that British Columbia was a colony within a colony. Canada was historically a colony of Britain, and the sensibility that I grew up with and the education I received made this patently clear. Our national flag contained the Union Jack, and the world map in our classrooms

had the countries of the British Commonwealth (formerly “the Empire”) featured in hot pink. British Columbia’s later entry into confederation excluded it from the “real” founding history of Canada that was featured in our textbooks. Canada is no longer a British colony but is now culturally and economically an American colony. So as a child I was indoctrinated with the Britishness of Canada, but the icon celebrating the gold rush that led to the founding of our province had its roots in American popular culture.



* Sharon Wall, “Totem Poles, Teepees, and Token Traditions: ‘Playing Indian’ at Ontario Summer Camps 1920–1955,” *Canadian Historical Review* 86 (September 2005).

Theft

VALÉRIE BAH

From The Rage Letters by Valérie Bah, translated by Kama La Mackerel. Published by Metonymy Press in 2023. Valérie Bah is a writer, filmmaker and photographer. She lives in Tiohtià:ke (Montréal, QC). Find her at valeriebah.com.

Imagine for a moment that you are in grade three. You steal books, right off the shelves. It begins with fines from the school library that keep dragging out and gradually escalates into shoplifting. All of this serves a higher purpose: to expand your secret stash. In the centrefold in a book on aquatic life, an image of a beached colony of seals reminds you of a greasy plate of griot. There is also an illustrated encyclopedia filled with naked human bodies, the genitalia of which you ogle before drawing clothes over them.

You fail la dictée.

1. *Mon école*
2. *Mon amie*
3. *Mon ami*
4. *Mes amis*

5. *À mon école, on fait du bricolage, des dessins et des peintures. On joue ensemble dans la cour de récréation. J'ai plein d'amis. J'aime mon école.*

When you're finally barred from borrowing books, you hide in the library stacks, slipping comics under your sweater or into your pants. Then you trudge towards the exit under the gaze of the librarian. You can't stand her. But you can't win. She suspects you right away and rats you out, which only makes you want to steal more.

Your school bag and locker function as waiting zones for your loot, en route to your damp basement, that lawless refuge. That's where the real work begins, a Frankensteinian experiment, courtesy of Scholastic Canada Ltd. Cut, paste, lay out. Rageful lamination with swipes of a glue stick or Scotch tape spawning your beautiful creatures. Child of a thousand secrets, Prometheus in school clothes, you give these pages a life they could never have expected. A book is just raw material: to dissect, to debone, to create anew. The results venture towards the grotesque. Once-glorious works of art—glossy-paged magazines, picture books, watercolour fables, new-age comics—end up discarded by a pile of laundry.

You fail la dictée.

1. *ville*
2. *centre*
3. *explorateur*
4. *communautaire*
5. *J'aime ma ville.*

Il y a un parc, une banque et un centre communautaire. Les avenues de mon quartier sont toutes nommées pour honorer des explorateurs célèbres. L'avenue où j'habite porte le nom d'un explorateur. Mon amie aussi habite sur une avenue qui est nommée après un explorateur très célèbre.

You try to keep a low profile in the school corridors, nurturing the “who, me?” look of a withdrawn weirdo. The loner who chases pigeons at recess. It doesn't take long for the librarian to reach out to your teacher about the increasing fines and her unfettered suspicions. Her meddling triggers a complete ban from the library, with accusations that follow you home.

The day the school administration calls your mother to summon her to a meeting, she furrows her brows.

“What's this, again? Bothering people? They've got nothing better to do?”

You barely react, fearful of her temper. Of her mood swings. The trepidation that underlies the white-woman voice she dons on the phone, her muffled whispers when you call her at work to mediate some fight over the TV remote. She knows that at the root of any institutional mise-en-scène in this country is the stench of discrimination. An understanding that spreads everywhere like maskriti oil. *Kisa yo vle?* No matter the cost, she opposes the unending waves of messages from the school intimating the failings of her five children, listing their deficits, real or imagined. Continuously suggesting that she does not belong here, while she works tirelessly as an administrative assistant in a nondescript office that unflinching tells her the same thing.

You fail la dictée.

1. *famille*
2. *histoire*
3. *livre*
4. *souhait*

5. *Maryse vit avec sa grand-mère, sa grande sœur, son petit frère et son oncle qui étudie en informatique. Elle fait la vaisselle et la cuisine. Elle ne va pas à l'école, mais adore les histoires. Quand on apporte des livres dans son quartier, elle y va toujours, même si on se moque d'elle. Son plus grand*

souhait est que tous les enfants puissent aller à l'école et apprendre avec des amis.

On the day of the appointment, your mother takes a day off work to accompany you to school. She combs your hair into a bun so tight, so elegant, that it mirrors hers. Both your dignity and your rage are plastered to your head with extra-strength fixative gel and a mist of Luster's Pink Oil Sheen Spray. A helmet is required for the exercise that awaits you.

Upon your arrival at the administration office, you notice her voice, her precise register. Her tone foretells a fight. Her whole body says: “What right do you have to blame my daughter, and by extension, my person and everything that we are?”

When the principal welcomes her into his office, you are relegated to a chair in the reception

area. For about half an hour, you watch the secretary sip her coffee, cheerfully lip-sync to soft rock on a local radio station, and help a first grader who's shit his pants. As if watching through a double-sided mirror, you feel covertly initiated into the school's inner workings.

When he emerges with your mother from the office, the principal seems tense and irritated. So does your mother, but in a different way. Some strands have been dislodged from her hairdo. It looks like she's fuming, but she

also seems somewhat depleted.

You barely remember what the principal mumbles on his way out. All you know is that your library loan privileges have been reinstated. You can keep up your little gimmick.

That morning back in class, coifed with the bun of glory, you draw your classmates' attention as they put away their books for yet another vocab test.

“Why are you so fancy today?!”

“Where were you this morning?”

“Shhh! Get your notebooks out,” orders the teacher.

You put the question to rest with a shrug. “My mother was fighting racists.”

You fail la dictée.



Dead Listener

ANDREW STEINMETZ

From Because by Andrew Steinmetz. Published by Esplanade Books, an imprint of Véhicule Press, in 2023. Andrew Steinmetz is the author of six books. Steinmetz formed the band Weather Permitting in 1985 and was a member of the band Good Cookies in the 1990s. He lives in Ottawa, ON.

This just in! I have news for you. Tonight, I went off list. Normally I never pause between songs. I plough through my set. Each song falls out and follows in order. But tonight, it was different. I took a detour. Usually that's a fatal error, an invitation to the blues. But this song fell out of me. It *played* me. And then there was this girl of about thirteen, standing a little further down the street, tapping her foot, just hanging out; you know, my biggest fan, born three minutes ago. Dressed in her school uniform, carrying a backpack, she was not in any rush to get home. That was the first unusual thing I noticed: someone of her generation stopping to listen and sticking around. Who was this person? Afterwards, she dug inside her backpack and approached with some change in her hand, only to be taken by surprise when she noticed there was no collection hat or cup for tips. She just let go of loose change by my feet, like she was spreading fertilizer.

"You didn't have to," I said. "Thanks."

"Sure." She answered. And walked. But only seconds later, she returned. "Hey, who sings that song?"

"What song?"

"The one you just played," she said. "I really like it."

"It's old."

"Yeah, I know." She didn't skip a beat. "I haven't heard it in a long time. My mom, she used to like it."

Who *was* this kid? Confused, for a moment she made me think of you, Spit, as she stood there, serene, like she had all the time in the

world. Geologic. Eventually she said, "I want to play guitar one day."

"How old are you?"

"Fourteen."

"That's a perfect age to start."

"Maybe..." Then she left, not so sure playing an instrument was in the cards, and straightaway it came to me. I sing that song. Me. Hombre.

Hombre wrote that song.

There's no way this kid knew what she was talking about. *She hadn't heard it in a long time.* What did that mean? Still, she liked what she heard. I'll take the credit for that. Do you know what song, Spit? I'll sing it now. "*I never meant what I said. Can't you tell when I'm playing dead?*" Once upon a time, it was about us. But now? What's its meaning? Who would know better than the kid, the stranger, my lone fan, if it means something entirely different today than

it once did to me or to you? She came walking down the street and innocently crashed right into that song, and the music must have served as a bridge for her. That's what I think. Sorry about all the pseudo-philosophizing, the bullshit, but I'm doing my best to wrap my brain around this, which brings me around to song writing.

And to the bridge.

The bridge is pure mysticism. It promises hallelujah: an eventual celebratory return to the sunshine of the chorus. The minor chord twist before the break of dawn. Often, it's damn flakey. It will make you cringe: Do we *have* to go there? Who put this fucking thing at the end of the song? Must we cross over it? Can it take our weight? All kidding aside, without a doubt, the bridge presents a Cartesian moment. There is no turning around once standing on that metaphorical bridge. Either you transcend—and continue across to clouds of polyphonic sweet harmony on the far side—or the abyss beckons. Where you have your hopes dashed on the rocks.

Why am I telling you this? I'm still warming up. We'll cross that bridge soon.



The Magic Door

PAIGE MAYLOTT

Excerpt from My Body Is Distant: A Memoir by Paige Maylott © 2023. All rights reserved. Published by ECW Press Ltd. More info at ecwpress.com. Paige Maylott is a writer, gamer and explorer of virtual worlds. She lives in Hamilton, ON.

Craig leans forward and offers his hand. He gives me one of those trademarked “bro confidence” handshakes—a firm, tight grip with a single, purposeful shake. It’s the kind of greeting that suggests he’s courteous and professional, but too busy to waste time shaking a hand more than once. It also makes me want to remind him I’m a woman, but I try not to read into it too much since I chose not to wear the dress my psychologist suggested.

The room we’re in has the curated aesthetic of a comfy living room rather than an office, but there’s nothing personal enough to make it feel like a home. There’s a portrait by some nature artist showing a misty lake with overhanging trees, and a shelf with a bonsai tree and wooden cut-out letters that spell *Born This Way*.

Better than *Hang in there, Baby*, I guess.

“We should start,” Craig says. “I understand you were referred to me hoping to be prescribed hormone replacement therapy?”

“Yes.”

As Craig refers to his folder, I realize I don’t know what to do with my hands, so I clasp them together. What kind of question is that, anyway? For Craig to even consider me as a patient, I had to see a psychologist for at least three months until they would agree to make a referral, then I spent another four months waiting for an appointment slot to open, and then I battled through Toronto traffic and Craig’s pissy mood. Maybe he just gets off hearing trans women ask for it?

No, I’m sure that’s not the case. It’s more likely a legal loophole. I’m hot, and irritable, and probably nervous. I try to smile.

Craig says, “I want you to be comfortable. This isn’t an interview. Think of it more like a conversation.”

Sure, a pleasant conversation where you decide my future. I nod.

“To help you relax, I’m going to take some anxiety off the table. At the end of this appointment, I will write you a prescription for spironolactone, if you want it. But I’ll need to see you for three months after today before I prescribe you estrogen.”

My heart sinks. I drove an hour for this?

“You won’t prescribe me estrogen?” I ask. I can tell by his tone that he thinks he’s doing me a favour.

Craig smiles as if he’s had this conversation before. “I can’t. I am required to see you three times over three months to prescribe it to you and—”

“I saw my psychologist for over a year, isn’t that enough? He referred me to you months ago.”

Politely, Craig waits for me to finish. “I trust your psychologist, and I have heard good things about his work, but I haven’t seen you, personally, for long enough.”

That would have been nice to know a year ago. However, I’ve lived without estrogen for thirty-six years. What’s three more months? I say, “Okay.”

Craig nods and puts on what I’m sure he believes is an empathetic frown. The faux compassion he’s sending out sickens me. “I’m so sorry

ORIGIN

From there’s more by Uchechukwu Peter Umezurike. Published by University of Alberta Press in 2023. Uchechukwu Peter Umezurike is author of Double Wahala, Double Trouble (Griots Lounge Publishing) and Gogo and the Slimy Green Grub (Lantern Books). He lives in Calgary, AB.

On the train, he presses his face
against the cool
of window glass.

Then he turns to the woman across him
and asks, *Where are you from?*

Canada, she murmurs,
eyes levelled on her paperback.

He peels his auburn face
off the pane—

No, originally?

Earth.

She catches his gaze,
dark-haired woman,
her smile sure,

precise like a smack.

about this. Did you still want me to prescribe spiro? Because there are things we need to chat about first if so.”

“Well, yes, of course I do.”

“Okay. I’ll tell you a bit about spiro and estrogen alternatives so you understand the various risks. First—”

Like the voiceover at the end of an American drug ad, Craig lists the potential side effects of both spiro and estrogen supplements. He tells me how the cheapest estrogen, the stuff low-income trans women use, is actually refined from horse urine, but if I have good medical coverage, I could use more efficient synthetic variations in patches, or injections, or tablets that dissolve under my tongue. He warns me that I won’t see many changes from taking only spiro, or any testosterone blocker, but I might observe some breast growth and my skin may soften. He then briefly mentions that there’s a higher chance of breast cancer, but I’ll lower my risk of heart attack, which I think is a nice trade-off. He concludes by saying that experts don’t fully understand these risks or if they influence my life expectancy.

From what I’ve read, when he says *experts* he means absolutely no one. Trans women’s hormones were originally designed for post-menopausal cis women, or for people with heart and liver problems. So, I only half pay attention because I’m relatively confident that what he’s saying is bullshit and speculation, and he’s talking a lot for someone who claims he’s behind schedule.

I reason that it’s possible these warnings are a test of my conviction, and I consider cutting him off to tell him the truth—that I’d drink literal poison if it meant I could live as a woman for just five years.

You can’t scare me, I’ve survived cancer.

Craig finishes with, “It’s slow, but it is a start. You want to block your testosterone, correct?”

“Absolutely,” I say. “At least that might stop me losing more hair.”

He glances at where my hairline has been sneaking up my temples, Craig’s own having fled to near the middle of his scalp. “Not everyone reacts the same. Spiro won’t bring back lost hair, but it should prevent further loss. Are you okay to chat more? If so, we’ll call this session the first of the three I need to legally prescribe you estrogen.”

If I say no, do you yell psych! and rip the scrip from my hands?

“Sure, why not?” I say, just happy he’s finished his “side effects may include” spiel.

“Great! How do you identify, Vanessa?”

“As a woman?”

“Right, I should have been more specific.” Craig mimics bopping himself against the side of his temple. “That was my next question. But how do you identify sexually?”

“You mean, am I straight?”

“Yes. Gay, straight, bi, asexual?”

Is it only in job interviews where they aren’t allowed to ask that? I hope this isn’t a qualifying

question and say, “I used to think I was straight, but I might be bi . . . or straight, but for men? It’s complicated. Does it matter?”

Craig hurriedly waves his hands. “No. It doesn’t make a difference for prescribing you. I just want some insight into your home life.”

“It sucks. I think my wife wants a divorce.”

There’s that fake compassion face again.

“These things are unfortunately common for transgender women. By the way, not wearing

women’s clothing today is perfectly fine, though most transgender women do. You might wish to experiment with your feminine presentation soon if you are considering surgery. Anyhow, we don’t have to talk about your real-life experience prerequisite yet. All that’s important for me today is that you identify as female.”

Great, am I going to have to go through this Harry Benjamin shit again?

“I identify as a girl—a woman, yes.”

Speaking that aloud while wearing men’s clothes, and in a man’s voice, and without a digital persona to hide behind feels unusual, and I’m suddenly aware of how strange I must appear when I say it.

Unfazed, Craig writes something down. “Would you tell me how you came to this decision? Or describe how you recognize you are female?”

I chew my lip to avoid blurting out my reactionary response, the one I’ve prepared for the trans-uninitiated. But what’s the correct answer? Does he expect me to say I like pink and dresses and want to wear my hair long, or that I like



to paint my nails? Those don't make anyone a woman. While I'm sure saying so would satisfy him, I decide to be as honest as possible.

"Men's presentation and bodies seem foreign, and I've always struggled to relate with other men. Leaning toward feminine presentation and mannerisms just feels *natural*. Beyond that, I've never cared about women's clothes or makeup. It's always been about my body—about *being* female, not dressing as one. I don't like what puberty did to my body, and I want to correct it."

Craig busily writes notes. He holds up a finger. "You don't have to be male or female, you know. Some people live in between."

In between? What an awful way to say that. I say, "I know that. Do you mind if I tell you exactly how I know?"

Craig smiles, "I would not mind at all, please go on."

"I imagine I'm standing in front of a magic doorway. Have you heard of this exercise?"

Craig looks up from his watch. "No, I don't think so."

"There is a magic door. If I close it and walk away, I could be a man without doubt in my mind. However, if I walked through the door, I would be a woman. Not a trans woman, but as if I was born that way, a cis woman."

"Interesting," Craig writes, pausing only briefly to emulate a smile.

"If I wanted to, I could walk back and forth between the threshold, becoming a man or a woman at will—"

Pointing with his pen, Craig says, "Which is completely valid. Is switching back and forth between genders something you wish was possible?"

"No, that's the point. The possibility of being unarguably female made me cry with relief the first time I performed this thought experiment. If that magical door existed, I would walk through, close the door, and throw away the key. It was then I realized the reason I have never seriously considered transition wasn't because I was unsure if I wanted to present as a woman, but instead because I was afraid of society not accepting me."

Craig gently rests his pen on the folder and reclines in his plush couch. His gentle smile is convincingly compassionate for the first time. "So, what changed?"

"I'm still terrified about being the freak who is pointed at, beaten up, or killed, but this is the only body I have. One thing surviving cancer taught me is that I need to embrace important things in

GRIEF MAP 2

From Selvage by Kate Siklosi. Published by Invisible Publishing in 2023. Kate Siklosi is author of Leavings (Timglaset Editions), the curator of the Small Press Map of Canada and the co-founding editor of Gap Riot Press. She lives in Dish With One Spoon Territory/Toronto, ON.



1. look closely: / these words tell us much about where we came from / that particular tangle of love and violence and care and neglect that makes us stormproof / at the end of the day / charters or laws or lore / it is just language / we are left with
2. how to act how to proceed / notwithstanding midrib, vein / the facts are scant / i come from oil, from trades, from hands / yet i am useless with tools except the needle and pen
3. the kildeer lures you away from the field's edge, limping / away from the well-fed earth where you dug in your hands / asking for reprieve / you were just a child
4. goldenrod rushes in sugaring time / lifting, stirring, sending stories / skyward to other wheres / learn to leave these words or stay in them awhile / it might make you want to stay alive long enough.

life while I still can. Hormones and surgery are the closest I may ever get to that goal in this lifetime. So, I suppose transition isn't a goal for me—it's a compromise."



Detritus from the House of Rage

JEN SOOKFONG LEE

Excerpt from Superfan: How Pop Culture Broke My Heart: A Memoir, Copyright © 2023 Jen Sookfong Lee. Reprinted by permission of McClelland & Stewart, a division of Penguin Random House Canada Limited. All rights reserved. Jen Sookfong Lee is the author of many books and the co-host of Can't Lit. She lives in Burnaby, BC. Find her at sookfong.com.

It is the early 2000s and I am newly married, trying my best to fit into my husband's group of friends—almost all white, almost all men, almost all lawyers. Like many women of colour before me, I know how to read a room, observe the social dynamics, and then translate that into what I can say and do that will both allow me entry into a group and impress that group. For these men, it's relatively simple: drink a dark beer I don't like, yell about movies made by Tarantino or Scorsese or Anderson (both Wes and Paul Thomas), and never complain about how drunk and loud they get or how late they go home to their wives. I watch just enough NFL football to pretend I care.

I am good at this game. They say I'm cool. I start to believe I enjoy it.

(Behind my office door in the small downtown apartment I share with my husband, I write a novel about a family not unlike mine, and the sadness I feel about how the pain of immigration is forgotten, and the schisms between fathers and sons, mothers and daughters. I relive an old assault both in my head and in the pages of this novel that is so tender and exposing. But these are not the kind of things I discuss with these men.)

One Friday evening, we are on a bar patio by English Bay, the sun a warm liquid gold that settles on our heads, and I feel pretty, like the sun is an equalizer and there is no privilege, no inequities. I am lulled.

Someone asks me about Chinese food and restaurants, and I answer, excited, for once, to be asked about myself. My parents owned a small restaurant in the early 1970s with a view of English Bay. They had nice tablecloths and served chow mein and sweet and sour pork and Sunday roasts. There were pancakes and hash browns in the morning and wontons at lunch. My mother's cooking—elaborate and so thoroughly Chinese Canadian, as opposed to authentically Chinese—is one of my favourite topics. One of the men, a lawyer I don't know well, scoffs by saying, "Oh, come on, Jen. We all know you're just a banana anyway."

Have you ever felt rage rising in your body? Of course, you have. You know, then, that it is inexorable on bad days, or sensitive days, or when there is no hard shell to block its growth, only a thin dry membrane, easily punctured. You also know that it is pure heat, small flames licking at newspaper, burning as it builds in temperature, as it pushes closer and closer to the hand trying to contain it. When it reaches its destination, it's too late. Nothing will contain it.

I stand up. I shout. "*What did you just say no one gets to call me that Chinese Canadian identity isn't a fun game for white people go fuck yourself.*"

He smirks. My husband and his friend pull me back down into my seat.

"It's not worth it," they say.

"Don't be mad," they say.

"Let me buy you a drink," they also say.

They coddle me. The smirking man does not apologize. He probably wouldn't even remember this incident. My anger is quickly doused, but the embers continue to burn, low and slow, long after.

On the other side of rage is scorched earth. The remains of your feelings, all of your feelings, exist in only charred bits and pieces, some still smoking, others long gone cold and hard. You kick at some, pick up others. When you look around, you no longer see pinwheels of flame or a burning red sky, only clouds of grey ash. You hear, playing in a loop in your head, Sia's most ferocious song, "Fire Meet Gasoline," her voice singing, "When the fire dies, darkened skies, hot ash, dead match, only smoke is left . . . burn with me tonight."

You are forced to start over. Isn't the soil after a forest fire abundant in nutrients? Something will grow here, you tell yourself. Something better. You stomp through, shake the burnt detritus from your boots, looking for the right spot to stake a claim for your new, productive life.



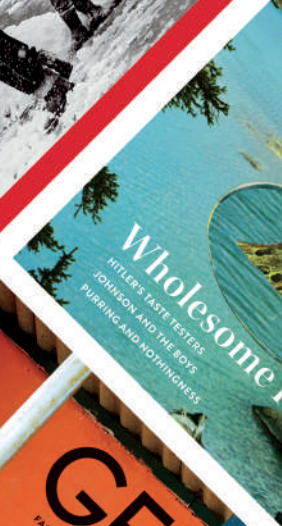
*Give Geist.
Get love.*



UNDER THE BELL CURVE
Unberbling Women / Biking Around with Oragaki / King of the Chihuahuacone / Casual Encounters



LOST CITY
BULL PICK ON SWAROVSKI IN WARSAW / HANDY TIPS FROM NICOPOLIS



Wholesome
HITLER'S TASTE TESTERS / JOHNSON AND THE BOYS / PURRING AND NOTHINGNESS



ACTS OF APPEARANCE
FORCES OF NATURE / FORBIDDEN METADNA / ROAD TRIP WITH CUPID / MARRIAGE POEMS

Take advantage of the *Geist* gift offer: give your loved ones the year-long gift of *Geist*—that's four issues of the Canadian magazine of ideas and culture, delivered right to their door.

Order today using the handy form on the other side.

GEIST

FACT + FICTION • NORTH OF AMERICA

YOUR INFO:

Please start my own subscription, and count it as **my first gift**.

I AGREE TO PAY \$ _____ for _____ subscriptions.

Cheque enclosed Visa MasterCard

Name _____

Credit Card # _____

Expiry _____ Signature _____

Address _____

City _____ Prov _____ Postal Code _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Sign cards and mail directly to recipient(s):

from: _____

GIVE TO:

NEW GIFT RENEWAL

Address _____

City _____ Prov _____ Postal Code _____

Email _____ Phone _____

GIVE TO:

NEW GIFT RENEWAL

Address _____

City _____ Prov _____ Postal Code _____

Email _____ Phone _____

GIVE TO:

NEW GIFT RENEWAL

Address _____

City _____ Prov _____ Postal Code _____

Email _____ Phone _____

US & International: add \$15 per subscription for postage.

Geist does not share phone numbers and email addresses but we sometimes share snail mail lists with other like-minded organizations. Check here if you do not wish us to share your address.



FILL OUT
THIS
FORM

*...and give
the gift of
Geist!*



YOUR OFFER

\$25
each

**TWO OR MORE
SUBSCRIPTIONS**

2 Gifts = \$50
3 Gifts = \$75
4 Gifts = \$100

\$30
each

**ONE
SUBSCRIPTION**

Your own or a gift

Note: gift rates apply to one-year subs only. Postage and tax included.

**MAIL THIS
FORM TO**

GEIST
#210 - 111 W. Hastings St.
Vancouver, BC V6B 1H4

**OR GIVE
GEIST NOW**

call 1-888-434-7834
email subs@geist.com
go to geist.com/gift

GEIST

FACT + FICTION • NORTH of AMERICA

The Business of Salvation

David Huebert

I watch the lights slip and slur on the headpond and think down, toward the dam, the embankment and the long drop of the spillway where the water rests, whirled and stunned



The app insists that I am not my thoughts. The app does not know I am a professor of religion—the Irving Chair of Critical Salvation Studies. The app has never asked. The app says the goal of meditation is not to stop thinking; the goal is to discern without judgement, to bear witness to the monkey circus, to provide a portable paradise in the mind. The app does not suspect I am using it to develop a future course on mindfulness and commodified spirituality. The app calculates sixty thousand thoughts per day, roughly ten per second. *Thought. Mind. Eco. Oikos. Home. Salvation. Dam. Death. Child. Face.*

The app, I must repeatedly remind myself, does not know how I came to this sleepy city of rivers and hills, a town where people brag about the farmers' market, the mafia of micro-breweries, the Bill Thorpe Walking Bridge. A city with streets named Secretary Lane and Colonial Heights Drive, where the students have scarred a whole street with couch burnings, where they hire women to ride naked on horseback across the campus, name their bottle depot the Redemption Centre. People laugh about the FOFF—Fine Old Fredericton Folk, grow sombre when we mention the Loyalists and their slaves, the damming of the river, the Shubenacadie residential school. On the phone, the girls crawling all over her, competing to push the red button, Marina tells her mother that the only industry is forestry and they've cut all the forests down.

The app does not know I am a lapsed Mennonite, does not care about my SSHRC-funded research on Pan, the sexually frustrated Arcadian goat-god whose stun-gun superpower, panolepsy, provides our modern notion of "panic." The app is not aware that Marina and our two toddlers and I came from another place, a long-ago exploded city, a town of citadels and sea. We came, like everyone else I know, for the red-brick university, perched imperial on the hill. Soon, we noticed that the stars are brighter at night, and that people apologize differently. Back in the exploded city, they said "saw-ree." Here they say "sore-y," as if the apology held some small affliction—as if the word were wound.

**Back in the exploded city, they said
"saw-ree." Here they say "sore-y," as if the
apology held some small affliction—
as if the word were wound.**

My neighbour/colleague, a biology professor named Hope, knocks and asks if we would come over for a lobster dinner Friday night. At the same time, she hands me a pamphlet: STOP THE KESWICK RIDGE FUNERAL HOME. "There's going to be a crematorium," she says. "They're going to burn bodies." Hope is a

squinter; any light seems to afflict her. Even here, in the shade of the doorway on a grey November day, she raises her cheeks, her mouth slightly open, as if the sun were a lurking predator. She explains how it's unsightly, the smoke in the skies. And there may be smells. I stand looking at the pamphlet and thinking about the name of my new hamlet. "The Ridge," or "God's Country" as the locals call it, known for bucolic scenery and apple harvesting. Hope explains that it's a tradition, she always has new neighbours and colleagues over for lobster. There is a test in her gaze. Behind her, in the distance, I see the headpond and the bridge, the deep fortress of the dam scoured in the rock below.

"What about the dead?"

She squints, holds up a visored palm. "What about them?"

"Where else would they go?"

"Friday," she says. "Settled."

The Mactaquac Generating Station is a run of the river hydro facility with an installed generation capacity of 660 MW, a hydraulic head of 31.7 metres, and a spillway capacity of 16,282.18679 m³. The facility's six turbines provide 670 megawatts and supply close to 20 percent of New Brunswick with clean, low-cost power. Beginning in the 1980s, concrete sections of the hydro station have begun to bloat and crumble due to a chemical reaction called alkali-aggregate reaction, requiring regular maintenance and repairs. The headpond, also known as Lake Mactaquac, covers an area of 87 km² and reaches upstream for 96 kilometres. The Mactaquac Life Achievement Project aims to find solutions so the dam can serve the community through 2068, reaching its intended lifespan of 100 years.

In my class on Environment and Eschatology, my eight tired students talk about ways to save the planet. We read Robin Wall Kimmerer, Winona LaDuke, William Cronon. I ask my students about their relationship to the land. They argue that Adam and Eve had extractivist mentalities, that English is septic with nouns.

I tell them yes, absolutely, brilliant! I pivot to the dam, consult the website, discuss the refurbishment, the Wolastoqey title claim and NB Power squirming out of their terms. I show a video of a Wolastoqey Elder speaking about the creation story, Glooscap defeating

the monstrous frog, which is how the river and its tributaries formed in the shape of a tree and branches. The Elder then describes a study that uses biogeography databases to show a debris dam near Grand Falls in the late glacial period, about 8,000 years ago. I tell them that two thirds of the world's rivers are dammed and isn't the sonic coincidence striking? Larry is puzzled: "Sonic coincidence?"

The students stare back, glazed. I have lost them. Something puzzling trickles through me. A strange feeling rises in my throat. A kind of vibration. The walls go blurry, liquid.

Autumn, the girl in fuzzy tie-dyed alpaca, saves me: "As in dammed, damned. Like a homonym?"

Larry, a student in white New Balances, says we should destroy the dam, save the river. "Save," I repeat, with gravitas. "And so we move from damnation to salvation. See you Wednesday."

Trying to sleep in the new city, I often feel like I am drowning. I feel my heart, swollen and frantic. I sit up in bed and stare out the window. It's not real, what I see out there. Some trick of the water, the light. Some flinch of the heart. But it seems totally clear: the dam is trembling, quivering, as if it were a creature trying to shake its fleas.

Larry comes to visit during my office hours. Larry's T-shirt reads, "There is no Planet B." Once they told me about their aspirations to be a death doula. They want to write their paper on sustainability and end of life. They do not say "death." Once I told Larry they are a bright mind, a future leader. "What future?" they said.

Today they tell me about the sea lamprey. An offhand comment brought it to mind, and they thought I'd find it interesting. The lamprey, sometimes called an eel, are coming up the Wolastoq in massive numbers to spawn. Snake-like parasitic fish moving upriver in New Brunswick and people call them vampires because they attach their suckers to other fish and feed on their blood. Larry says the lamprey's mouth is a saucer-sized oral sucking disc filled with sharp, hooked teeth, a razor-sharp tongue at the core of it. I ask them what's the metaphor, in terms of environment or eschatology.

Larry winces. "Does there need to be a metaphor?"

I sort the emails into folders called "Doom" and "Gloom." Events, talks, promotions, research, funding, teaching, students, nagging excuses, library, accessibility, departmental matters, pedagogy, PD, promotion and tenure. The app tells me to take a mindfulness minute before meetings. We are striking a subcommittee to address contract faculty and precarious academic labour. The Provost mourns the passing of Dr. Boris Radulov, a colleague from Anthropology, who leaves behind a wife and two sons following a courageous year-long battle with an aggressive form of cancer. I stand on my standing pad, in my running shoes, staring at the screen gone blur, thinking of Boris's bald spot, his neck rolls, his campaign against the 3:3 teaching load, his chin scrunched up at faculty meetings, his small feet and big laugh. I think of mourning, of passing, of his poor children. And yet the feeling is unmistakable, crawling through the murk of pity and compassion—a froth of guilt and envy and relief.

Larry says the lamprey's mouth is a saucer-sized oral sucking disc filled with sharp, hooked teeth, a razor-sharp tongue at the core of it.

As I drive home across the dam, there's a feeling underneath the car. Or in my body? A kind of quiver. A tilt in the light and my jaw goes strange and I feel as if I'm underwater. Gravity eases and the air goes gelatin and I worry that the car might float into the blue.

At home, I find the girls in the garden with shovels, flinging gravel and sand. "We're diggers." They gleam, scratching their bums. I chuckle, not telling them that the Diggers are a seventeenth-century agrarian Calvinist sect. Emerson says the worms have been speaking to her. I ask what the worms said and Mona tells me they're sorry but it's not their fault.

I glance at Marina like *bless their toddler hearts*. We do dinner and laundry and when

I caress Marina's neck-shoulder swoop she starts to hum "Rhythm of the Night," which is code for having her period. *SpongeBob SquarePants* is obtusely guarding the secret formula of the Krabby Patties. Soon the girls are running around in pyjamas, singing "ring around the rosie, popsicle-a-cozy." I read *Jack and the Beanstalk* and a picture book version of *Frozen 2*. They squirm and scratch their bums too much, complain about an itch. I give them a placebo cream and they flutter into sweet twitchless sleep. Once, I cried folding their laundry. I was holding a pair of JoJo Siwa pyjamas and a pair of *Paw Patrol* pyjamas and I did not know which belonged to whom.

**The app is not aware that my father was
a hungry Mennonite, a man who
changed his name from Johann to John
and left the canola farm and the
Brethren Church because he was far too
ravenous to stay in W., Saskatchewan.**

Marina and I sit out beside the willow, the dam twinkling from the valley below. Each night, the lights gleam in the dark water of the headpond, a perpetual liquid Christmas. I tell her about the lobster dinner and she shrugs like *sure*. The familiar friction sits between us: I have dragged her here for the university, hauled her from her family and the city by the sea. And me, am I even happy? Here at the university, wearing my golden handcuffs as I preach the business of salvation at a university funded by forestry moguls?

In the winter it was easier; I had a favourable teaching schedule, drove four hours between cities to be home four days a week. Marina says she's worried about me. She thinks I may be overworked, stressed. I stare at the willow, which I've nicknamed Pan. There are no willows in the exploded city. I've read about their voluminous roots, how they spread, wide and circular, nearly twice the size of the tree itself, colonizing the garden. I watch the lights slip and slur on the headpond and think down, toward the dam, the embankment and the long drop of the spillway where

the water rests, whirled and stunned, and tell Marina about the endless emails, the course website acrobatics, the meeting minutes and the Level 2, the Arts Council and the Provost's Strategic Plan, the curriculum committee and the grad committee and the EDI committee. I tell her about my service teaching and the Eschatology Class, how the students are basically Calvinists, how they believe themselves fundamentally depraved, clamouring for some clarity, tirelessly sanctimonious, longing for direction in their search for The Good. I tell her I just don't know how to reach them. Is it them? Is it me? Am I so out of touch? Marina asks if I even like them and I say that's just it, that's the horror of it, I am febrile with love for them, I love them like my own children.

The app would never suspect that I lost my faith long ago, have been trying half my life to find something to replace it. The app is not aware that my father was a hungry Mennonite, a man who changed his name from Johann to John and left the canola farm and the Brethren Church because he was far too ravenous to stay in W., Saskatchewan. The app does not traffic in irony, abides no nuance. The app says I am not my thoughts, does not address feelings, does not concede that my thoughts are my sustenance, my vocation. The app tells me happiness is my birthright. The app theorizes smiling—how a real smile starts with the mouth and works up to the eyes, changes the hormones inside the person who is smiling. Even a fake smile can do this, trick itself into a real smile. The app does not concede that a god can be dammed, that spillway might strangle an eel. The app tells about studies where a person holds a pencil between their teeth and even this changes their mood, releasing dopamine. The app is a glutton for dopamine, always crafty for a hit.

I drive to work across the dam, stare into the headpond. I used to be an activist. I once lived in a tent in a park on Bay Street for a whole summer, eating hardly cooked potatoes dipped in tomato sauce. I stood, trembling, in front of bulldozers. Now I sign online petitions. Marina says it's fine, it's normal, once you reproduce, to want more comfort and security, to worry more about yourself. To realize there are things you can't change, things

beyond your control. Teaching, I have convinced myself, is still the good work. Asking the tough questions. Raising consciousness.

On one side, toward Mactaquac Provincial Park, the river looks like a lake. It appears perfectly calm, but there are signs posted, warning not to swim, referring to the fast current that will drag everything in the water down through the intake, on through the penstock toward the turbines. On the other side it drops off 55 metres. That's where the deterioration is, the alkali-aggregate reaction, the locally sourced greywacke slowly gnawing away at itself.

Upon arriving in this province, I learned that my family on my mother's side had settled close to here, in Kingsclear, on the other side of the dam. This was hundreds of years ago, before these Welsh settlers travelled to Ontario, then called Canada West. They were farmers, though I don't know what crop. These ancestors, three generations of them, were all buried in a small graveyard that is now covered by the headpond. When the dam was built in 1968, the government saved a few buildings from the flooded town to make a pioneer village, but they didn't exhume the bodies in the graveyard. Someday, when they decommission the dam or neglect it back to itself, the bodies of my ancestors will rise up, floating, in the ghost of a river risen again.

I bump into Hope in the hallway. Behind her, the cleaner pushes her cart past the posters for summer trips to Europe, for courses in classical languages, talks on defunding the police. Hope squints against the fluorescent light and tells me about her research on the toxic blooming algae, *Heterosigma akashiwo* (*Raphidophyceae*). Hope says she loves eating lobster but it makes her a bit squeamish, the cooking and that. Would I—might I perhaps be able to buy them?

In class, we discuss the word "salvation," how it contains the sense of "save" but also the sound of "salve." I remind them about last class, about Genesis, ask if there's anything at all we might repurpose from Adam and Eve, from Noah's flood? Anything beautiful there? What debts do we owe to this vision of salvation?

They drop their eyes, pick their teeth.

I shift to Twitter wars and Facebook slacktivism, Musk's space-opera redemptionism,

internet eco-metaphorics—thirst and feed, spam and fire and dank memes, the viral and the dreaded inbox flood. I ask what apps they use and they tell me Insta is just a shopping app, Facebook is where you talk to your grandma. I express fear of Snapchat and they tell me don't worry, it's not a cult. We talk about greenwashing, about Greta, about martyrdom. We look at the slides, talk iconography—Shakira, Snoop Dogg, Julia Butterfly Hill, all of them self-fashioned saviours.

Someday, when they decommission the dam or neglect it back to itself, the bodies of my ancestors will rise up, floating, in the ghost of a river risen again.

I mention the corporate university, how their professors are radicals in minivans, how easy it is to sing revolution from the City on a Hill. I tell them how every single professor at this university is a hypocrite, is committed primarily to their own ease. How all the preaching and ideas become meaningless. How my most radical colleagues take annual trips to Costa Rica and do not discuss them openly. How at a faculty gathering a white settler dean who built a career on decolonial methodologies loudly lamented the price of campus parking passes and explained that his new home would need five bedrooms, three bathrooms; meanwhile half these courses—I wave an arm in the air—are taught by the "precariat," a stream of hyper-educated super-talented people without benefits or job security.

Larry raises their hand. "Is this about, like, the university as a new sort of moral-religious institution, similar to the corruption of the Christian church?"

"Yes," I snap. "Absolutely! Brilliant. But also"—I realize this as I'm saying it—"I'm talking about myself. Not that I'm the three-bathroom dean—but that I, too, am compromised. A hypocrite, ideals waning into coziness." I pause, swallow with difficulty. "This is my greatest fear."

They stare back, blinking. A wall has been broken. They regard me—Larry, Autumn, and the rest. They are not sure what to do. It is

not fair what I've done. My throat constricts again. Colours swim through my head. I begin to feel like I'm floating underwater. Vertigo, I tell myself. I tell the students, "Great work, see you Friday."

Every weekend we drive the four hours, the girls strapped into pink headphones, worshipping the iPads.

At home I watch *Frozen 2* with the girls, their favourite. What sticks with me, strangely, is not the crumbling dam, Elsa riding down triumphant on a magic purple spirit-horse to stop the flooding of Arendelle, but the wisdom of Olaf the comical snowman: "Water has memory."

The girls, particularly Emerson, scratch and scratch their bums. They scratch through the movie, through dinner, through hair-brushing and tooth-brushing and, finally, sleep. As we sit out with Pan, Marina googles symptoms on her phone, asks me if we should be concerned. I complain about my students, how they're totally brilliant but I feel so distant from them, so far removed. Like they can actually make change but I'm already lost. Like the more people pay you for talk about environmental disaster, the less it means. How strange it is to stand on the other side of the podium, wanting to feel what they feel, wanting to be amazed and compelled and agitated.

"Your blood pressure," she says. "You're just a person. Just a human being."

I don't tell her the other thing, the liquid feeling. I don't tell her how I dreamt myself standing on the bridge over the dam, my fingernails full of green-brown grit, headlights slurring past, then wobbling in the headpond. Far below, fanged parasites gnawed the concrete and it crumbled and held, crumbled and held.

Marina asks if it's working, the meditation. Is it helping? I tell her it's not supposed to, it's research. "I know," she says. "But is it?"

I stare back, ignore the swaying dam, the socket moon.

"You can quit you know."

"What?"

She smiles and shrugs and says I could quit, walk away. It's been done. Marina has always supported me, but it's never been a secret that she longs to move back to the exploded city. Every weekend we drive the four hours, the girls strapped into pink headphones, worshipping the iPads.

I say retirement and sabbatical and she says whatever, who cares about the pension, it's bullshit. She says something about cholesterol and blood pressure and years of my life, but I'm watching the dam behind her—glowing orange, quivering.

"Well," she says. "You know how I feel."

Emerson calls me inside, says she needs to poop so I take her past the kitty night light. She slumps blear-eyed on the toilet, produces an unusual sound. A slurp that catches my ear, compels me to look down, notice a kind of froth around the edges. Becoming a parent, Marina used to joke, meant becoming an expert in human shit.

I lean closer, turn on my phone's flashlight. Fibres? Minuscule, hair-thin, pale. What did she eat? Tiny soba noodles? Microplastics? There is a ripple in the water, like motion. It must be coming from the plumbing, from below. No. The hairs are moving. The hairs are not hairs. "What's wrong, Papa? What is it?"

"Nothing," I say, and flush.

We consult the medical oracle in the wine-down dark, the room glowing blue. We speculate about rashes and fungus until we land on pinworms. Pinworms, also known as threadworms and nematodes, are narrow parasites that cause discomfort and intense itching around the anus, particularly at night when, receiving the signal that the host is asleep, they crawl out of the child's inner anus to lay their eggs and copulate on the surface. The host.

Breath. Wine.

"Pinworms are contagious," Marina reads from her phone, "but do not tend to affect adults and can be avoided with proper handwashing and hygiene. Currently 40 million people in the US are infected with pinworm."

The phone advises that you check, make sure. The best way is with a flashlight and a sleeping child, which means waiting twenty minutes then the two of you with headlamps,

entering with a *Mission Impossible* crouch. The headlamps shining on the bunkbeds, the girls' innermost space. Pulling down Pull-Ups and prying soft pale cheeks, finding them dancing and terrible, a mockery of staple-sized worms, squirming in the sacred dank.

A different app guides me to the pinworm Adrugs. A pharmacist says oral, painless, common, quick. On the way home I stop at the grocery store, debate a bottle of wine, find myself standing in front of the lobster tank. The brown-red creatures piled atop each other, crushers and pincers and elastic bands. All these tortures we gently accept. I remember reading that in the wild they walk, in the cold months, far out into the ocean, along the ocean floor. They could cover miles and miles. But why? What were they seeking out there in the cold?

Outside, there's a half-dozen protesters holding pizza-box signs. I spot Larry and try to drop my eyes, but they're already approaching with a pamphlet that reads ABOLISH THE DAM. Beneath the letters, a crude drawing of a withered salmon in a choker. Larry says they're shutting it down, tomorrow night. It's all over Twitter, digital wildfire. "Join us?"

I gesture at the bag of pills in my hand, mutter something about a family emergency and those darned daycare plagues.

In the morning I remember Mona, what she said in the garden. *They're sorry but it's not their fault.* Marina reminds me that it's Friday, meaning lobsters, meaning Hope. I tell her I'm quitting my job. We can go back to the other city. She laughs, sighs, "I wish." Within hours, the girls are shitting dead worms instead of live ones. I flush the toilet, watching the dead parasites sink and swirl, and I know it is gone, it is purged, whatever was dammed in me.

I walk into class brisk and sure, tell my students we are all sinners in the hands of a vengeful earth. I tell them I am unqualified, I am a fraud. They don't need me. I am leaving—they won't miss me. I tell them it's useless. I tell them the dam is crumbling. I float through the room. I hear my own voice, as if underwater. What am I saying? What am I doing? Why does it feel perfect and right? I feel the dam trembling, weary.

I melt into the tiles, become molecular, imagine myself as a krill cowering on the mid-ocean ridge, baleen shadows passing over. I tell them they are presentist sanctimonious ahistorical holier-than-thou ingrate anachronist hypocrites. Or they are sages. They are brilliant. There is nothing to teach them? How can a person teach salvation? They nod and hunch over their notes, scribbling fast, antic. I have never seen them more engaged.

They pick up a lobster each and start prancing around the kitchen. The claws hang sedate and little bubbles come out of the lobsters' mouths.

At home I show the children the lobsters, explain that they'll be bright red when finished. "Wow," Emerson says. "They change colours?"

"I'm that one," Mona says.

"I'm the big one!"

They pick up a lobster each and start prancing around the kitchen. The claws hang sedate and little bubbles come out of the lobsters' mouths. I feel something rising in me, hear a rasping voice screaming: "*Stop! Stop it! Now! Stop!*"

Marina is staring at me, chilled. "Let's put them in the bathtub," she says. She means the lobsters, but I see my children in a boiling pot of water, wearing elastic bands on their wrists.

Hope greets us in dog-walking dressage. Leash clipped to her belt, a hard-plastic holster of poop bags, asking if I've met her baby, a geriatric Australian shepherd. She musses the dog's head and it pulls its lips back, exposes gums freckled black. I raise the paper bag of lobsters. Hope asks, again, whether I can cook them, am I sure I know how? I say yes, sure, twelve minutes a pound. She squints, smiles. "I'll do the butter."

There are four lobsters—one for each adult and one for the girls to share. Hope produces a pot, which seems far too small. I tell her I

don't see how they'll fit and she slips the butter on, tells me she's done five in there before, blusters after my children who are not to touch the photos or the ornamental elephants or the matryoshka dolls.

Hope and Marina talk about algae, about the other city, about which samosa place at the market is better. The girls smash a precious family photo and Marina runs for the broom. The dog nips and snuffs, laps baguette crumbs. The water comes to a boil. The butter melts, starts to burn. I ask Hope is she sure about the pot and she squints, "Yes, positive."

I cut the elastics and drop the first lobster in. It flaps its tail, then curls into the bottom. The second one splashes an arm up, pincer reaching for the ceiling, tiredly clamping the air. The third dies slower, its head slumped above the surface, the water barely boiling now.

I hold the last lobster by the waist, the claws winging back to snatch me. There's room, Hope assures me. This lobster is quicker than the others. It reaches both claws all the way back, the pincer and the crusher opening and clamping shut. The tail thwacks. I flinch and pivot and there's a snort and a scrabble of metal and paws, a dog rising up onto the stovetop. The butter pot teeters, spills hissing over the stove and the dog starts to wheel around the room in a blur of claw and snout. The dog whirling and thwacking and pinning the red-brown creature on its back, eight tiny legs scrambling in the air until Hope appears with a steel snow shovel, wields and swings and clangs a chunk out of her tile.

Marina says your hand, your hand. The children stand in the doorway, watching slack-jawed and pale. I look down at the slick buttery mayhem of my fingers and wrist and my thoughts become my body, become scalded flesh. Marina is going for the keys, saying hospital, going for ice and a silver bowl, but I'm already at the door, in the car, driving toward the floodlit dam, the lights on the water like a shattered shrapnel moon. I drive fast, speeding through on autopilot, my hand still covered in a gore of butter and burn. I think of my grinning children, of their tiny teeth, of my far-away home. My children, red and scalded. My children in the mouth of a dog. My children

crawling in masses past the crabs and barnacles, over rockweed and saw wrack, sea belt and coralline.

I see the blockade too late. The minivan and the pizza-box sign. A glimpse of Larry's face and then there is no road, only sound, only screech and twirl and the sky pivoting, the sky swallowed by the headpond, dam lights a twinkling disco, car spinning stunt-wild and in the rearview a dazzle of police lights. My thoughts are not me, not me. My thoughts are the world, this world, moving far too fast. My thoughts are lobsters, crawling out into the cold wide ocean. My thoughts are my children, their ancestors in the headpond, my hand a mass of terrible pus, butter-slick white, and my red children cooking, their front arms heavy, so heavy. In this moment, the app comes on in ragged whisper, saying that it needs me, cannot be without me. Somewhere a car is plunging, two pairs of headlights coming together in the still, deadly lake. The app is lonely; it requires me; without me, it cannot be. Somewhere bodies are rising up. Somewhere a car is being sucked toward a turbine, stopping at the intake grates where it shudders, fishlike, swarmed by ancestors in the form of lamprey, their toothed mouths salty with flesh and messages. They want to explain: they have done nothing wrong, they promise. They didn't know, how could they have known?

A settler writer of Mennonite-Ukrainian and British descent, David Huebert is the author of Chemical Valley, Peninsula Sinking, and a forthcoming novel, Oil People.

The origin story of the Wôlastoq was told to the author by Cecelia Brooks of Wabanaki Tree Spirit, and the Canadian Rivers Institute. Cecelia's version is an expanded version of that told by Gabe Paul. Cecelia, who also works in conservation, directed the author to a study by R. Allen Curry, "Late Glacial Impacts on Dispersal and Colonization of Atlantic Canada and Maine by Freshwater Fishes," which offers scientific evidence to support the story the Wôlastoqiyik have been telling for ten thousand years.

Winners of the Literal Literary

POSTCARD

Story Contest

EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL EDITION

FIRST PRIZE

Surveillance

LIISA KOVALA

Greetings from the middle of nowhere. I hope your war is more exciting than mine. At least in Helsinki you're seeing action, but here in the countryside it's day after day looking out for Russian aircraft that don't appear. Wide open skies, a breeze through the pines and starlings calling to one another is simply irritating. So is this uniform. Can't they make something less itchy? I think this collar will strangle me.

We've been told what an important job we have, how we could save lives, and I know it's true. But how long can I stand here with these binoculars pinned to my face? After my shift, I have raccoon eyes. At least I'm the first to see any newcomers—soldiers or fellow Lotta Svärds—whenever a truck rolls in. Of course, Kristiina always demands to see them



for herself. Often, she already knows who they are and why they're coming. What a gossip.

The only things to watch out for these days are the men. The most recent batch of soldiers went to the front (God protect them), but the ones still stationed here grate on my nerves. Even when I'm off duty, someone is always asking for a cup of coffee or another sandwich like I'm his wife or

something. Why don't they get it themselves? They drag their dirty boots in and trudge dirt around and who gets to clean it up? You guessed it. I didn't volunteer to be a Lotta so I could sweep floors and do dishes. I could have stayed home to do that. You'd think they'd at least let us use the sauna first, but no. And they spend their free time smoking and playing cards and they don't even ask me to play.

And don't get me started on that young upstart Matti. I mean, come on. Everyday he finds some excuse to interrupt our surveillance with some inane comment. Can't he see we have a job to do up here? Only yesterday, I spied him sauntering toward us, bow-legged and brash, and had a sudden urge to crouch down, but there's nowhere to hide on the observation tower. Kristiina swore under her breath and picked up the field phone, pretending she

was on an important call to headquarters, but that left me to handle him.

"Pretty girls like you should be on a dance floor," he'd said. "Let me take you dancing. My tango will sweep you off your feet." I'd scoffed and told him I wouldn't dance with him even if Mannerheim himself ordered it. What's with these soldiers? Away from their wives and girlfriends and they think every woman here ready to do their bidding.

I can't take another day. Can you put in a good word for me and get me out of this place? If this war doesn't kill me, the boredom will.

Liisa Kovala is the author of Sisu's Winter War (Latitude 46, 2022). Her debut, Surviving Stutthof: My Father's Memories behind the Death Gate (Latitude 46, 2017) was shortlisted for a Northern Lit Award. Liisa's work is inspired by her Finnish heritage and the northern Ontario landscape she calls home.

SECOND PRIZE Sentimental

CARMEN SIEGERS

An old English pub in a beachside town. Seems as good a purgatory as any. Ancient brick and mortar. The gloom, the dust, the dark wood.

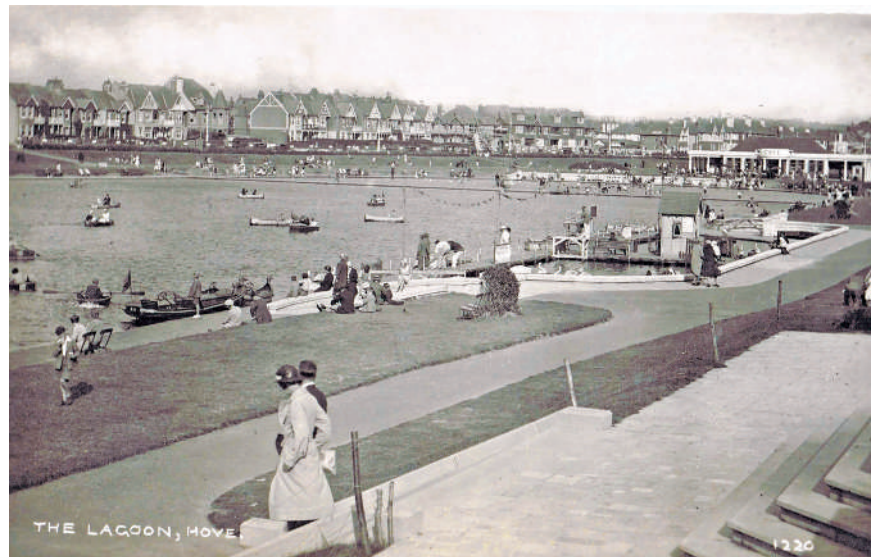
You have to pay the toll, the bartender says. I've already paid, I protest. I've paid so many times. The bartender scoffs. Everyone says that. But he is drawing a pint. The dark amber beer makes a gurgling sound as it leaves the tap, hitting the side of the mug the bartender holds at a perfect tilt. He presents it with a flourish. The correct amount of foam on the top. We're not amateurs in this country, the bartender says.

Amateurs.

I sip my beer.

A man with long greying hair and a beard sits on a stool in the middle of the pub, strumming an acoustic guitar. His gravelly voice is low as he sings "Wish You Were Here" by Pink Floyd. He sings almost to himself, staring at the guitar, not looking up.

Two old men are arguing while huddled together in a booth. A dartboard hangs on the far wall. *Thwack*. A local hipster in a plaid jacket and



knit toque misses the bullseye. His pals jeer good-naturedly.

Amateurs.

I'm thinking about that time you entered the 10k mud run. You said it would be a shit show and I said you couldn't win. You said, watch me.

I'm thinking about all the things we argued about, whether to stay in or go out, drive to Banff or drive to Jasper. Is Pearl Jam better than Nirvana. Why would you even try to compare the two, and then we debated that. You said *Moonrise Kingdom* is the best Wes Anderson film and I said it's *Rushmore*. I haven't changed my mind about that. But maybe I could concede a few points about other things.

I'm thinking about that time we stopped at a small Italian town in the Northern Alps and discovered a vintage motorcycle show in the middle of that plaza. Dozens of classic bikes lined up in the old cobblestone square. Italian "show & shine." The dude in the leather vest showing off his 1930s cream-coloured Norton, as you ran an admiring hand along the side of it. I made the organ donor joke and you said I have no sense of adventure.

But I'm the one here now in this old English pub I've stumbled upon after a spontaneous decision to go south instead of north. And I wish you were here with me drinking a pint,

even if it were the Strongbow nonsense you always preferred.

The man with the guitar is still strumming and singing.

Hell, I guess I'm feeling sentimental.

Carmen Siegers is a writer and former journalist whose current day job is in film and television production. She writes short stories and screenplays and currently lives in Vancouver, BC, with her nineteen-pound Schnoodle named Daisy.

THIRD PRIZE

Fun & Fast

RUBY WOODRUFF

Dear Sandra,

Do you remember back when life was fun & fast? When we'd spend our days taking trips to the slopes and nights working for tips at the Whistlestop. Where you met Graham and even though I said he was bad news, you started going steady. I remember you two twisted together like a pretzel. Limbs linked in love. We'd all go to his basement suite when our shifts finished. Long after the nightlife had called it a night, we were still charged up, the lightning bolts we once were. Shocking behaviour. Blind drunk. Dancing through the dark.

But fun & fast don't last. I could tell by the way his life was in piles. Piles of dishes in the sink, piles of clothes on the floor, piles of cans in the closet. He was a pile of shit; I'm surprised you didn't smell it sooner. I don't miss him, but I miss it. Our youth. It wasn't as carefree as everyone always says it is. Life's problems are there no matter what age you are. Even as a child you have issues. Age appropriate.

Now all my cares concern health. Visits to the doctor, the optometrist, the dentist, the pharmacist. These are

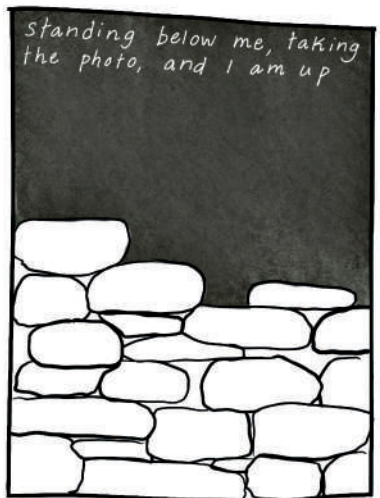
the trips I take. The mundane prerequisites of staying alive. "To Do To Live" list. Draining the last of my energy. I feel slow & tired.

No longer a lightning bolt, I grumble and stumble, chasing the light. Maybe it will bring me to the past, or maybe my future. Old thunder thighs. Memories keep me moving. Crinkling my eyes when I remember the snow blowing into them. Stretching my lips when I remember the time you skied into a tree well and I had to dig you out. You were never much of a skier. Our abs were tightened by laughter born of long nights and little sleep. Now all I do is sleep.

You never think about moving when it's easy. When it's as natural as breathing. Then, when you can't move like you used to, it's all you can think about. And when you start thinking about breathing, how easy it used to be, well, I haven't thought about it; I may not be fun & fast anymore, but I'm not there, yet.

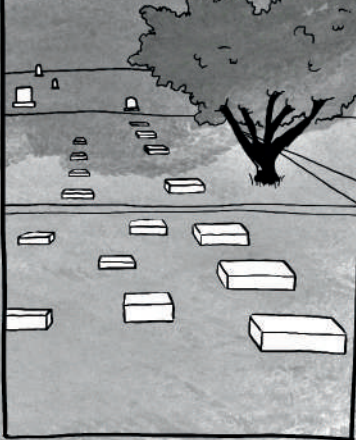
With no fixed address, writing is the main constant in Ruby Woodruff's nomadic life. She has written for multiple outdoor adventure companies and often shares stories about her own experiences. To balance out her long days of sitting and typing, Ruby surfs, cycles and works as an active travel guide.







Sometimes my mom has trouble



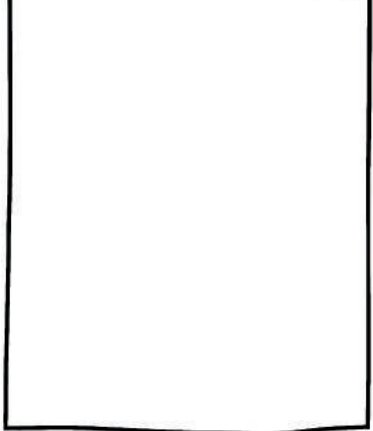
Feeling close to the



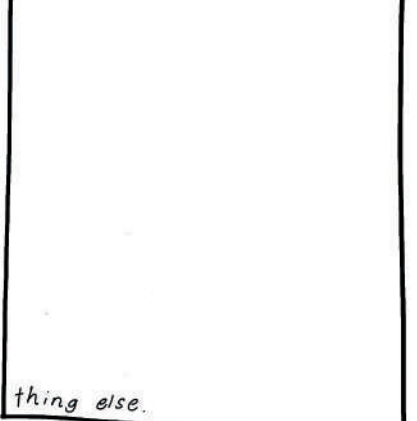
world.



She says it's like there's a

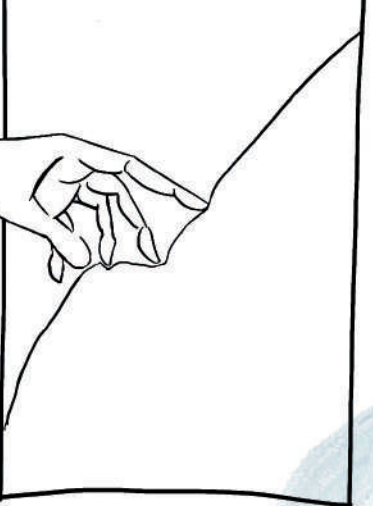
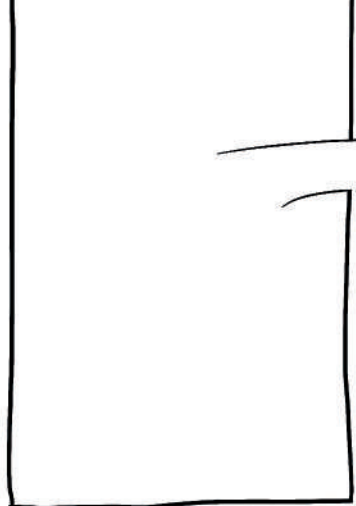


thin veil between her and every



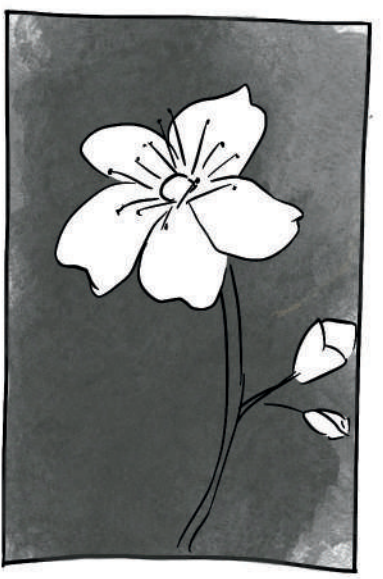
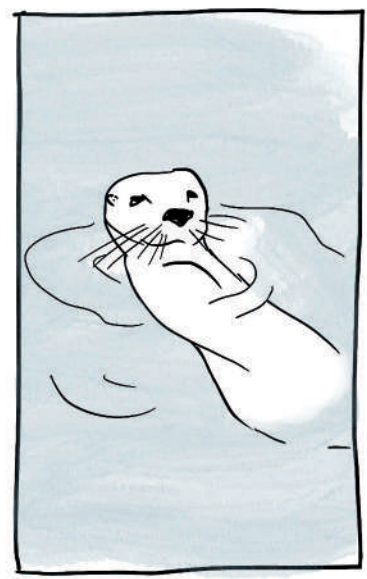
thing else.

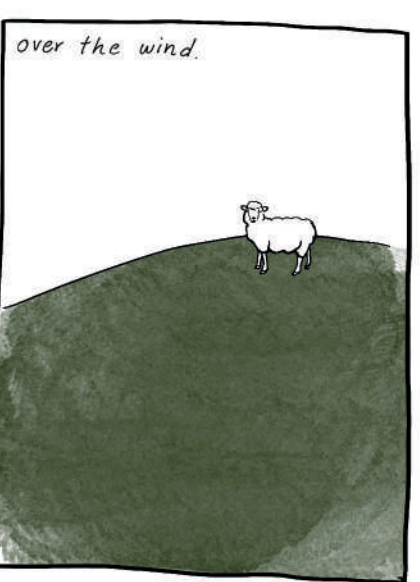
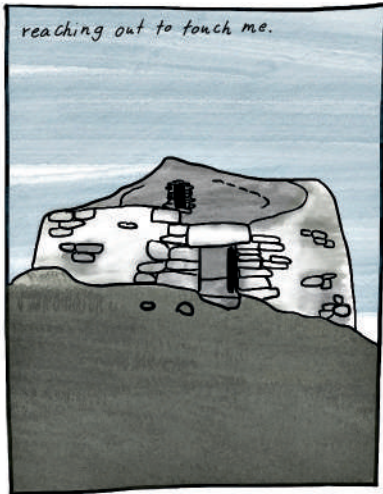
She says sometimes she's jealous of me.

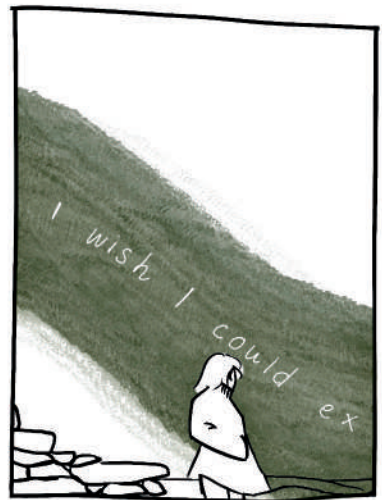


Of how easily I hear what rocks are saying.











GEIST
FACT + FICTION • NORTH OF AMERICA

COMBAT MISERABLISM!

Subscribe to Geist!

Go to geist.com
or call 1-888-434-7834.

Now Must Say Goodbye

Christine Lai

The postcard presents a series of absences—the nameless photographer, the unknown writer and recipient; it is constituted by what is unknown



MONUMENTS

The scene is quiet; the Thames embankment nearly empty. In the bottom left-hand corner, a barely visible figure stands by the parapet. Farther along the embankment: the obelisk. Made of granite mined from the ancient quarries by the Nile, the obelisk was first erected in Heliopolis and subsequently moved to Alexandria, where it was later toppled, buried, and, millennia later, excavated before being transported to the

city. Here it still sits, on a plinth that holds a time capsule containing photographs, children's toys, coins, a map of London, hairpins, and newspapers.

NATURAL DISASTERS

In that vast city, I began collecting in a time of dispersal. At an ephemera fair, I came across a vintage postcard depicting the cathedral of Cologne, which I was supposed to visit with someone who was no longer by my

side. The image made me cry, but I purchased it anyway. Something about the cheapness and fragility of the diminutive picture spoke to my experience at the time. Perhaps love is the found object par excellence, the most transient and aleatory thing collected.

I became a habitué of ephemera fairs and flea markets. Paul Éluard once wrote to his ex-wife about his habit of hoarding postcards in the aftermath of their divorce: "[I] stay

in this apartment arranging my cards. In postcard style, I am crowned with melancholy, decline and neglect.” I too stayed in to arrange my cards. The collecting and organizing structured my days, and the time of heart-break receded.

Éluard understood this truth about the cartes postales: they not only provide fodder for meditations on the past, but also facilitate an alchemical process by which the flux of existence is transformed into order and calm.

RECTO –TRAFALGAR SQUARE

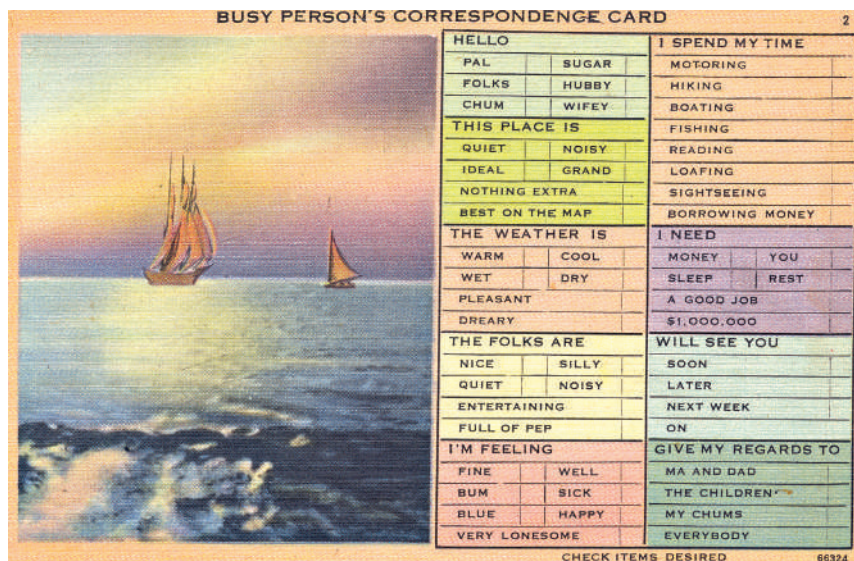
To Miss Alice Taylor, Watford,
Hertfordshire
January 9, 1905

Dear Alice,
Thanks for P/C last week;
would have answered it before
but I haven't been well and it
“slipt my memory.” Am now
much better. Nance says she is
quite aware you are alive, but
as she wrote last it is your turn
to write. Now must say good-
bye. Best wishes to all + kind
regards, Ted

LOVERS

In the novel *Cartes Postales* (1973), by Frédéric Vitoux, the narrator discovers a trove of vintage postcards, and proceeds to trace the contours of imaginary lives using both the explicit content and the implicit meaning of the messages.

The postcard, for all its openness, resembles a small, enclosed room, wherein two individuals conduct an intimate conversation. Even in the plainest messages, it is possible to intuit an entire past, shared between sender and recipient, that underpins the correspondence. As Jennifer Croft writes, “It is apparently a paradox that the first essential qualities of postcards, brevity and exposure, are guarantors of closeness (despite separation), emblems of intimacy.”



When Heinrich von Stephan, a German postal service official, proposed the idea of the offenes Postblatt (“open post-sheet”) in 1865, his goal was to expedite communication, to allow for “sufficient simplicity and brevity.” After the first postcards began circulating in 1869 in Austria-Hungary, there were initially concerns about privacy. To evade the voyeur’s eye, senders wrote encrypted messages in code and shorthand, in Latin or Esperanto; some wrote upside down or backwards; others communicated romantic sentiments by positioning the stamp in a particular way. The limitation of space placed constraints upon language yet also liberated it, initiating new ways of writing.

BEACHES

The poet Paul Éluard, like his fellow Surrealists, was an avid deltiologist, a collector of postcards. He traded and shared cards with colleagues; disassembled old postcard albums in order to add to his own collection; rescued the erotic cards he found pasted on the walls of an old house; and took weekend excursions with André Breton to comb flea markets for illustrated ephemera. Once, he supposedly traded a Dalí painting with Georges Sadoul for two hundred postcards.

In his essay “Les plus belles cartes postales” (1933), Éluard celebrates the postcard as a window into the collective unconscious and as fecund soil from which new artworks might germinate. “Postcards,” he writes, “do not constitute a popular art. At most, they are the small change left over from art and poetry. But this small change sometimes suggests the idea of gold.”

But Éluard’s collection speaks less to the desires and fantasies of the masses than to his own. His cartophilia was in part a response to the end of his marriage with Gala, who left him for Dalí. Pining for her, Éluard turned to the fantasy women on postcards, who, in a sense, replaced Gala as his muse. The cards in the category of “Love” reflected his own psychological reality. Éluard writes, “Under two burning hearts, the inscription: *United for Life*, the sender had crossed out *for Life*, thus depriving the Other of the idea of death, of that last drop of living blood.” Love, too, was an object of exchange. Perhaps for this reason, Éluard continued to exchange erotic postcards with Gala long after she had left him.

ANIMALS

I collect haphazardly, sometimes because I am drawn to the colours on certain cards: the burgundy and

bright yellow sails of ships docked at Le Havre; the grey of a group of donkeys; and the azure sky behind the old Notre Dame de Paris. I also use postcards as notepads: on the verso side of cards showcasing book cover designs, I scribble fragments of essays, stories and novels.

After a year of collecting, I began to see postcards everywhere—in artworks, in literary texts, in films. Now I even see postcards in my sleep. During the day I read about John Stezaker’s Surrealist series of “inserts”—in which a vintage postcard is superimposed on a film still or black-and-white photograph, so that a cascading waterfall appears in the middle of a trial scene and crashing waves interrupt an exchange between two individuals—and at night I dream that my own face and the faces I see around me have been partially masked by a carefully aligned postcard.

RECTO – LAKE IN THE CLOUDS, ROCKIES

To Hilda Rank, Tooting Common, London

August 9, 1907

Dear Hilda,

You cannot imagine what a wonderful sight it is to have these enormous masses of rock all around you. I have not yet seen the tops of the very high mountains for they are all in the clouds. Will write tomorrow. Dick

FLOWERS

When postcards first became coveted collectors’ items in the late nineteenth century, they democratized the culture of collecting due to their cheapness and ubiquity. Postcards of cityscapes and metropolitan scenes made it possible for anyone to create a personal atlas of the city, and thereby chart the urban transformations taking place around them. Like these nineteenth-century



deltiologists, I sometimes wandered down streets and compared the view on a postcard with the scene before me, so that even as the image highlighted what had disappeared, it simultaneously offered a kind of pictorial continuity. Other times, I superimposed a postcard on a completely different site, so that the picture replaced the view before me. In this way, the South Bank Centre, a place that once evoked tremendous sadness, eventually reminded me of a desert garden.

STREETSCAPES

The American photographer Walker Evans amassed over nine thousand postcards in his lifetime, and

engaged with them in his own work. Not only did Evans use postcards to determine the themes of his projects, he produced his own photographic postcards of simple, anonymous buildings, and published photo essays—illustrated with cards from his collection—that recorded the history of deltiology and provided a pictorial tour of American cities. Evans also recreated the scenes depicted on certain postcards from the same vantage point, thus foregrounding the changes wrought by time. Writing for *Fortune* in 1962, Evans described the picture postcard as a “folk document.”

Beginning in the late 1950s, Evans presented postcard slideshows, first



for friends in his New York City apartment. The postcard images would be blown up to the size of an entire wall and projected in the dark, as if in a cinema. Later, when invited to lecture at Yale and the Museum of Metropolitan Art about his career in photography, he gave postcard presentations instead. Evans invited his audiences to walk into the pictures, to see their own shadows layered on the streetscape of the past. As he explained, “One can, in effect, re-enter these printed images, and situate oneself upon the pavements in downtown Cleveland, Omaha or Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts.”

PAINTINGS

Prior to 1902, the back side of the postcard was reserved for the address, and the message had to be squeezed into the margins next to the picture. In 1902, the British Post Office launched the “divided back” postcard, allowing the message to be written on one half of the verso, alongside the address, thus reserving the recto side for the photograph or illustration. This change, combined with new printing techniques, led to the dominance of the image.

RECTO – CRUE DE LA SEINE, JANVIER 1910

To Mademoiselle Fernande Henrienne, Place Cambronne, Paris
March 29, 1912

Il est inutile que vous vous dérangez pour moi, car il m’est complètement impossible de rien pouvoir me préparer pour cette semaine. Mes amitiés à vous.

WATERFALLS

In *You see I am here after all* (2008), the American artist Zoe Leonard used approximately four thousand vintage postcards of Niagara Falls to create a panoramic grid that ripples across

the gallery walls. The mass-produced touristic views are nearly identical, though there are variations in colours and perspective. In *Survey* (2012), more than six thousand postcards of Niagara Falls are stacked in towering piles. “We use things,” Leonard writes, “to communicate complex ideas, feelings; it is a dense, compact, potent language, the language of the found object.”

Hand-coloured, cropped, and manipulated—sometimes with rainbows painted in to augment the beauty of the scene—these postcards exemplify how the idealized imagery of a singular site is constructed, polished, and disseminated via the tourist shop. Over time, the Niagara Falls have been reshaped by erosion and human intervention. But the postcards do not record such changes. The pictures, for all their minute differences, portray an unvarying cultural construction. It is as if the natural wonder of the falls has remained a frozen thing of beauty, perpetually covetable and collectible.

In much the same way, postcards of cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries romanticized and reframed the urban scene, clearing it of unsightly signs of poverty and modernization. Paris thus became the prosperous centre of leisure and

glamour, and Old Amsterdam with its concentric canals came to represent the city, even as the canals of other districts were filled in and canal-side houses torn down to make way for new developments.

RECTO – CLAPHAM COMMON, LONDON

To Miss Alice Taylor, Watford
July 10, 1905

Dear Alice,
Thanks for P.C. sometime ago. You have not told me what local ones you have got, so I do not know if you have this one or not. Best love, Nance

OBJECTS

She stands on a hill with the others and watches as their city burns. The plumes of smoke have blackened the sky, and orange flames consume the frail forms of the buildings. All around them are scattered the possessions that they were able to rescue in the aftermath of the earthquake.

Her eyesight is blurred by resentment and shock as she looks at the lounging woman, who relaxes on the grass as though she were watching a film. Her own mind is bombarded by the images of all that she



Refugees watching the burning City. April 18, 1906, San Francisco, California.

210 Charles Webster Photographs, San Francisco. From an album.



RIVERS

Picture postcards abound in the oeuvre of British artist Tacita Dean. Many of her projects involve revising or reframing the postcard, so that the once static image begins to move in entirely new ways.

In *The Russian Ending* (2001), comprised of twenty photographic postcards portraying natural and anthropogenic disasters, Dean annotated the black-and-white images with film directions—“string music,” “pan down”—thus infusing them with new narrative potential. It is strange to imagine people sending pictorial representations of death and destruction to loved ones. Perhaps the ubiquity of such images dampens their effect and expunges from collective memory the horrors of battlefields, explosions and shipwrecks. Or perhaps they are a reminder that loss is always imminent.

Dean’s *c/o Jolyon* series (2012–2013)—my favourite of her postcard projects—is likewise preoccupied with catastrophe. It features one hundred pre-war postcards of the German town of Kassel, which was blitzed by Allied bombing raids during WWII. Using photographs taken of the exact same locations, Dean overpainted the pictures with gouache and added details of the modern, postwar city—apartment buildings, cars, street lamps. The result was a layered montage of the real past and the imagined present.

Dean’s elegiac photographs and films are often preoccupied with such processes of disappearance or disintegration. A central irony of her work, as I see it, lies in the fact that these meditations on loss depend, in part, on the chance recovery of lost things. Dean trawls flea markets for vintage ephemera, and the serendipitous encounters lend new meaning to these objects that were once adrift amongst other urban detritus.

Like the Surrealist objet trouvé, the postcard presents a series of absences—the nameless photographer,

could not save, all the lives buried under the rubble of homes that will be rebuilt into utterly unrecognizable spaces.

ISLANDS

At the start of Antonio Tabucchi’s short story “So Long,” the narrator, Taddeo, sorts through his collection of postcards, searching for ones he might be able to send to friends on an upcoming trip. Taddeo playfully mismatches the images with the messages, thereby creating strange juxtapositions. On a postcard showing Robinson Island, he writes “We’re on Timultopec;” on one depicting towers, “This is the Machu Picchu mountain range.”

All the cards are signed “Taddeo and Isabel,” Isabel being the narrator’s partner, with whom he was supposed to have travelled to South America. But she is no longer here. Taddeo packs her photograph in the suitcase with the postcards, so it’ll be as if she were accompanying him on the trip.

Tabucchi’s works are frequently marked by the experience of loss, of the dissonance between what is and what might have been. The cartolina here registers distance: between here and there, origin and destination; between one person’s present and

another person’s past; between fantasy and reality. When the postcard is held in the hands, that distance might be temporarily bridged. But in the end, the object reaffirms the pastness of what has already gone.

At the train station, en route to the airport, Taddeo meets a young ice cream seller—also named Taddeo—and gives all his postcards to this boy who dreams of travelling the world when he grows up. The boy, stunned with the unexpected gift, thanks the older man. One day, he might forward the postcards to his own friends; or he might present them to a stranger, who, like Taddeo, has suffered losses for which the collection offers fleeting consolation.

RECTO – ST. PAUL’S CATHEDRAL

To Miss Harradine, E. Worthing
August 9, 1905

Sorry she has not been so well. I’m afraid it will be very awkward for me to be without E. the first week I am home. I shall not be equal to doing anything without a little help just at first, if I am to avoid relapses, for the journey will be rather an undertaking. Much love, H. B.



HENRY E. HUNTINGTON LIBRARY & ART GALLERY, SAN MARINO, CALIFORNIA

the unknown writer and recipient; it is constituted by what is unknown. But this opacity is irrelevant, because the found image is really about the person viewing it. As Dean remarks, “Art works best when it responds to the autobiography of the viewer.” Much like a dog following a trail in a zigzagging manner—to use Sebald’s analogy—we follow the memory or thought triggered by the randomly discovered image. The creative act commences when we allow ourselves to be interrupted by the accidental, to be guided by pure contingency.

RUINS

I am attempting to think through the postcard, with dozens of images strewn across the desk before me. Yet I struggle to complete the essay. Where can I find the space for the contributions of Walter Benjamin, Aby Warburg, Jacques Derrida, W. G. Sebald, Agnès Varda, Susan Hiller, and David Opdyke? The collection remains incomplete, continually shifting as items are added or removed, and categories redefined. What strikes me about postcards is precisely this: their multiplicity and irreducibility, their tendency to expand outward, beyond the rectangular frame, into something infinitely arresting.

RECTO – RUINS CHURCH AND CASTLE ABERDOUR

To Mrs. Duncan, Stockbridge
[date obscured]

Dear Bell,
I will be down on Sunday afternoon. Will you be going out. Pull the blind down so that I will know before I go. Night dear, Jean

LIGHTHOUSES

The Japanese-born conceptual artist On Kawara dedicated his career to marking time. His projects took on ritualistic or diaristic qualities—art-making as the quotidian practice of recording time. For his renowned *Today* series, Kawara created monochromatic canvases using traditional Japanese lacquering techniques, with fourteen to eighteen layers of acrylic paint. On these backgrounds, he used white paint to inscribe the date on which the work was made. If Kawara had not completed a painting by midnight, he would destroy it, as it would no longer be a painting of “today.” Occasionally, he made two paintings in a day; rarely, three paintings. For another project, he sent telegrams with nothing except the message, “I am still alive.”

In the *I Got Up* series, produced between 1968 and 1979, Kawara

mailed thousands of postcards to acquaintances, with the rubber-stamped time of the exact hour and minute he woke up that day. He travelled extensively, and the messages chart his peripatetic wanderings. “I GOT UP AT 6.12 A.M.,” he writes from Hong Kong; “I GOT UP AT 12.11 P.M.,” in Quito, Ecuador.

The postcards form a self-portrait, an archive of the body’s rhythms, its movements and moments of repose. They are also a way of structuring time, of possibly transcending it. As Tom McCarthy writes of the *Today* series, what the work “iterates is its own time, minus the time. What has actually been kidnapped, held to ransom, by the work is time.” Is this not the function of writing, too? The essay a repository of stray thoughts; the fictional scene a tableau of fleeting emotions; the poem a frieze of remembered acts. We write—on postcards, in notebooks, on screens—to capture time.

When I finish flipping through the exhibition catalogue of Kawara’s works, it is already late afternoon. There is golden sunlight and early spring warmth. I tuck a few blank postcards into a book and follow Kawara out the door. I mentally chart a route along the water. Perhaps somewhere along the way, there will be a café with an empty table, where I might write a postcard with this message: “I got up. I went. I read. I am alive.”

Christine Lai’s debut novel, Landscapes, is published by Doubleday Canada (May 2023), and Two Dollar Radio in the United States (September 2023). Landscapes was previously shortlisted for the inaugural Novel Prize. Christine holds a PhD in English Literature from University College London. Christine began work on this essay as part of her residency at Geist. References to Walker Evans’s lectures and Paul Éluard’s letters and essay come from Postcards: Ephemeral Histories of Modernity, edited by David Prochaska and Jordana Mendelson (Pennsylvania State UP, 2010).

GEIST in the Classroom



Geist is always looking for new writers and readers



Teachers are always looking for good readings

Geist in the Classroom puts us together.

Sign up now for FREE class sets!

“*Geist* is an inspiration in my writing classes. They’re thrilled—with the publication itself, and with the clear invitation to publish. Thanks from all of us!”

“*Geist* helps motivate me and my students to continue with our own writing and artwork. Love it.”

If you are a teacher of writing, composition, literature, publishing or any kindred subject, you can get free copies of *Geist* for you and your students, just by asking for them.

P.S. If you are a student, hand this to your instructor!

GEIST

FACT + FICTION • NORTH OF AMERICA

FOR DETAILS VISIT GEIST.COM/GIC
OR CALL 1-888-434-7834

ENDNOTES

REVIEWS, COMMENTS, CURIOSA

A MOMENT WITH HOLDEN

Once I began reading **Holden After and Before: Love Letter for a Son Lost to Overdose** (Arsenal Pulp), Tara McGuire's memoir about her son Holden and his death from an accidental opioid overdose at the age of twenty-one, I couldn't put it down. Using memoir, non-fiction and fictional recreations, this is a story told from inside a family dealing with substance abuse disorder, complete with all the fears, the worries, the sorrows and the frustrations. After Holden's death, McGuire's need to understand all this takes her on a journey into uncharted territory of the heart. McGuire takes us behind the headlines of the opioid crisis, and tells us about her son Holden. She shares the real, complicated and wonderful young man Holden was. He was a graffiti artist. A skateboarder. A son. A brother. An art student. He was confused and anxious. McGuire explores the squats, lofts, alleys and bars Holden frequented in the community of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Most importantly, she talks



to Holden's friends. After his death, Holden's friends created a mural just off Main Street in Vancouver in his memory, as part of the Vancouver Mural Festival. McGuire scattered some of Holden's ashes into one of the artists' paint trays, and Holden became a part of his own mural. The Holden Courage mural is at 1502 Main Street, in a parking lot. I went there to see it and had a moment, with Holden—this smiling young man I felt I knew, thanks to his mother's breathtaking book.

—Peggy Thompson

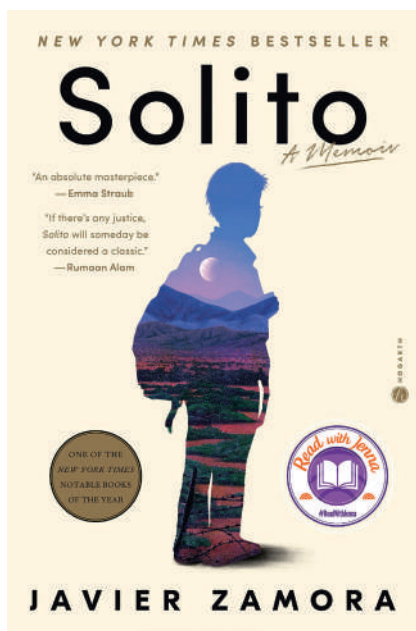
THE TWO ROBERTS

If you care about the proper use of semicolons, then you should definitely see **Turn Every Page** (Sony), the 2022 documentary about the two Roberts: Robert Caro (author of an acclaimed four-going-on-five-volume biography of Lyndon Johnson), and his editor of fifty-plus years, Robert Gottlieb (“the most important editor of the post-war period” according to some). *Turn Every Page*, which is directed by Gottlieb's daughter Lizzie, offers an intimate look at a remarkable working relationship, one that is highly professional, patient (on both sides), and productive. Though I should caution that “productive” is definitely a relative term: the first volume of Caro's Lyndon Johnson biography was published in 1982, the fourth volume appeared in 2012, and Caro has been at work on volume five ever since. In one of my favourite scenes in *Turn Every Page*, Caro shows Lizzie Gottlieb his backup system. Caro types everything using carbon paper and a second sheet of paper. The originals

are kept in his Manhattan office; the carbons Caro brings home, where they are shoved into a high cupboard above his refrigerator: paper copies of everything he's written since they moved into that apartment. "Every so often I get up on a ladder and push, and there's always some room behind." Robert Gottlieb passed away in June of this year at the age of ninety-two, so he will not see the completion of this mammoth undertaking. Hopefully, though, Robert Caro will. Now age eighty-seven, Caro still walks to his office seven days a week. Once there, he hangs up his suit jacket and settles at his desk wearing a shirt and tie, facing his Smith Corona Electra 210. In January 2020, Caro said he had "typed 604 manuscript pages [of volume five] so far"; he is rumoured to be working on the years 1966 or 1967, with much of the Vietnam War still to be addressed. —*Michael Hayward*

CROSSING BORDERS

In 1999, when Javier Zamora was nine years old, his grandfather took him by bus from his home in El Salvador to Tecun Uman, a city on the Guatemala-Mexico border. After

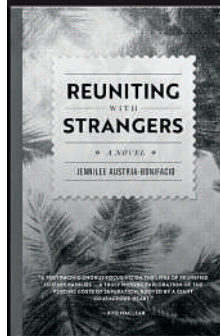


fourteen days there—during which time Grandpa insists that Javier memorize a map of Mexico and that he “learn to lie better”—Grandpa puts Javier on a bus with a coyote named Don Dago, so that he can travel to the US where his parents are waiting for him. Javier begins his journey with six other *migrantes*, who, in his mind, he calls “The Six, like the Power Rangers.” But plans change and people make their own decisions, until finally Javier travels as part of a “little fake family” that consists of Patricia and her daughter Carla, plus a man named Chino. Javier Zamora, now a widely published poet, tells the story of this harrowing journey in **Solito: A Memoir** (Hogarth Books). The book maintains the perspective of the author’s ten-year-old self: afraid of flush toilets and too shy to undress in front of Patricia when she helps him take a shower. Ten-year-old Javier is too young to anticipate the danger they will encounter; he experiences everything in the present, through the smells, sounds and sights around him. Crossing the desert, Javier gives names to the unfamiliar foliage, such as the “cheerleader bush” that has flowers like little yellow pompoms, and when they are dragged off a bus and forced to lie spread-eagled in the dirt, a small lizard gets close to his face and he names her Paula. “Hola, Paula.” Javier’s journey took seven weeks, during most of which his parents had no idea where he was. Despite many fiascos and several gut-wrenching attempts to cross the final border, Chino, Patricia and Carla kept Javier close and, what was incredible to me, they never gave up. —*Patty Osborne*

CHAMPIONING TREES

Tracking Giants: Big Trees, Tiny Triumphs, and Misadventures in the Forest by Amanda Lewis

FABULOUS FICTION



Reuniting With Strangers
JENNILEE AUSTRIA-BONIFACIO

This gorgeous novel shines a light on the complexities of family reunification across the Filipino-Canadian diaspora with a narrative that subverts expectations of the Filipino immigrant experience while revealing the journey of a caregiver's mysterious young son.



Once Upon an Effing Time
BUFFY CRAM

A thrilling, darkly funny page-turner about a mother-daughter duo, a stolen school bus and a '60s doomsday cult. This hallucinatory novel explores the fuzzy lines between sanity and insanity, magic and reality, love and duty.



A Season in Chezgh'un
DARREL J. MCLEOD

This subversive novel by acclaimed Cree author Darrel J. McLeod is infused with the contradictory triumph and pain of finding conventional success in a world that feels alien.

AVAILABLE AT YOUR LOCAL BOOKSTORE



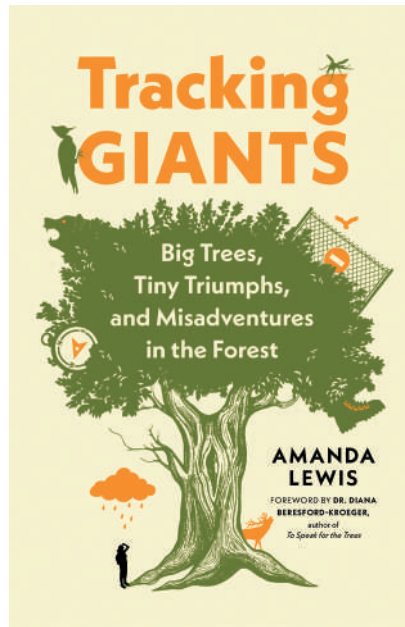


Set in the early 80s, in a local music scene brimming with post-punk ethos and a disdain for classic rock, *Because* is a wry and charming depiction of a sibling relationship founded on feverish angst, unspoken admiration, jealousy, and the pursuit of the greatest song they can write from their own room.



A life-long musician, Andrew Steinmetz formed the band Weather Permitting in 1985. In the 1990s, he was a member of the alt-country band Good Cookies.

ESPLANADE FICTION
360 pages | French flaps
\$21.95



(Greystone Books) is an entertaining nature memoir about finding community in the forest. Burned out from working in the publishing industry, Lewis sets out from her East Van apartment with an ambitious goal: to visit every Champion tree in BC. Champion trees are the largest known tree of their species—the title can transfer to a different tree if the Champion is damaged or dies, or if a larger tree is discovered. As she works her way through the BC Big Tree Registry and meets with other enthusiasts, Lewis realizes she is putting too much pressure on herself to be the best tree-tracker, and that her goal is unachievable due to the shifting nature of Champion status. She reshapes her project, giving up the completist mindset to focus instead on understanding Champion trees in the context of the forests where they reside. This change allows Lewis to enjoy gaining new skills and learning about the interconnectedness of the forest while “reveling in insignificance and the community [she] found along the way.” Throughout, Lewis details the historical context of BC’s forests, from Indigenous uses to settler deforestation to modern forestry practices. Despite growing up in BC and living here as an adult,

much of this information was new to me, such as the efforts of some logging companies, First Nations, and the BC government to protect old-growth groves with a certain number of acres of buffer space. I appreciated her calling out the colonialist mindset of “discovering” big trees, and her conflicting feelings about naming Champion trees, which can draw attention to the tree for preservation but also create an influx of visitors who may damage the tree and its surroundings, as is the case with Big Lonely Doug. And as a fellow completist, it was refreshing to see Lewis reframe the project to something that would be more enjoyable to her, instead of needing to achieve the biggest or best. The descriptions of different local plants and trees made me realize that my own identification skills are not up to scratch, and inspired me to learn to recognize the plants I encounter in the forest. Lewis creates a compelling argument for creating your own path instead of following the one laid out by others.

—Kelsea O’Connor

SUBTERRANEAN MYSTERIES

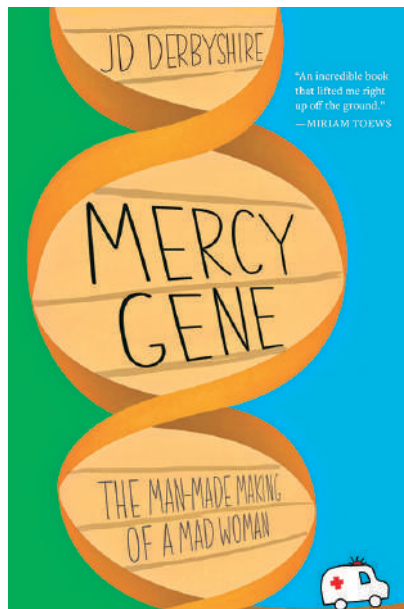
Stories about subterranean mysteries have fascinated me since I was small, beginning with Jules Verne’s *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (not forgetting the cheesy film version from 1959, with James Mason and—yes!—Pat Boone), and the Pelucidar novels of Edgar Rice Burroughs, with their fabulously garish covers depicting the winged, fanged, and taloned creatures to be found “down there.” Robert Macfarlane’s **Underland** (Hamish Hamilton) rekindles that half-forgotten fascination, with Macfarlane acting as a contemporary Orpheus, guiding us on an eclectic series of expeditions into the underworld. The range of these expeditions is broad, both geographically and thematically; to

quote from the front flap: “We move from the origins of the universe to a post-human Earth, passing along the way through Bronze Age burial chambers, the catacombs of Paris, Greenland’s melting glaciers, starless rivers and Arctic sea caves, the underground fungal networks through which trees communicate, and a deep-sunk ‘hiding place’ designed to store nuclear waste for 100,000 years to come.” You’re pulled in from the first sentence: “The way into the underland is through the riven trunk of an old ash tree.” A cleft tree trunk, a darkened passage leading underground... Who wouldn’t want to tag along?

—Michael Hayward

HAVE MERCY

If you’re not familiar with JD Derbyshire, they’re an award-winning playwright, a stand-up comic, and a very funny human. **Mercy Gene**, the title of Derbyshire’s latest book, from Goose Lane, is a scrambled version of the word “emergency,” and that more or less sums up JD’s story. *Mercy Gene* is auto-fiction, and is loosely based on Derbyshire’s play, *Certified*. In *Certified*, the audience, in the role of a psychiatric panel, determines by a vote whether or not JD should be certified. JD has been certified in the past, which is part of the story and one of the book’s major themes, along with assault, memory, comedy and queer identity. *Mercy Gene* is stream of consciousness—though never confusing—and is made up of short pieces: lists, memories and wonderful fictional appearances by Margot Kidder and Miriam Toews. The book is a testament to queer survival. Young Janice/Jan/JD is helped early on in their identity quest by their next-door neighbour Edwin. Edwin lives with his mother: he’s in the basement, she’s upstairs. On Saturday nights Edwin and his friends throw parties where



they dress up in drag and dance. Edwin sees early on who JD is and provides a safe space for them, and, without words, the message that you are seen, you are loved and you are safe here. Edwin’s friends bring over ties, suit jackets and Oxford shoes for Janice/Jan/JD and christens them Sweet Pete. And they all dance. As drag comes under attack from the hard right, it’s great to be reminded of the strength of drag culture and its role in community. Other memories, such as an early assault, horrify, as do JD’s battles with institutionalization. *Mercy Gene* never loses its funny bone though. This is a wonderful book. —Peggy Thompson

THE MESSY BACK OF HISTORY

Canadian historian Joseph Pearson lives in Berlin, where twentieth century history often remains a fraught landscape of contention and silence. To uncover the material for **My Grandfather’s Knife: Hidden Stories from the Second World War** (HarperCollins), Pearson embraced object-centred and object-driven history; his investigations spin out from a knife, diary, cookbook, cotton pouch and stringed instrument. Several times Pearson uses the analogy of

BINGE-WORTHY
BOOKS from Fernwood

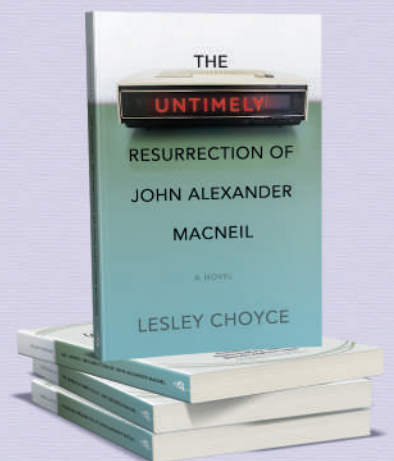
“

Your can’t win a race
you’re kept from running.

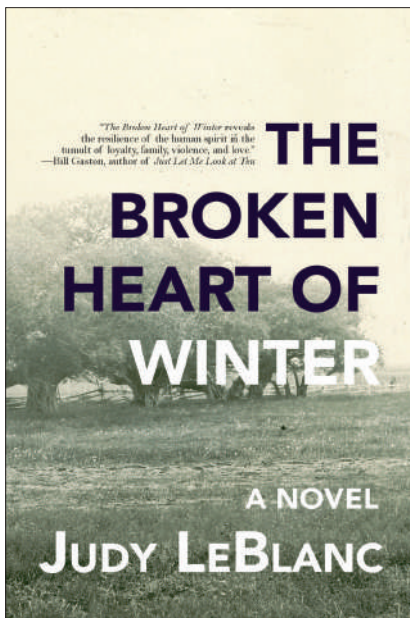


”

After willing himself back to
life with sheer stubbornness,
John Alex finds Death himself
sitting at his kitchen table.



ROSEWAY
by FERNWOOD PUBLISHING

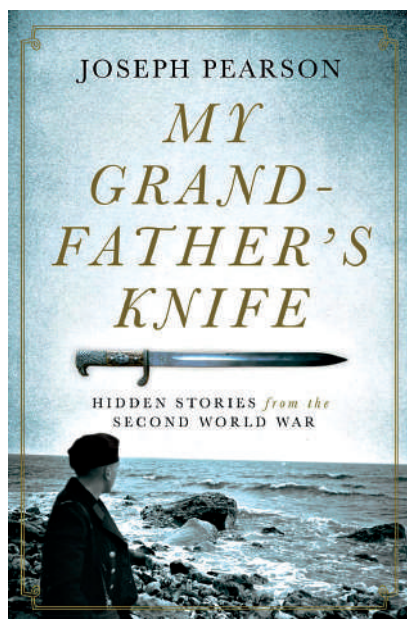


Three generations of Acadian women grapple with dislocation, exile, and mystery in this Acadian novelist's stunning debut.

"[R]eveals the resilience of the human spirit in the tumult of loyalty, family, violence, and love."

—Bill Gaston, author of *Just Let Me Look at You*

 CAITLIN PRESS



a rug, and of history being presented as its neatly sewn-up front, rather than its messy back—the part of the process that interests him. Pearson looks at how everyday details of life, such as what we eat and what music we listen to, are intertwined with politics, and how those politics infused every aspect of life in Nazi Germany. Erna Jokisch was Joseph Goebbels's cook, and from her Pearson teases out stories as seemingly banal as a recipe for salad dressing, small stories which show how ordinary people can absorb, accept and enable monstrous ideologies. "For the historian, recalling places and objects is strategic: you can invoke memories long buried by asking them 'Have you ever been here?' or simple questions such as, 'Tell me about your favourite dress?'" Pearson expertly uses simple questions about objects to prompt stories which have been repressed or hidden for decades. In one chapter, Pearson interviews Erich Hartmann, a double bass player with the Berlin Philharmonic during the Nazi regime. Hartmann still frames the orchestra as apolitical, though they received elite privileges as a powerful source of state propaganda. Pearson looks into the provenance of Hartmann's instrument, possibly stolen

as part of Goebbels's "procurement" program. He is unable to trace this particular instrument, but begins a detailed investigation into other instruments given to members of the Philharmonic through this program. Are these objects tainted by their dark history? Pearson shares these stories with musicians who play the instruments today, and each has complex responses to the revelations. *My Grandfather's Knife* is an intensely entertaining book of history, recording eyewitness stories while rigorously engaging with ideas. The objects at the centre of the book remain powerful catalysts, fascinating in themselves but most important in their ability to illuminate human experiences. —Kristina Rothstein

A NOT-TOTALLY-ACCURATE INTRODUCTION TO THE AZORES

My family immigrated to Canada from the Azores, a group of Portuguese islands in the middle of the Atlantic. When the show **Rabo de Peixe** (in English: *Turn of the Tide*) came out on Netflix, I marathoned it, since it takes place where I spent my childhood summers and where my parents returned to live. Naturally, I have some thoughts.

- The scenery feels true to the place, with beautiful shots of the Island.
- My Portuguese isn't great, but I know how people in São Miguel speak, and this isn't it. For example: the way they say "America." In the Azores, it's pronounced "Ahh-merka," not "Ah-mer-i-ka." I can tell that the actors are from the mainland. Why didn't they hire local actors? Or use a dialect coach?
- There's a serious lack of elderly people compared to reality.
- Cows block traffic. This is a fact.
- Interior shots of homes and details—like the Holy Spirit flag

hanging from the car's rear-view mirror—are accurate.

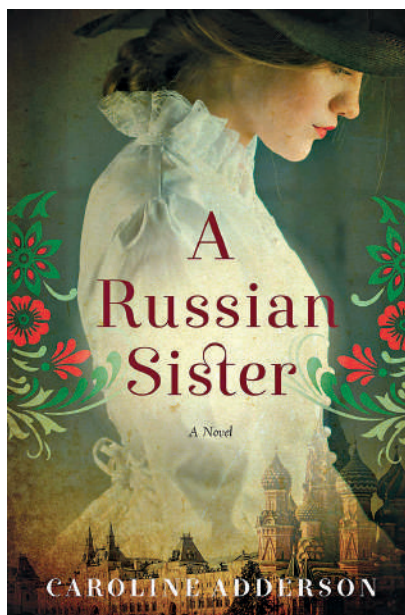
- The depiction of poverty and desperation is overblown. The Azorean economy is built on agriculture and fishing (and now tourism). Yes, hardship exists. And many families immigrated (including mine in the 1970s) for greater economic opportunity. But the show makes it seem like the Azores is destitute. It's not.
- The film's Portuguese title refers to Peixe, the village where the action takes place. It means fish tail, and I used to make fun of it as a kid. But it's a pleasant place. On my most recent trip, we visited a liqueur distillery, had an all-you-can-eat lunch, and stopped in at the fish market.

Despite the show's flaws, I revelled in seeing my second home on screen. If you're curious about the Azores, this will give you a not-so-accurate peek. But it's better to go. It's not like anywhere else.

—Debby Reis

A RUSSIAN BROTHER AND HIS SISTER

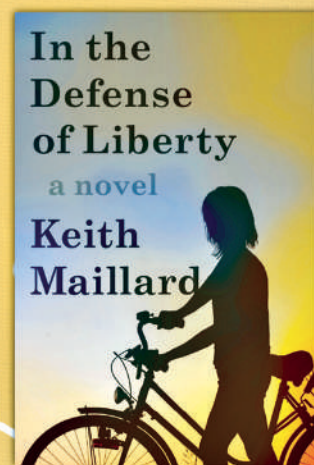
When I first began to read the classic novels by any of “the Russians”—Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Turgenev et al—I struggled mightily to keep all the characters straight. First: there were so *many* of them! And second: why did their names keep shifting about? “Mikhail” for example: how was he related to “Misha”? And “Mishka”: just where did *he* fit in? In this respect at the very least, Caroline Adderson's novel, **A Russian Sister** (HarperCollins), is rigorously Russian—though Adderson at least provides us with a nice, concise list of all her characters; I immediately bookmarked the page for ease of reference. *A Russian Sister* is an insider's account of the family life



of Anton Chekhov, the great Russian playwright (*Uncle Vanya*; *The Cherry Orchard*) and author of hundreds of short stories. The narrator of *A Russian Sister* is Maria (a.k.a. Masha), younger sister to Anton (a.k.a. Antosha). Masha dotes on her ailing brother; in addition to this doting, Masha willingly sets Anton up with various of her female friends (as would almost any dutiful and adoring sister, I suppose). It is Anton's off-and-on relationship with Lika, an actress and one of Masha's closest friends, that forms the central romantic thread in *A Russian Sister*, a thread that becomes entangled with many others. At one point Adderson describes a pivotal moment in the action: Anton, on the eve of his departure—by train, horse-drawn carriage, and river steamer—for Sakhalin, a grim penal colony in Russia's Far East. There exists a family photograph that captures this exact moment (not reproduced in *A Russian Sister*, but viewable at gettyimages.ca/detail/2669441). Lika and Masha are among the friends and family surrounding Anton; everyone looks directly at the camera, but it is Anton, front and centre, who draws our gaze.—Michael Hayward



freehand-books.com



**Fast-paced & intimate
personal & political
queer & beautiful**

Linda Svendsen

**It is brave
It is breathtaking**

Carrie Jenkins

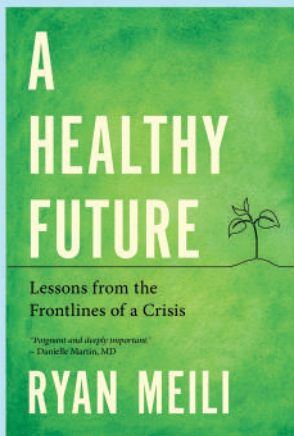
freehand-books.com



**MORE PRECIOUS
THAN RUBIES**

In 1981, Connie Kuhns approached Vancouver Co-op Radio about doing a show dedicated solely to playing music by women. At the time, Kuhns was already reviewing women's music and concerts for *Kinesis*, a monthly publication put out by Vancouver Status of Women. I was a fan of Kuhns's show, Rubymusic Radio, and listened to it every Friday. **Rubymusic** the book, from Caitlin Press, is a collection of those *Kinesis* columns, with other pieces Kuhns has written over the years, including several published in *Geist*. It's an astonishing snapshot of the world of women's music, and a look at women in folk, soul and rock music of the times, including Lillian Allen, Yoko Ono, Ferron, Ellen McIlwaine, and bands from the Vancouver punk scene, such as the Dishrags and the Moral Lepers, as well as many, many more. One thing that's clear from *Rubymusic* is just how hard it was (and still is) for women to succeed in the music industry. Major labels weren't that interested. "I cannot stress strongly enough how the contributions of female musicians and the women who support their networks have been overlooked and dismissed, even into our modern times. In a story that may be familiar to some, my mother was the nighttime cleaning lady at her hometown radio station. In the dark and damp basement, she found hundreds of demo 45s that had been thrown away. She saved them for me. Most of these records were by women." And so a passion was born. *Rubymusic* is a book you can dip in and out of, reading up on your favourite artists first if you're so inclined, and then finding out about other amazing women whom you may not have heard of before.

—Peggy Thompson



"Through a compassionate, empathetic, and justice-centred approach, Ryan Meili takes us on a journey to better understand the ways that **the COVID-19 pandemic changed us forever as a nation, and as a people ...** this book is required reading for anyone who wants to better understand the collective role we all have in ensuring a healthier and more just society."

Naheed Dosani, MD, Department of Family and Community Medicine, University of Toronto



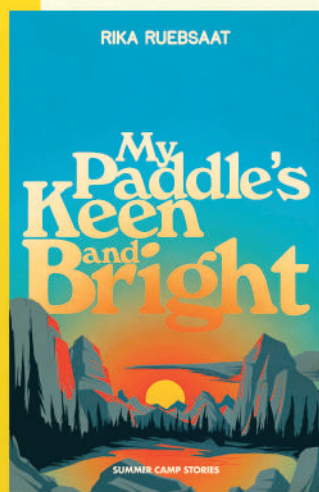
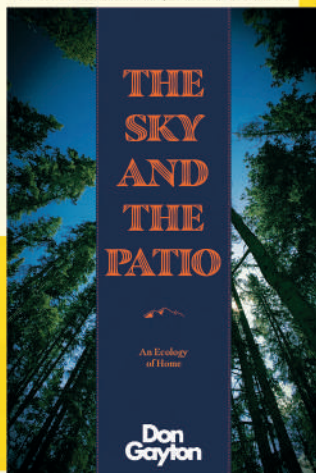
A Healthy Future: Lessons from the Frontlines of a Crisis

is available from your local bookseller, or at www.ubcpress.ca

THE SKY AND THE PATIO
DON GAYTON

In 25 engaging essays, Summerland writer Don Gayton fuses the personal with the ecological to portray the geography and the natural and human history of his adopted Okanagan Valley homeland.

978-1-55420-194-5 :: \$18.00 :: NOV 2022



MY PADDLE'S KEEN AND BRIGHT
RIKA RUEBSAAT

In *My Paddle's Keen and Bright*, Rika Ruebsaat invites camp veterans of all ages and backgrounds to reflect on their experiences of summers spent away at camp, and the indelible lifelong impressions these have left on them.

978-1-55420-188-4 :: \$24.00 :: FEB 2023

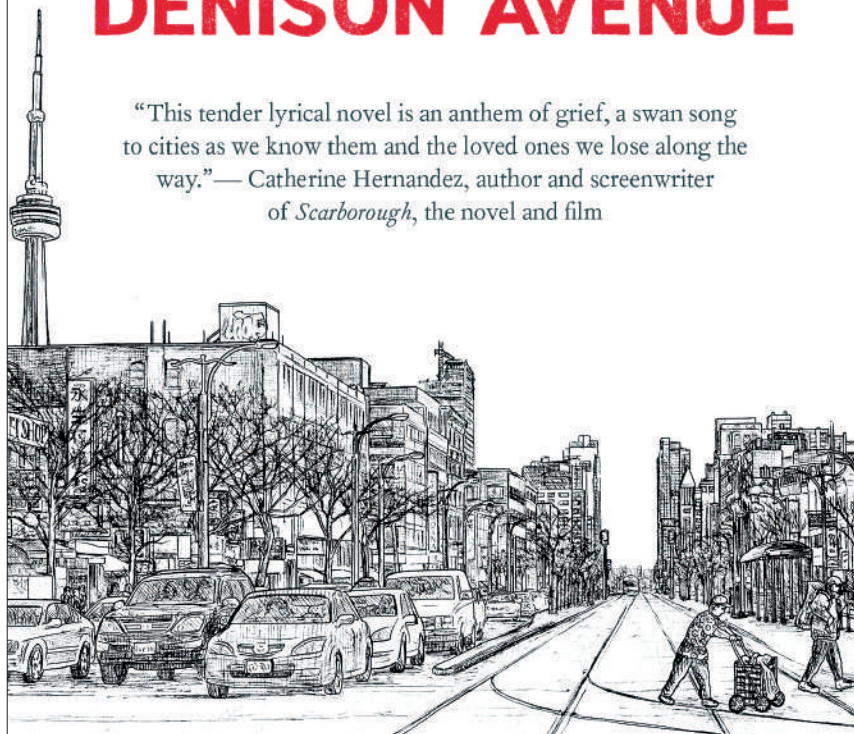
NEW STAR BOOKS

BELLE ÉPOQUE GOSSIP

Julian Barnes opens *The Man in the Red Coat* (Random House) with a scene set in June 1885, as three Frenchmen arrive in London. “One was a prince, one was a count, and the third was a commoner with an Italian surname.” The commoner proves to be the eponymous “man in the red coat,” a certain Dr. Samuel Pozzi, who wore his dazzling scarlet housecoat—“full length, from neck to ankle, allowing the sight of some ruched white linen at the wrists and throat”—when posing for a formal portrait in oils, painted by John Singer Sargent in 1861. You might ask why a “society surgeon”—basically: a gynecologist to the French upper classes—merits a lavishly illustrated biography by a Booker-winning Francophile. Well, precisely because Barnes *is* an unapologetic Francophile, fascinated by French culture and history, who one day wondered just why this “commoner” had posed for a portrait by Sargent, and how he came to be in London in June 1885 on a shopping trip, in the company of a prince and a count. Using Dr. Pozzi and his red coat as a *port d’entrée*, Barnes takes his readers on a fascinating and gossipy tour of Paris during the Belle Époque, “a time of vast wealth for the wealthy, of social power for the aristocracy, of uncontrolled and intricate snobbery, of headlong colonial ambition, of artistic patronage, and of duels whose scale of violence often reflected personal irascibility more than offended honour.” Along the way we meet the French writer, Colette, and “the divine Sarah” (Bernhardt); we dine with Marcel Proust and rub shoulders with the notorious Comte de Montesquiou (model for the decadent central figure in *À rebours*, J. K. Huysmans’s scandalous novel of that era). *The Man in the Red Coat* is an entertaining work of social history, one which successfully manages to maintain a delicate balance, simultaneously literary and trashy. —*Michael Hayward*

A NOVEL BY CHRISTINA WONG ILLUSTRATIONS BY DANIEL INNES
DENISON AVENUE

“This tender lyrical novel is an anthem of grief, a swan song to cities as we know them and the loved ones we lose along the way.” — Catherine Hernandez, author and screenwriter of *Scarborough*, the novel and film



UNIVERSITY of ALBERTA PRESS



“Umezurike’s lyricism shines.”
Manahil Bandukwala, *Quill & Quire*

“In *there’s more* Uchechukwu reveals that he is a poet of first rank.”
Afua Cooper, poet and author

“Umezurike finds tender language for the ineffable sting of departure, the ache of remembrance.”
Kiki Petrosino, *White Blood*

there’s more navigates immigrant life with a multifaceted awareness of joy, melancholia, loss, and hope.

there’s more

UCHECHUKWU PETER UMEZURIKE

88 pages | Robert Kroetsch Series
978-1-77212-680-8 | \$19.99 paper

ORDERS 1-800-565-9523 | INFO uapress@ualberta.ca | uap.ualberta.ca

The GEIST Cryptic Crossword

Prepared by Meandricus

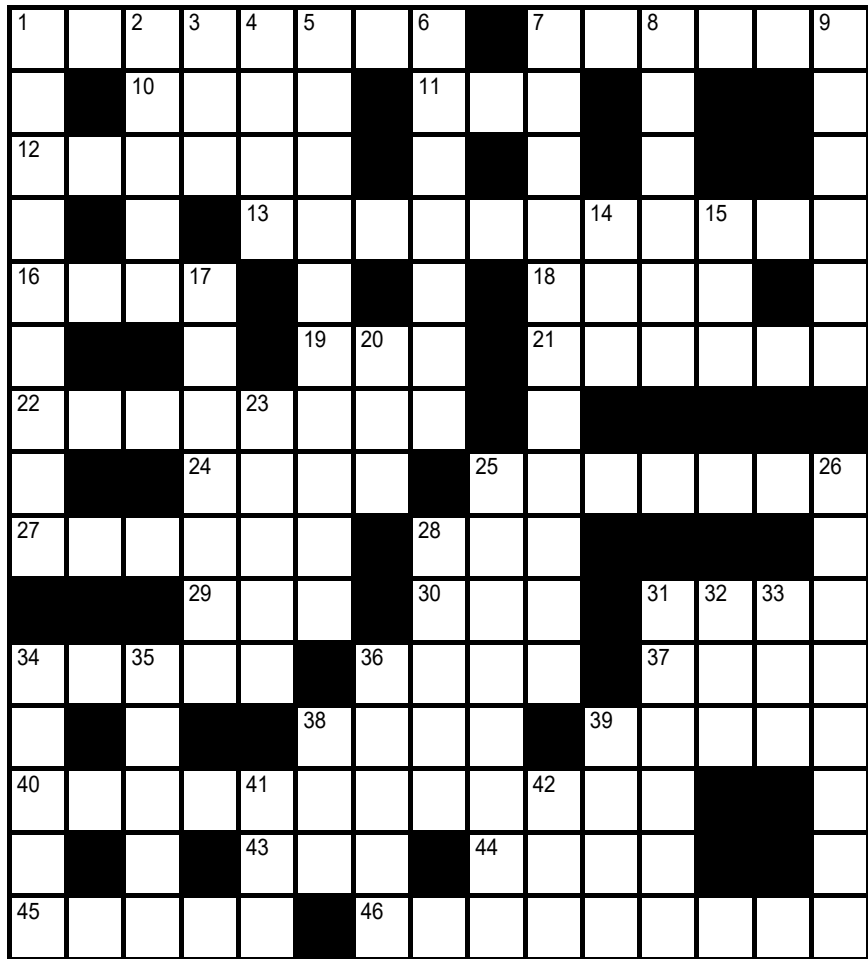
Send a copy of your completed puzzle, along with your name and address, to:

Puzzle #124 GEIST
#210-111 West Hastings St.
Vancouver BC V6B 1H4
or geist@geist.com

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

ACROSS

- 1 Try grinding those brown bits with some butter
- 7 Don't get angry, just get that stuff ready for the #1 bars
- 10 I'm glad I was part of that scheme!
- 11 Singular way to support the Egyptian
- 12 Gay icon or just mooning over the seventh?
- 13 He's lowering it faster than a wild dog on a roller coaster!
- 16 Racial insult or dessert sandwich?
- 18 How did you make that glass whistle?
- 19 Sounds like we won't have had dinner until after seven
- 21 They sure put a lot of black marks on some pages!
- 22 The smell of musk had them all chirping
- 24 It wasn't a bad idea to keep telling John how to be
- 25 Where should a man, a dog, and a gas-guzzling machine go to? (2)
- 27 In Paris, a creamy treat can hit you like lightning!
- 28 Picture the attraction of a deep sound inside your body (abbrev)
- 29 I sold my units without measurable sweat (abbrev)
- 30 Sylvia's buddy got hit by some strong winds
- 31 Sir, that is a cut above the waist!
- 34 The golden one is still a goodie
- 36 Did she live on an island where the peaceful rivers flow?
- 37 Did you make enough to buy a vase for the funeral?
- 38 It's windy so get out of the woods and pick a couple of reeds
- 39 At 1 we should pick beans off that tree
- 40 I rise, longing to know if they're all from one place (2)
- 43 When the Feds say they're gonna give us stuff in a more modern way, should we be afraid? (abbrev)
- 44 Start by coming in out of the rain, man, and then clean the mantle
- 45 That department really burnt us
- 46 Barb ate on Wednesday so we have to ban her from legumes (3)



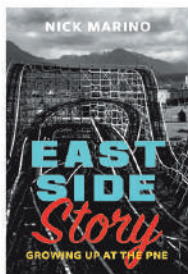
DOWN

- 1 Hide it in the tool cache so we won't have to share our sweet treat
- 2 Hey bro, who's that kid?
- 3 Remember when people took that train? (abbrev)
- 4 Does that bad guy live near you?
- 5 Three trios, no van. Who can blaze a trail for us?
- 6 Sounds like the red ring app can be a real crusher
- 7 He bit no more once he ingested a brain stimulator
- 8 They were a bit mildewed but he poured them in anyway
- 9 Will this still putrefy our entrails?
- 14 That drink often makes me sick
- 15 Around here some builders are from two countries (abbrev)
- 17 Are you ready to fold? Because craning my neck is killing me
- 20 The way they talk, it seemed like he was in a good place
- 23 Tell Leo it is too thin for curtains
- 25 The aide ran a centre for confused spinners
- 26 She weeds out the unwanted by making a new row in back
- 28 When that teen plays, it sounds flat
- 31 Meet Leon at the shelter
- 32 Grant's Toronto group likes the creatives (abbrev)
- 33 She plans to retire from the military and move to Belfast (abbrev)
- 34 Such a juicy haven for old musicians
- 35 Italian disco girl loved the heat
- 36 Sounds like Adam has a ball of energy to get out of his system (2)
- 38 Morse's favourite reference book (abbrev)
- 39 Sounds like a sac in a fancy box
- 41 Currency is a weighty subject in Britain (abbrev)
- 42 Shoot, we just can't seem to get control

Solution to Puzzle 123

O	V	E	R	C	O	A	T	A	N	O	R	A	K	
V	X	O	T	R	A	N	S	B	I					
E	X	P	E	R	I	M	E	N	T	A	T	I	O	N
R	A	O	N	N	E	U	D							
D	N	A	N	C	A	L	P	H						
R	E	D	R	A	W	H	O	O	D	I	E	E		
A	I	A	N	A	P	A	A							
W	I	N	D	B	R	E	A	K	E	R	C	R		
	O	D	O	D	O	L	T							
B	O	M	B	E	R	P	A	R	K	A	E			
L	A	R	M	O	I	R	E	A	M	T	D			
A	U	D	I	O	B	O	O	K	K					
Z	T	E	N	G	D	U	F	F	L	E				
E	O	E	M	R	E	P	S							
R	A	I	N	C	O	A	T	S	H	A	W	L	S	

ADD THESE BOOKS TO YOUR ARSENAL.



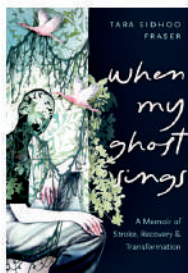
EAST SIDE STORY

Growing Up at the PNE

NICK MARINO

A sly, sentimental, and wickedly funny memoir about growing up at Vancouver's famous fair. "Nick Marino brilliantly taps into our collective longing for a simpler, less cynical place in our lives."

—Kevin Chong



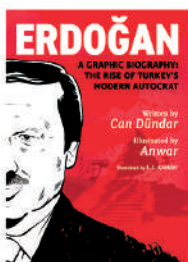
WHEN MY GHOST SINGS

A Memoir of Stroke, Recovery, and Transformation

TARA SIDHOO FRASER

A lucid exploration of amnesia, selfhood, and who is left behind when the past is obliterated. "An unhurried and nuanced journey of both uncertainty and love."

—Amber Dawn

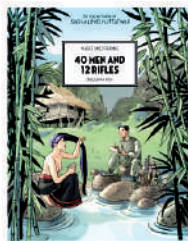


ERDOĞAN

A Graphic Biography

CAN DUNDAR & ANWAR

A sweeping graphic biography documenting the rise of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the long-running president of Turkey, a demagogue for whom democracy has been merely a means to power.



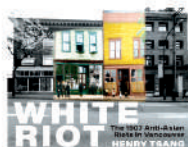
40 MEN AND 12 RIFLES

Indonesia 1954

MARCELINO TRUONG

By the author of *Such a Lovely Little War*: a stirring graphic novel about love, beauty, and war in 1950s Indochina. "Marcelino Truong's book is a work of genius, destined to become a classic."

—*L'Histoire*

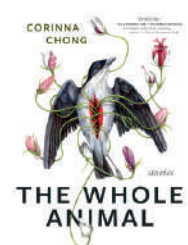


WHITE RIOT

The 1907 Anti-Asian Riots in Vancouver

HENRY TSANG

Essays and photographs that situate Vancouver's anti-Asian riots of 1907 in the context of contemporary anti-Asian sentiment. "Highly recommended." —*Vancouver Sun*



THE WHOLE ANIMAL

CORINNA CHONG

A refreshingly original story collection that grapples with the self-alienation and self-discovery that make us human. "A powerful collection." —Alix Hawley



THE WRITER'S STUDIO

ONE-YEAR
PART-TIME PROGRAM



Joseph Kakwinokanasum
Author, *My Indian Summer*
2018 graduate

- Work with a mentor in a supportive environment
- Explore the practice, craft and business of writing
- Learn fully online or in Vancouver/online

SFU CONTINUING STUDIES

sfu.ca/creative-writing