



the Society
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STOMPSON

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Denise Bartel, <i>No Flowers, One Bee, a Little Greenery, Maybe There's Hope</i>
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Speak of the Dead

by Alison Piwowar

The Melken kin, now being twins Hattie and Ernst along with their older sister Viola, huddled near a roaring fire in the study of Randolph Kettering, Green Bough's highly esteemed lawyer.

Mr. Kettering conducted business from his home, Treetops, having earned the privilege to do so more than two decades ago. It had not only been insupportable to him to travel daily into the commercial centre of the town but more to the point, it offended his sense of decency. The time of escape couldn't come soon enough and when it did he lost not one second in effecting it.

Now, he regarded the group assembled to his immediate right with curiosity and a trace of sympathy that was more of the automatic rather than the heartfelt kind. To be sure it was nothing personal. If a lawyer, any lawyer, invested the socially acceptable amount of emotion into each unfortunate case he handled, well, there would be almost nothing left for him to give. Indeed, within six months or a twelvemonth at most, he'd be out of business entirely.

Mr. Kettering steeped his fingers. The children, now adults, all looked remarkably well. Odd, he thought, to describe them in such a way. After all, why shouldn't Hattie, Ernst and Viola Melken look healthy? They had never wanted for anything material, only those items which money, regardless of its abundance, couldn't buy.

Ah yes. There's the thing. Yet they'd all thrived if not exactly prospered. But again, the need for prosperity was rather a moot point in connection with the Melken clan.

However, Randolph Kettering knew this was not the right moment for philosophizing. The Melkens had come in answer to his summons on a very practical matter indeed. So, without further ado, the lawyer carefully unlaced the dark purple leather bag he allocated only to clients of means and withdrew from it an unfolded piece of parchment.

The intensity with which he focused on this document once it was free from its place of confinement piqued Hattie Melken's attention. She suspected it had a similar effect on Ernst and Viola, though they both feigned the deepest disinterest.

Well, let them do as they will and remain blind in their own denial.

Hattie Melken's large sea-green eyes

surveyed the study as they always did when visiting Mr. Kettering. From the book cases, which covered three of the four walls and were lined with a surprising variety of titles that ranged from heavy legal tomes, a tool of Mr. Kettering's trade, to copies of some of the most recent novels in publication, to the Oriental carpets which were so at home, they looked like they'd grown up out of the floor like perennials in a flower bed, to the massive mahogany desk which was Mr. Kettering's place of command in front of the floor to ceiling window, giving an excellent prospect onto the gardens, even his insistence on the use of candlelight, little had changed from her first visit fifteen years ago. A mirror reflection of its owner.

There was comfort to be drawn from that to be sure.

Hattie clearly recalled that autumn day, with its crystal azure sky, the crisp though not cold breeze and the trees turned out in gold and auburn, when she and Ernst were deemed by Papa, for Mama had succumbed and was no longer able to provide an opinion, that they were now old enough to accompany him to Treetops. It was a mark of distinction; they could be trusted to behave in a fashion becoming to Papa, and both children relished it. Perhaps their delight was a little too pronounced, for Viola now sulked somewhat because her favoured status as the child to accompany Papa was vanquished by their inclusion.

Because Mr. Kettering had been the family's trusted solicitor time out of mind, they felt a certain familiarity that dispensed with formalities such as sitting in the stiff-backed chairs normally reserved for these types of occasions. Once Mr. Kettering had the reason for their visit on his desk, he joined them at the fireside to first enjoy the tea and sandwiches which appeared as if by magic.

The atmosphere was more akin to a tea party than the reading of their father's will. Even the weather gave off a festive air of merriment - goose down snow which barely clung to thin branches still festooned with berries. It reminded Hattie of Christmas, although they were now five weeks past that time.

Hattie noted Viola, usually the most stoic of the siblings, was enjoying herself immensely and wondered if it was altogether proper. This was, after all, a solemn occasion. Yet despite their proper mourning garb not one of the Melken children felt sad.

To be sure they missed Papa but as all of them had not been resident at Raven's Roost, the family estate, for quite some time now any sentiment of sorrow or loss was more from duty than spontaneity. This idea pricked the conscience of Hattie and by extension Ernst, for Papa had been, for the most part, the best of men to them. It was especially bewildering to the twins they should not feel a deeper sensation of grief.

C'est la vie, even in the midst of death.

Mr. Kettering carefully placed his cup and saucer on the small table beside him and gently patted a napkin to his lips.

"Well now Viola, Ernst, Hattie, we've had some refreshment and reminiscences, let us just follow the formality of reading your father's will. There are no surprises and it shall only take ten minutes at most. If that is suitable to you all?"

The Melken children nodded in unison, a habit that after all these years still intrigued and slightly unnerved him.

Mr. Kettering cleared his throat and arranged his spectacles as precursor to a smooth and swift recitation. Hattie perceived she was the only one who saw the quick dart of his eyes to the closed door.

"I, Karlton Frederich Melken..."

A knock, strong and confident unlike that of any servant's sounded on the oak door. Randolph Kettering's expression was of deepest annoyance. But to Hattie, who sat closest to him, it was also accompanied by a distinct undertone of fear.

Before Randolph Kettering could open the door, it did the honours, seemingly of its own volition. In stepped a tall well-built man of advanced middle age who still retained a distinct handsomeness in spite of it. He was, to be sure, a stranger who possessed a distinctively vague familiarity.

This gentleman surveyed, with a not small amount of delight, the collection of startled expressions his appearance elicited. In one motion he swept off his cape and hat, and neatly arranged both on the back of the chair the children failed to notice, until now, had been pulled forward as if in anticipation of another guest. The man now installed himself in it. His eyes swept their faces one more time. Then he spoke in a rich baritone.

"Well, it is good indeed to be here and I see I am not late for you have not really started. Viola, Ernst, Hattie, please allow me to introduce myself. I am your father and I am very pleased to be with you at last."

What Nature Is

by Andrew Adair

The forest was quiet, nothing but the faint music of various buzzing insects and other such bugs I had no interest for. Every now and again the rustling of the leaves on the ground or the sound of movement in the trees above would alert me; force me to jerk my head in its direction, hands instinctively readying my camera for the shot, only for the feeling of hope and promise to drain from my body as I realized it was no more than a common squirrel or woodpecker. I ventured on into the collage of green, hoping that today would finally be the day I obtained my photo of that bird. That bird had been somewhat of an interest turned hobby turned obsession for me, to capture the winged animal in my photographs, to have its clear image framed on my wall, so that my guests could gaze upon it, so that I could be recognized as the outdoorsman I know I am, someone who knows just *what nature is*. I was once again violently pulled from my daydream as I heard the sound I had heard many times before, the sound that made me follow the ritual of preparing my handheld camera to at long last be in possession of the bird's glory. The disappointment deep within I knew was inevitable snuffed down by the thoughts of having the photo. Only this time I saw it, I saw the bird, the very bird that had been the focus of my spare time for as long as I cared to remember at the moment. The very bird that had mind-manipulated me into trekking through the woods nearly every day with hopes of snapping a glimpse of its beauty. I suppressed my inner excitement as my hands prepared to take the shot only... I couldn't. I looked at it. I simply looked at it. It was then it dawned upon me that I'd never actually seen at this bird. Only pictures, only its image on paper. I couldn't photograph it, if I did, I would have only the picture. There was no way I could capture its actual likeness, its actual beauty. I chose to enjoy nature with my eyes, not a camera. When it flew away I was content. I began the journey home with the satisfaction I once believed would come from possession of a mere paper copy of the bird. On the way back I turned my head, observing the amazement that is the forest, the amazement I had passed by upon when I made my entry, the very same amazement that I once believed I could keep in a frame. When I finally had made my exit from the assemblage of foliage I had what I thought I would have with a photograph, only in my mind: the true understanding of *what nature is*.

I'm Okay—Maybe

by Catherine Fenwick

Insanity is a perfectly rational adjustment
to an insane world. ~R.D. Laing

Reality blurs when it skitters,
like meddling clouds of mosquitoes,

stinging conduct that sucks
like muck on the bottom of a slough.

My thoughts are foggy—this seems real,
but maybe it isn't.

On a sweltering day my feet sink into stinking sludge.
I wade in deep enough to float,

splash, dog paddle, head high to avoid
rank smell of bottle green water.

Over there—in the margin where land meets mud
a sandpiper steps out of the weeds.

I emerge from the suck
with a new view of reality.

The world has gone berserk—
I'm most likely okay.

Concussion

by Marie Griffith

In the prison in my mind
The mourning doves
Scratch the pavement
Coo cooing softly.
There's a garden on the hill.

Beside butterfly columbine
Tomato plants
Leaning arms stretched out
Grab me closer
Pull me into green fruit fragrance.

Earthworms slide between
Neatly tucked together carrots
Composting loosely softened soil
Beneath the sinking footprints
Digging deeply underneath.

Four wrens splashed
Off the birdbath
Beside crisp rain washed lettuce
Sprinkled with green onions and dill.
It's a San Francisco
Slow food movement
From the garden on the hill.

Fenced in with no escape
Summertime city sounds
Drifting through the cracks.
In this prison in my mind
Sun kissed I rise
For that second cup of coffee.

It's me God, David's Mom

by Annette Bower

This letter's fluttering in my hand like it has wings. Look at that mailwoman, mail person, walking away into the spring air, as if she didn't leave a letter bomb behind.

Drop it on the counter and forget about it. But how can I? Dear God, it's something important; I can feel it. I hate when this happens. I hate signing for mail. It could be anything, and I don't know what it is.

I'll poke myself with the letter opener and get blood poisoning and then whatever it is won't matter. I don't recognize the letterhead. What am I going to do this time? I can't pretend I lost my glasses and ask Mabel next door. She's getting suspicious. This manor is a snakes' nest for gossip. I've asked her too often since I've moved in. She gave me a magnifying glass for Christmas. She said it would help me look up phone numbers.

What time is it? Will David be home? No, of course, he won't. He never likes to be bothered right away anyway with my little problems. He has so many big ones. He hates when I make stupid mistakes like the time I gave the man a cheque for a security system that didn't have a camera.

There was a time when I knew things. Before No Name came along, I always found the best deals. Now I don't know what's in the tins or what they cost. I pretend I can afford quality brands because those companies still invest in pictures on the labels.

When Albert was alive, we'd have some laughs. I might have said vegetable soup for supper, but it turned out to be mushroom. It wasn't important. God, if you were as just as the bible says, I'd be dead, and Albert could have driven over to David's house with this letter. But since David moved out to that ritzy area, I can't find my way. All the houses look alike. The streets twist and wind like cracked gumbo during a drought.

Maybe I should throw that damn thing away. It's probably bad news anyway. What kind of good news comes by registered mail?

Dear God, help me to ask David in the right tone. If I sound nervous, he gets impatient. If I become insistent, he clips his words. I imagine him running his fingers through his hair, rolling his eyes to the ceiling. Cheery, I hate to bother him, is what I'll try.

Dear God, maybe he had a good day. If I wait 'til about seven maybe he'll have had his after-work drink. No seven's not good; he'll probably just be eating his dinner, and the kids will be demanding some daddy time. But if he's had a busy day, he says goodnight to the kids and watches a little TV in peace.

Dear God let me call at the best time, or have him call me.

It's just past seven maybe it'll be okay. I can't stand it any longer. If those kids in the convent hadn't made fun of me so long ago, I'd be able to read, I'd know, I'm not stupid.

It's ringing, once, twice, three, no, I won't hang up. David has caller ID. Maybe he'd call me back.

"Hello, Christopher. It's Grandma. You're in your jammies, good boy. Can I talk to daddy for a minute? Yes, I'll wait."

"Hello, David. I know this is bedtime. I won't bother you long. I received a registered letter today, and I remembered that you asked me to let you know when these things arrive. You'll come over on Saturday. Yes, I agree four more days won't make a difference. Good night dear."

Four days, a lot can happen in four days. I could be dead. Then what will he do? Bury me next to Albert. Of course, he'll cancel my lease, and sell all my stuff, and then take a little holiday. I'll prop the letter on the counter, and then he'll find it on Saturday or after I'm dead.

Now I lay me down to sleep, God. I leave tomorrow in your hands. Amen.

1910

by *Bob MacKenzie*

It might as well be 1910, thought Irma as she turned her back on yet another load of laundry sloshing away in the old wringer washer and walked from the attached shed back into her large, homey kitchen. Homey, Frank calls this. Sure. He's not stuck here all day in the wilderness with nothing to do and no-one to talk to. She turned to the morning's dishes, still in the sink. Not even a tap: a stupid pump, ugly as sin sticking out of the counter. And a wood stove. It might as well be 1910. God, I might as well hand-crank the washer. Or pound the clothes clean on some rock. She gave the knob of the ancient mantle radio what she imagined to be a vicious snap, then waited for the tubes to warm up. Good thing we have hydro. And a phone, though God knows who I would call outside of back east. The radio surged into the room and her thoughts. Rock music and cruise missiles, and me trapped in 1910. She slumped into a chair and gazed, thinking she was not thinking, into her less than warm cup of coffee.

Frank Carter roused himself from quiet contemplation of his now empty coffee cup long enough to glance at the truckstop clock. He left a dollar on the counter and walked back to his rig. Frank considered himself a lucky man. He had been lucky enough to land this driving job even before moving to Alberta, and only a week ago he had qualified to run flammable and caustic substances, with a corresponding raise in pay. Most of all, he was lucky to have Irma. She seemed to take to life in the foothills as easily as she had fit Toronto. Yes, he was lucky to have such a wife. He would see her as soon as he completed this run to Edmonton. He had been away four days: it would be good to get home again. Frank was thinking of home as he climbed into the big tractor and eased it back onto the highway. At his back, he could hear thousands of gallons of gasoline gently slosh into place as he brought the tank in line behind him.

Even with the radio on, the rhythm of the washer swung back and forth through the kitchen as though the machine were the living heart of the house. Irma paused in her half-hearted washing of a plate to watch the panorama outside the window above the sink. Wistfully. That's how I

should be looking, wistfully across the wild land to the mountains hazy in the distance. He likes this view. It's like a painting. Nothing moves. Even the clouds seem painted on. She gazed wistfully across the wild land. The dark stranger she had seen as she stepped from the train a week ago now stepped to her side. He spoke. What did he say? It's wrong, all wrong. In this far land, there are no castles, no adventures, no mysterious strangers. It's like living in a painting. This was not at all the way she had imagined it back in Toronto. It had been like a dream: a new life with her new husband. After a year living on her income while he searched for work, his new job had seemed a godsend. But that was six months ago.

The early afternoon sun settled like pools of water across the seemingly endless pavement ahead of him and the landscape shimmered in the distorting waves of its returning heat. In the air-conditioned cab, Frank was only peripherally aware of the rising heat around him. The road was straight and there was not much traffic. His thoughts drifted to the past, when he had driven from Sarnia to Toronto to look for work. He had only been there a week when he had first seen her. Part of him had felt that even Mr. Greenjeans was extravagance for a man without work, but another part of him felt he deserved it. In the seven years since he had left high school, he had worked steadily, first as a labourer and then as a truck driver. Sure, he had been laid off in the present crunch, but so had lots of other people. He was better off than most. He had over twenty thousand in the bank plus the money from poge. Thanks to his good wages, the U.I.C. was really quite generous with him. So far he had not even touched the bank account. Besides, all week he had diligently applied for every job he knew was open plus a lot that were not. He deserved a break. He had been browsing for quite some time through the stores of the Eaton Centre, when he realized it was near suppertime. The plants were what took him to Mr. Greenjeans. Frank enjoyed having plants around him: living things, to take away from all that glass and chrome of modernity. She had taken him by surprise. He was himself good looking, with fine blond hair and blue eyes that could change to hazel in the right light or if he wore the right clothes. He had known women before, and beautiful women at that, but she was somehow different. When she had come to his

table with a menu, he had immediately been taken with her. She had a simple style that enhanced her appearance: near shoulder length brown hair and minimal make-up. Her brown eyes, even in the fluorescent light of the restaurant, had a fire all their own. Frank was certain she was the prettiest girl he had ever seen. Unlike his usual self, he had been tentative, even shy, when he had asked her if she would be willing to date him. She surprised him by agreeing even though they had just met. That Saturday evening over coffee after seeing Diva at the Cineplex, he learned that Irma Coughlin was a native Torontonian, that she was twenty three, just two years younger than himself, and—or so he thought in retrospect—that he was in love with her. It took him only a month to ask her to marry him. It took her only seconds to accept.

Jobs had been scarcer than he had expected. They had married very soon after his proposal, just in case he got a job outside Toronto. He did not. For nearly a year, Frank got up at eight each weekday morning, checked the newspapers, went to the Manpower Centre to check the job boards, and spent the rest of his day knocking on doors. After his U.I.C. claim had run out, they began to live on Irma's wages and tips. It was a rough time, and they began to argue. The offer from TransPetro had come in the nick of time, as he was fond of telling Irma.

They had been in Calgary less than a month when he had found the farm. The price was a bargain. Calgary was not what Frank had expected: too much like Toronto, all glitz and hurry. A farm could be both an investment and a peaceful place to return after a day or night of driving. Irma had caught his excitement and had agreed even before they saw the place. Now they had lived there nearly five months. It was the perfect life.

The wheel was turning heavy in his hands. Frank came quickly to the present. He was working very hard to control the truck. From the feel of it something was wrong in the steering hydraulics. As he slowed, the rig became harder and harder to control. Even in the air-conditioned cab, Frank began to sweat with the exertion.

Irma hefted the last basket from the last load of laundry and carried it to the stand outside. Just like 1910. She climbed the five steps and began clipping the clothes to the line. A farm, he said. A farm. A nice white house with a nice red

barn. Cows and stuff grazing. Lots of machines, bright and shiny in the sun. Corn all over the place. That's a farm. Once in a while she paused to watch the rows of newly hung clothes dancing in the light breeze. It was too late. What could I say after I already said okay. The place is falling down. It's hard to find any paint left on the outside. The weather has made the whole place grey. It will make me grey and old before my time. A week just to clean it enough to move in: over a month after that to make it fit to live in. What was he thinking of? What was I? There. That does it. Picking up the empty basket, she turned a moment to look at the pink beginning to form behind the distant mountains before she walked again to the house. Frank was coming home. She would lie down and rest for a while, then make some supper.

In her dream, Irma is driving her car along a highway. The highway seems to go on forever. She feels as though she has been driving forever, and must drive forever more, with no end in sight. But an end is in sight, for ahead of her she can see the silhouette of some city, like the Manhattan in the movies only bigger and brighter like the glittering Peachtree complex she has seen in magazines. She is driving to the city. She is happy driving to the city. She cannot recall where she has been, but she knows she wants the city. Ahead of her the sky is lighting up. It is like fireworks: big and bright and exploding into the night air. She is fascinated and slows as she nears the spectacle. It is a gigantic fire flaring up in the middle of the road, flames leaping many metres into the air. She gets out of the car and walks closer. An outline is beginning to form at the centre. How curious, she thinks, as she draws closer yet. It is the outline of a truck. Then there is a man: dancing, she thinks at first. Then she sees he is burning, flailing trapped in the midst of the inferno: and he is Frank. She reaches toward him, but the flames are too hot. She cannot get closer. Somewhere she hears the sounds of church bells. She is lost in the sound of church bells.

Frank? Frank, are you okay? The phone—only a dream. She rolled slowly off the colonial chesterfield, rousing herself into a standing position. Must have dozed off. The phone. She hurried to the telephone in the kitchen. Wait. I'm coming. It would never do to miss one of her very rare calls.

“Hello? Oh, Mother. How are you? You know, I was just thinking of you this morning. Do you read minds so far away? Why did you call?”

“That’s really nice. But isn’t it awfully expensive just to say hello at this time of day? You could have called tonight and saved.”

“Lonely? No not really. Come on, Mother. What do you expect me to say? It’s really quite nice out here. Peaceful, you know. Like the grave itself. I’m getting quite used to it. I’m sure we’ll do fine here.”

“I miss you too. And Daddy. Tell me more about you. About Toronto.”

While her mother told her the latest news from Toronto, Irma watched the darkening scene in her kitchen window. It was not quite night, and the sky burned bright red over the distant mountains. She felt something deep inside tug a question from her.

“Mother, remember a few years back, those tank trucks—double bottoms, I think they were called—remember all the fuss because they were rolling over or something and catching fire?”

“What? No. No, it’s okay. I just wondered if they had solved the problem, that’s all. Listen, this is costing you a lot.”

“No, I’m fine. Frank is fine. Frank is fine.”

“The tank trucks? No, just a dream I had brought it to mind. Just a dream. I’ll call you later in the week. Okay? Bye.”

For a long time after she hung up the telephone, Irma stood watching the red of the sky grow deeper and deeper until it was almost the colour of blood over the black teeth of the horizon. She felt a twinge. Before the sky could go black, she turned away and began preparing supper. Frank would be home soon. Frank will be home. He will.

At nine o’clock, Frank had still not come home. Irma was beginning to worry. He should have been home by seven. Usually, if he was held up for some reason he would call and let her know. She waited impatiently for the telephone to ring. She had been reading a book, but had been unable to concentrate for more than a few lines at a time. Finally she gave up trying and just sat, curled up in her armchair, listening to the radio and listening for the telephone.

It was not quite sleep, but the dream had begun and Irma was drifting toward that car on

the highway when something on the ten o’clock news snatched her back to wakefulness.

“...jackknifed on Highway Two outside Edmonton and exploded. Ownership has not been confirmed, but the truck is thought to be one of the TransPetro fleet out of Calgary. After two hours the wreckage is still too hot to be approached. Police are rerouting traffic around the area of the accident.”

Oh God, no!

“...driver has not been identified at this time, although it is believed he was trapped in the wreckage.”

Frank...

“Fire crews remain at the scene.”

Where are you, Frank? My God, where are you?

“...information at this time. Stay tuned for details as they become available.”

Frank... Frank? The remainder of the newscast was no more than background sound to the beating of her heart. Her eyes were full with tears that would not flow. She sat perfectly still in her chair, not knowing how long, not caring. Later, she stood, then began to walk through the house, feeling calm, strangely calm. She ran her hands over objects, caressing, she looked at each piece of furniture, each wall, each knickknack, with new eyes. She took into herself all that they had made together for themselves. Just like 1910. Isolated. No way of knowing. But does it matter. What could I have done. What could I have done, but love him. She walked and she walked. Once, she tried to call the TransPetro offices. It was after eleven. There was no answer. Then she walked around the house once more. What else could she do. Irma was alone.

Irma did not know how long she had been there, her hands tightly gripping the edge of the sink, her eyes set somewhere beyond the kitchen window, deep in the darkness. The light was beginning to wash over the house and in the west the skyline was again becoming apparent. She stood watching the mountains materialize in the distance. A picture: but always changing. Something alive. Something part of you. Oh, Frank. Frank, I wish... I wish.... The new day was about to begin. Irma Carter stood watching. There had been nothing new on the radio. She had listened to the same report over and over until it echoed through her head.

It took Irma a moment or two to realize the telephone was ringing. Please no. I don't want to know. Not yet. She removed her hands from the edge of the sink and turned toward the telephone across the room. Please stop. Go away, please. The telephone kept ringing. Slowly, she walked to it and cautiously lifted the handset.

"Hello?"

"Frank? Frank, it's you? Oh my God, it's really you? Are you all right?"

"Breakdown? But the accident...?"

"Larry Smalley. Oh, poor Susan thank God! I'll call her later and see what I can do. Why didn't you call? I've been worried sick! No, the office didn't call me. I tried them and they were closed.

"Well, how was I to know you were stuck nowhere near a phone. When did they finally let the repair truck through?"

"Only an hour ago? But it's already..." she glanced at the kitchen clock, "nearly five thirty.

"I know it's been a long night. When will you be home?"

"Good. I'll wait up. Are you sure you're okay?"

As he was speaking, she looked across the room at the brightening landscape outside her kitchen window.

"Okay. Hurry home. Frank..."

"I love you."

She hung up the telephone, but stood there with her hand still on the receiver for a moment before walking across to the kitchen sink. She softly ran her fingertips along the iron handle of the pump as the tears began to well from her eyes. Then she gripped it and began moving it rapidly up and down. Just like 1910. She placed her cupped left hand under the stream and raised it to her lips. I suppose I can get used to that. Outside, the world was just beginning to come alive. Yes, I guess I can.

Highway 5

by Arlene Mighton

"To the multiple disordered tones
Of gears changing—"

Denise Levertov

Without looking, I hear you
And know you.

Shifting gears

Slowing down

Increasing speed

18 gear changes.

Once you reach top speed

You do not appreciate

starting again.

Red car with large tails

Yellow sports car with double exhausts

Four-wheeler rolling ahead

Green truck cab pulling bales of hay

Black semi thrusting forward.

I walk slowly, past the intersection

My eye on the traffic

A large grey semi rolls up,

shifting gears, pressing onward.

I back track

Push the walk light

Wait for the green light.

Thirty seconds pass

Pedestrian crosses the walkway

Intersection traffic idling

Other side finally reached.

I'm safe.

Giddy Up

by Cameron Muir

Our farmhouse was small and snug but still had plenty of places to hide when Dad had been drinking. One July afternoon, when Mom was in the hospital and most farmers were out spraying their wheat or swathing their hay, I came in to find Dad and Johnnie Mantyka and some lady sitting at our kitchen table with a cribbage board, a bottle of Five Star whisky, and coffee cups. Their laughter quieted, and Dad and Johnnie smiled at me and the lady smiled at Dad and Johnnie, and she tugged at one of her clip-on earrings, confections of glass or plastic that splashed light down onto her cheeks. She opened its clasp and let it bite down again.

“Hey, Buckie.” Dad said. “Mr. Mantyka is helping me fix the mower.”

“Johnnie!” the lady said in a voice much higher and much louder than Mom ever used. “Johnnie, show the boy how you can count.” Then to me, “You can count, can’t you?”

“Maybell,” Johnnie said.

But there was no stopping her, “Fifteen two, fifteen four, fifteen six and a pair is fucking eight!” And her laugh burst out after the “eight” and she put a curled hand to her mouth and she bobbed back and forth, laughing at the floor and the ceiling until she ran out of breath. “That’s some kind of counting. I bet your teacher never taught you that kind of counting. I bet she didn’t.”

“Hey, forget about that,” Dad said. “Hey Buckie, show us your Sherriff Dunnigan. Do it for us, Buckie. You know.”

I did know. The one thing that I could do that would make Dad laugh, even on evenings when Mom asked him where he had been, even then the one thing that could save us all and let us retreat was my impression of Sherriff Dunnigan from the Giddy Up Hour. It was my favourite program on television, when Dunnigan would teach us how to make a lasso, or how to open a door properly for a lady, or how to shoot a man’s cowboy hat right off his head without even hurting him, just leaving him gobsmeared so he had to pat his head and say, “Huh?” But what Dad wanted to see was my routine when I used the corn broom as my horse and drawled like Dunnigan himself.

“Come on now, Buck. Giddy up.” His voice had come down an octave, like it did sometimes, but still I didn’t move.

Johnnie got out his jackknife. He prised the plastic star off the whisky bottle, then fixed it to my bib overalls, sticking a star point into the pencil pocket. “There. Now you’re a real sheriff. Let’s see what you got.”

I grabbed and straddled the broom, wheeled into the living room and back again, then pulled back on the broom, “whee-hee-hee-huh,” and looked directly at the three adults at the table. “Now you varmints listen up and listen good. You leave the Widow Davis alone or else I’ll hafta come back here and kick your sorry backsides out of the county, one by one. Just see if I don’t.”

Dad and Johnnie laughed, and the whisky from Dad’s coffee cup spilled over his knuckles, dripping as if he had just won a fight. The lady pointed and said, “Whoooo! That’s you two! That’s your sorry backsides he’s talking about. I seen ‘em both and it’s me that’s sorry I seen ‘em.”

I hit her with the broom across the side of her face, and one of her earrings went flying. I grabbed it off the floor and ran out to the yard and got to my bike and pedalled down to the pasture where Grandpa’s old Studebaker sat with its flat tires and its windshield smashed in, the front seat covered with tempered green glass. I put the earring into the glove box then laid down on the backseat and stayed until it was dark and I heard Dad’s truck leaving the yard.

Decades later, long after an auger had taken half of Dad and put him into a grain bin, I was living alone in a small, comfortable apartment in downtown Calgary. The phone rang and when I answered a voice said, “Am I speaking to the Sheriff? Buckie, is that you?” It was Johnnie Mantyka and he said he wanted me to visit him at a nursing home, said he wanted to talk to me about my dad. I held the cordless receiver away from me then placed it on the coffee table where it swivelled around on its back, its long chrome antenna pointing at items of furniture, then finally at me. I waited and heard snippets like “good man” and “big heart” and “really loved you” until there was no more, but then the dial tone jolted through me, bounced off the wall behind me, up to the greasy dusty space above the kitchen cupboards, down the hall, and into my room where it resonated under my bed.

Mum was the one

by Gillian Harding-Russell

... I fought
refusing to learn to play the piano
after school, though she tutored my friend
very pleased to be taught, and many others
in our drawing room. Hers

was the classroom down the west end
of the school, and was my brother's friend's
maths teacher in grade eleven when I was afraid
to walk past the principal's office down the hall
the door open watching for those lost.

But there was another mother I could lie beside
when she had a nap on a Sunday afternoon, and
I played with stuffed animals amid the familiar scent
dabbed behind her ears. She wore earrings
though her ears weren't pierced, and the lobes
were sore from the pendants she wore, her life
outside at times grating with that inside.

One night I could not sleep for a worry
about a truth I had not told when Mrs. Adams in Grade One
had asked a question that expected an answer. 'Some children
are afraid of the dark, but none of you is...' (did she say 'of
anything that silly?') and I could not raise my hand
against the force of that question for all
to see I was that coward, and so

cowardly, I didn't, now holding onto Mum's arm
to plea with her, please, please to lie down with me
in the dark, and blurting out this secret fear, with tears.
How I was afraid of the dark, that interminable sea
of night, and my mother suddenly calm

lay on the bed beside me and
told me about her own mother dying
when she was eleven. How her mother
had told her about a glittering shore
beyond an ocean of rough waves as
a place of peace that could indeed go
on and on in a spirit of mind disembodied
from its earthly moorings

but I, already with an instinct for pessimism,
was inconsolable. How could one hold the shape
of what had no borders in the eye's understanding?
And just this limitation in my seeing,
my mother pointed out, should give me hope:
that the inconceivable could exist
without me able to conceive it.

Foundling

by Debby Adair

Beginning in the 18th century, the Foundling Hospital in London was a place where desperate mothers relinquished the care of their young children. They left identifiable tokens—coins, buttons and felt hearts—in the hopes of returning to one day reclaim their children. Today, many of these unclaimed tokens are on display in the Foundling Museum. (More information at: <http://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/about/the-tokens/>).

She dressed him in his brother's things, no shoes, but with a pair of matching socks, so small, they'd never had a chance to become worn. She wrapped him in the only blanket she could spare, and would take it home with her, afterwards. The streets were busy, busier than she had ever remembered. Perhaps she had never really paid this much attention, but she wanted to, now, tonight, to remember it all, this moment, the sounds, the noise, the cacophony around her, around them. Horses pulling carts in the streets, lamps lit, music playing, somewhere, a piano, perhaps someone had a window open. She was surprised at her awareness, every bit of her threatened to dissolve, to unravel and vanish into the fog seeping into the street. She clung to the confusion, the chaos, so like her, now, like them, like her heart booming under her skin. Remembering every detail would take all her concentration. She watched the hats, coats of men passing, paused just slightly if one brushed up against her arm, while she held him, drew him into her chest tighter than before. She forced away any thoughts of impropriety or conduct. Remembering the slight touch of these strangers would keep her present, in the moment, and she wanted to remember, to be able to recall, later, the events, all the details of this night, so that she could replay them when her arms were empty, when she peered into the bed and knew that he was gone.

The music was getting louder, piano keys banging grotesquely, laughter, why were people laughing? They were almost there, and she almost tripped, she almost dropped him, when she came suddenly to a thing, a body, that lay calmly in the street. It looked up at her and smiled, but she kept

going instead, it was the only thing she couldn't do, couldn't smile at anyone, couldn't look them in the eye as they passed. So, there would be some things she wouldn't remember, then. But in her eyes they would see sadness, they would frown puzzled at her, if she were to look on them, and they would see him, in her arms, and they would re-read this sadness on her face, and then they would know where she was going. So she looked away, tried to take in the smells and chaos, but not their eyes. Later, their eyes, their faces, darkening with their awareness, this later, she would endure a lifetime of, of judgment, her cross to bear, but, not tonight. Tonight she wanted to recall the cat that called to her from a doorway, the smell of saltwater in the air, the glow in the street lamps, the smallest things holding them both together.

At the entrance, she paused, they paused. Nurse came to her, wearing a black and white gown, or uniform, arms out-stretched. She paused but only briefly, and was surprised at her willingness to hand him over, to these out-stretched arms, the arms of a stranger, whose eyes waited and a mouth that seemed to neither smile nor frown, arms out-stretched with a kindly mouth.

He was still sleeping, she knew, she didn't even have to check. She followed him, now, outside of her arms, who had been inside her body, now in the arms of this black and white form. There wasn't a lot of noise anymore, the heavy doors drowning out the machinations of the world. She followed, blindly, as if drawn by a pulley, or maybe the string that holds a kite to the earth, to keep it from floating away.

They came to an office, or a kind of sitting room. Another black and white figure came forward and placed a hand on her arm, near her heart, near the spot that he had just been, he with the faded blanket and the good socks. The figure motioned for her to sit down, smiled and began to talk, its mouth moving and making sounds but she couldn't understand, couldn't process the words. The figure asked her, again, the one question she knew it would.

"I have it right here," she announced, as if she had won a prize turkey or a card game or a lottery. From her pocket she pulled it out, a single, small and round object, gold with a little blue stone in the centre. She had two buttons, saved them, when the lady of her house gave her an old sweater, worn so thin it had to be discarded. She wanted it for the buttons. The lady must have

forgotten to snip them off, so she did, holding onto them, how happy they had made her, knowing one day she could use them, perhaps on a shawl, or on her other son's sweater. Her other son. And now there would be only one and he would know, and he would ask her where he is and she didn't know what she was going to tell him and she had thought about this over and over and had never been able to come up with an answer. She pushed this thought as far down into her as it could go, and only wished this strangeness, this bitter taste of grief and bile would stay there until she could go down the hall, down the huge steps and back out into the street.

"You will remember this button, be able to identify it, will you?" She nodded and nodded, unable to stop agreeing, unable to stop this surrender, betrayal, her acceptance of shame. The figure pierced the button expertly with a long pin, and quickly slid the button, her button, his, onto a tray, which, out of the corner of her eye, seemed to hold many shiny things, coins, pins, but she turned her eyes quickly away from the weight of it, not wanting to remember how the button looked, so small, so foreign, surrounded now by so many other fragments.

They let her place one last kiss on his sleeping head, and she stroked his cheek, and let his soft breath linger on her face, and she thought of only happy things, to give him these last thoughts of happiness, and felt a bliss for one moment, that he should remain sleeping and not sense her sadness. For he had always been a sensitive baby, and she knew, she knew he would be able to tell, he would feel it, in her touch, in the air around him, and it was all she could hope for that his last moment with her was to be still.

She turned before her tear reached his face, and they removed his shabby blanket, and handed it back to her. She reached out an arm, and they placed it there, and she let it hang, and there it remained, almost to the ground. And she slowly turned and made her way back down the hall, and her body felt as if it had been plucked fresh and she could not remember the color of the walls, or if there had been any walls, or if this could possibly be a dream, and maybe she would wake up and he would be in her arms, could be back in her arms, and his brother would smile and pat the baby's head and sing a lullaby to his brother, while she rocked, while they rocked.

She made her way through the streets like a silent rider, whose horse knows the way. She came back to the lady's house, to her room, her place, and stood before the door, and thought about this door, how odd that she should have a door with a knob on it. She slowly went in and felt the blanket now, still hanging from her arm. Her hands gathered the blanket, her finger poking through the one hole it had. She closed her eyes and when they opened, the light from the lamp in the street caught on something, made a little flash. She looked and saw the matching gold button with the blue stone, and she gathered this button, and she gently wrapped it in the blanket, around and around, safe from the hole, and she held this bundle to her, safe and warm, and she rocked her blanket, her token, and from somewhere inside her, she softly heard the sounds of a lullaby, and they waited for her other son to come home, and they rocked.

Mary's Quickening

by Angelina Schellenberg

good morning, sky painter
brushing rainbows on the inside
of my arc, shade your own form
sweep to the limits of limb, flood
my belly with promise

rise, little dove
fallen beneath my heart, beat
your broken wings
against my flesh, show my feet
the way to solid ground

good night, gentle wind
swirling within my waters
raising me above
the deluge, in this lonely stirring
grant me rest

Droplets in a Glass of Water

by Emma Tessier

It was Thursday. As usual, Bob got up at 5:00 AM.

Bob got a huge scoop out of his 50 lb cat food bag and headed to the food dishes. With 15 cats, the dishes lined the floor of one entire wall.

When they were done eating, he surveyed the room. Food was all over the floor; the water dish was now empty and there was a damp cat in a corner.

Bob went over to his parrot, Nicole, and fed him his breakfast. Dragon fruit and a tuna sandwich.

By 7:00, Bob was out the door. As he got in his 16-year-old Crown Victoria, he was thinking about his life choices. He was 30 years old and inherited his car from his Grandma. His house, which he also inherited from his Grandma, smelled like perfume and had rose wallpaper everywhere. Bob wasn't complaining though, he was simply wondering why his Grandma liked that wallpaper so much, and how she got it on the roof of the car. Bob had become a teacher because he wanted his summers off to pursue his passion of running a clown camp, which hadn't worked out yet.

Bob's hair started falling out the day he started teaching. He noticed while washing it. He had told himself he was going to quit Monday. That was many Mondays ago.

When Bob got to school, he ran his hand through his thinning hair, locked his car door and headed for the school.

"Yoohoo, Bobby!" He heard his name being called across the staff parking lot.

Bob groaned, picking up his pace and putting his earbuds in. He could hear her footsteps. She was fast. Bob grabbed the door handle and looked behind him, no one was there. He breathed a sigh of relief. Turning around he felt another hand cover his.

He looked up. A red-haired woman stood in front of him. Panting. How had she got in front of him?

"Oh Bobby, I thought I'd never catch you." Bob opened his mouth to speak, but she placed a giant sweaty finger to cover his lips. "Shhh, Bobby. Just let me speak. I think we should go out."

"Um...no. You're my Mom's best friend. You go with her every Tuesday to senior smorg from 3:00-5:00. Plus, I have my cats," Bob stated. He

then yanked open the door and walked through.

"But Bobby. Your Mum is 60. I'm only 59," she called after him.

School started with a bang. Literally. The sound of a cannon. The bell was broken so someone decided the chill-inducing sound of a cannon was a good way to get everyone to class.

Bob felt more hair fall out.

"I QUIT!" Bob stated, marching down to the office. He slammed his keys down on the secretary's desk.

"Mr. Everest, how may I..."

"I QUIT!" Bob repeated.

The principal rushed out of his office.

"Mr. Everest. We thought this might occur, that's why we..." The principal motioned for the secretary to pull out a file labeled 'Bob.'

"Don't try to talk me out of it by showing me the great things I've done for this school."

"Oh, we aren't." The principal chuckled. The secretary pulled out a single paper and handed it to Bob. It was a pre-printed letter of resignation. The only thing missing was Bob's signature.

The secretary pointed to the dotted line.

"Sign here."

Bob signed.

2 Weeks Later

Bob had been watching a lot of YouTube lately. With all the extra time on his hands, and no paycheck coming in, he decided he'd try to train his cats to use the toilet. With his savings dwindling already, he thought soon he'd have to choose between buying food and cat litter.

The videos were very misleading. They promised anyone could do this. However, in his two weeks, all he had managed to do was get all 15 cats to fall into the toilet. He had been sprayed with toilet water every time. It was surprisingly refreshing. As he was trying to cut down expenses, he thought his daily drenching would count as his shower. Fifteen days of not having a real shower was getting to him.

He took a break from toilet training his cats to watch slime videos.

One morning a music video popped up. He was trying to get out of it when the lyrics and beat caught his attention. RAP! Lightbulb moment! He quickly began to write. The lyrics flowed from the tip of his pen. He was a natural! Bob finished his first song in three minutes. He timed it. He knew

his fans would want this information. He reread what was written and sighed with happiness.

"I'm going to be a rap artist!" Bob announced to his cats excitedly. "I'm going to buy cat litter!"

Rapping was a little harder to get the hang of. He naturally talked very slow, but in about half an hour he had it down. By 10:00 AM he had written, sung, and recorded his first hit! It was so easy! At this rate he'd be a millionaire in no time.

Bob marched down to the local radio station and demanded to be put on air. He had taught the station manager's daughter, who only passed because he agreed to give her credit for putting her name on the test. Bob reminded him of this very loudly for 60 minutes straight until the exhausted man agreed to play it twice, once right on the spot and then again at 4:00. They never listened to the song. They should have. The lyrics went,

*My name is Big Bobby
And my rhymes are snazzy
Snazzy, snazzy, snazzy, snazzy
Say what, say what
Boom!*

Bob walked out, dreaming of what he would say while accepting the 'Best New Artist' award at the Grammys. Would it be too much to thank the guy who carries the 50 lb cat food bag to the car for him?

His Mom was calling. Bob couldn't wait to tell her his news.

"Hey Momsikins, did you hear my..."

She cut him off. "Bob, my whole skydiving club heard your song. I nearly drove off the road!"

"Don't you love it?" Bob broke in excitedly.

There was silence. "Bobby...would it be possible...to get your teaching job back? I'm not sure rapping is your calling."

"This isn't a phase, Mom. It's who I am!" Bob hung up.

Bob needed coffee, so he called his friend Stephen. They got their drinks and started talking.

"Bobby, I'm just going to tell you, I heard your song. Please don't make any more music," Stephen whispered.

"Why doesn't anyone like my song?" Bob whined.

"Have you listened to it?" Stephen asked.

Later, when Bob sat on the couch, waiting to hear his song on the radio and record it to save

for future generations to enjoy, he heard, "Up next," the radio person said, "Bob Everest in 'I Love Myself'"

This was the big moment! Bob was so happy until... he heard his song. His voice was scratchy, high, and low in some spots. It was all around terrible. Bob made a face, threw his phone on the table and told himself he would never sing again.

Bob quickly looked up his Twitter account. One follower.

"I am sorry, my fan, but I must end this," Bob wrote. He deleted everything. Another career, done.

15 Years Later

Bob was happy. He was most definitely not a rap artist. Bob was down to 5 cats and his parrot. He had rehomed the rest; cat litter was just too expensive. The need for food had won.

Bob was celebrating his 10th anniversary by going to a funeral. His wife was Elle Everest. Bob always said it was love at first sight. Actually, initially Bob kind of disgusted Elle. But, like a wart, he grew on her. She loved his name. Elle's favourite song was 'I Love Myself' by Bob Everest. She was his biggest fan. His only fan. She still tried to get him to restart his rap career.

Bob was now a bartender and the nearby campus's safe ride. Elle collected butterflies in East Africa. Somehow, she made money doing that. They were going to a funeral tonight because one of the people Bob had worked with when he was a teacher had died. She was 59 when they worked together, he could still hear her saying...

"Bobby!" his wife called. "You ready?"

The funeral was great. Bob thought they gave her hair a real nice red dye job. It was great to see all the delicious food at the lunch. Bob and Elle were terrible cooks so they enjoyed other people's food a lot.

1 Week Later

"I can't believe it!" Bob exclaimed.

"You inherited a McDonalds!" Elle screeched. That red-haired woman must have really liked her Bobby.

"Mmm, I love McDonalds."

"Yep, I know, Bob, but own one, that is..."

"Awesome! I'll quit my job Monday!"

Excerpt from “Dissonance of Orange”

by James Trettwer

I linger in the The Kaffee Hause
at the back where the artistes don't hang out.

I stir my Brazilian dark roast, heavily sugared
a dollop of cream in the umber brew
my only company
until you read from your new novel
The Ordonnance of Orange inside the cover
I trace your note with my finger ... for you, your initials.

In my bland chair I settle my cup
on the squat table, stir-stick parallel
to napkin edge. I shuffle the cup,
repeat, until cup's handle is perpendicular
to stick, napkin edge ...

... my cup
in the exact centre of a different napkin
at a different coffee shop two weeks ago
where you read some of your heroine's
story
her bare legs spread
her four-by-four driving Neanderthal
grunts between her inner-thighs
her orange halter made by hand, especially
for him ripped, heaped beside her.

After, she remains prone with gratification,
guilt while he parties with friends
she watches whirling stars on an ebony
backdrop and catches glimmers
of epochs past – compel her to act
move west beyond her small, rocky town
toward her own expanding new universe.

Big Island

by Joanna Lilley

The finch is high in the koa tree.
The two men see it and raise their field glasses.
It's smaller, yellow, not green and large
like the others. Same thick dark conical bill,
though. *Juvenile*, Munro whispers.
Palmer nods and lowers his binoculars.
He lifts his shotgun to get a closer look.
A hundred birds raise at the blast and scatter.
The men watch the little one fall, listen
for the landing. It takes a while to find it
in the bright green grass. Munro picks it up.
It's tiny in his upturned hand,
shot-ragged and blood-speckled.
Palmer spreads a cloth on the ground;
Munro puts it gently down.
Palmer unsheaths his knife.
He holds the little bird with splayed fingers,
cuts into its warm breast.
Its stomach is crammed with koa pods.
Greedy beggar, Palmer says, as blood settles
in the creases of his knuckles.
Munro dabs a stout finger into the spill.
Caterpillars, I reckon, he says in the tight
New Zealand accent Palmer loves.
No wonder they grow up green, Palmer laughs.
Our lord and master's going to like this.
Munro raises a finger to his lips.
Shhh, he says. *There's another one*.
Palmer raises his gun.

The Awakening of Clarence Bettelman

by Eric Neufeld

Clarence Bettelman heard the call of the power saws and backhoes as Starland burst forth from Los Angeles. The day he finished Grade 11, he was already knocking on construction shacks. He wanted to build Starland, and one day, he'd live there.

Jobs were easy to get then.

And from the first minute that he held a hawk and trowel, he knew that the plastering trade was what he was born to do. He loved the hustle and bustle of tradespeople pushing new homes out of the ground, pouring foundations, roughing in framing, threading electrical wires, and plumbing through the two by fours. And then the plasterers would come! They'd cover up that jumble of studs and wire and pipe and make each home an adobe temple.

Never would he spend another minute in a stuffy classroom.

There was a tough but tender beauty waiting to be born in the new subdivision and Clarence would be its midwife. Plastering was not a job for Clarence; creating smooth creamy white surfaces was fine art. Years later, over breakfast sausages and biscuits, he'd tell his family, "Plaster done well gives a room its character, the way features give a face its personality." He looked straight at Mike and Ken, his oldest, both smart-alecky kids. "It's about the people who walk through those rooms, what they'll believe in, how they'll pray, what they'll dream. You don't know how much time I spent thinking about you when I did your bedrooms."

"True enough, Dad," Mike said once. "It's all about the plaster. I mean, what's paint? Black, white, green, pink, tootsy-frootsy. What difference could that make to a room?"

Ken tried not to crack up. "Don't get him going," he whispered. "We'll miss dessert. Tonight's game. College."

"If you two not-so-funny comedians don't listen respectfully to your father, you won't be getting so much as a morsel of bread pudding," said Helen, watching the caramel bloom as she stirred in the baking soda.

"God-a-mighty," Clarence said one day, sucking a little tea through his sugar cubes, when the paint conversation arose again, "Is there a

vainer creature in all of creation than a painter? I tell you kids, that peacock Mr. Valby truly believes that a building – and maybe all of Creation – is merely a canvas laid out by us worker bees for the maestros in white with their pretentious moustaches to grace with cheap paint for the whole world to admire. It's just breath."

Raylene and Rhonda, still hard to tell apart, were finishing up their fried potatoes. They shrugged in unison. "But, Dad, a room needs paint," said Raylene. "It's the final touch. People have to have paint."

"My point exactly. Terry, can you pass me those buttered green beans one more time, please?" Clarence helped himself to a last good-sized last serving. "If what painters do is so magnificent, why is it their customers pick the colours for them? Out of a catalogue? And why do folks repaint so often if paint's so perfect?" He shoveled down the tasty greens. "You know what's perfect - these beans are perfect."

"I'll tell you why people repaint." He chewed down a mouthful. "Painting is just makeup. The true beauty is in the face underneath. That's why women wash off their make-up every night before bed. So lucky men like me get to see true beauty in the nuptial bed—" He winked at Helen.

"Ewwww," Mike and Ken said together. Helen boxed their ears. "Pass me your plates, children," said Helen. "Let's have this bread pudding while it's hot."

"Yay!" hollered Rhonda and Raylene.

"Plaster begins with the lath," said Clarence.

"Do tell," said Ken, screwing up his face. Helen dealt him another cuff.

"One of these times, we're going to call the Children's Aid," said Mike.

"Do," said Helen. "I expect they'll billet you in the Governor's mansion."

"Then the scratch coat." Clarence picked his teeth. "All the proportions have to be perfect, just like these beans. Salt, pepper, butter, beans. The four essential elements, in perfect proportion, cooked for just the right time, by a most talented, and very fair, woman. It's alchemy. Which is why nobody makes beans like your mom. Lath, wire, scratch coat, finish coat – those are the four elements of plaster. My alchemy. My walls and these beans are the gold."

"For heaven's sake, you old coot. I don't make beans for art or alchemy. I make them

because I have to feed you lot.” Helen whisked Clarence’s plate away.

“The true artist doesn’t know she’s an artist,” concluded Clarence dreamily.

Treasure hunters recognized a Clarence Bettelman – the magician of America’s Golden Age of Suburbia – the minute they walked into a home he’d plastered. A man untrained in the fine arts, he spent his first working decade creating understated yet spectacular interiors for ordinary working folks.

Then, without warning, along came drywall.

For decades, tradesmen considered drywall a cheap unattractive alternative to plaster, suitable for sheds, garages, and low-cost housing. Until the minimalist era of interior design arrived, with its hoity-toity emphasis on open spaces and large flat smooth surfaces.

“I’ve got no bone to pick when it comes to simple,” Clarence would say over bacon and eggs at breakfast. “There’s nothing more beautiful than a perfectly smooth and continuous plaster wall. But cheap is cheap. Drywall takes the satisfaction from the work and the soul from the space. Anyone with an eye can see the seams and nail holes.”

Sad to say, drywall caught on like a summer fire in Antelope Valley. Even his own family didn’t understand that plaster offered an infinite variety of perfectly flat surfaces, each with its own character. You’d think Helen of all people, who understood from sewing and doing laundry that no two whites were exactly alike, would understand. But no, she quietly let him talk. No comment.

“I guess simple is the one look that drywall can do,” Clarence conceded one day. “Half-assed, though.”

“Mr. Bettelman!” Helen said, picking up her tatting shuttle.

Clarence Bettelman, who had a wicked sweet tooth, had taken to walking to church Sundays. With all the long hours he put in, his middle was spreading too much, he told his family. He needed the exercise.

Truth said, what Clarence needed was time. Time alone to think. Forty-five minutes a week without Helen or the kids or the TV.

All around him, the LA he’d built was deteriorating, sometimes disappearing. He’d

left high school to build homes for the families of a tightly-knit community. Now the skies were turning yellow, and their garden of Eden had become a tangle of wires and concrete. A Woolworth’s went down, a bigger Walmart went up. The locally owned Beavis Mall, only four blocks further down, would be bulldozed to make room for a Costco the size of a continent.

Clarence had thought plastering would be his life, his insurance, and a legacy he could pass to his sons. But he’d thought wrong, horribly wrong, and now he was in proletarian purgatory. He’d seen men better than him wind up in orange aprons working shifts and weekends at Home Depots.

Now, look at that! From behind the slumbering heavy-duty machinery, a sandpiper hen was herding three precocious chicks in the direction of the conservation area on Westridge shore. Some unexpected turn of events, maybe an ill wind, must have thrown them into the middle of this construction, and it was up to Mama Sandpiper to get them back to paradise.

Why would a perfect God would make life such a struggle for these poor creatures? Wasn’t it hard enough just to survive?

Mama Sandpiper shot out a string of weet calls, and the chicks followed. Chances are, they’d make it.

The same God whose winds dislocated them from their safe haven gave those birds brains. To use. Even the water bugs backstroking in the dozer track puddles would make it.

He’d make it back, too. Back to Eden. He sighed. Though maybe a different Eden.

As morning’s haze lifted, the white metal roof of the Walmart beneath three cumulous clouds like ice cream gleamed like a holy place.

Clarence Bettelman had a vision.

In his hairy ears sounded the words: “Lord, show me that my life has a purpose I must accept.”

On the walk home, he’d stop in at the Walmart and buy a blender.



Allan Neilsen
Coming and Going



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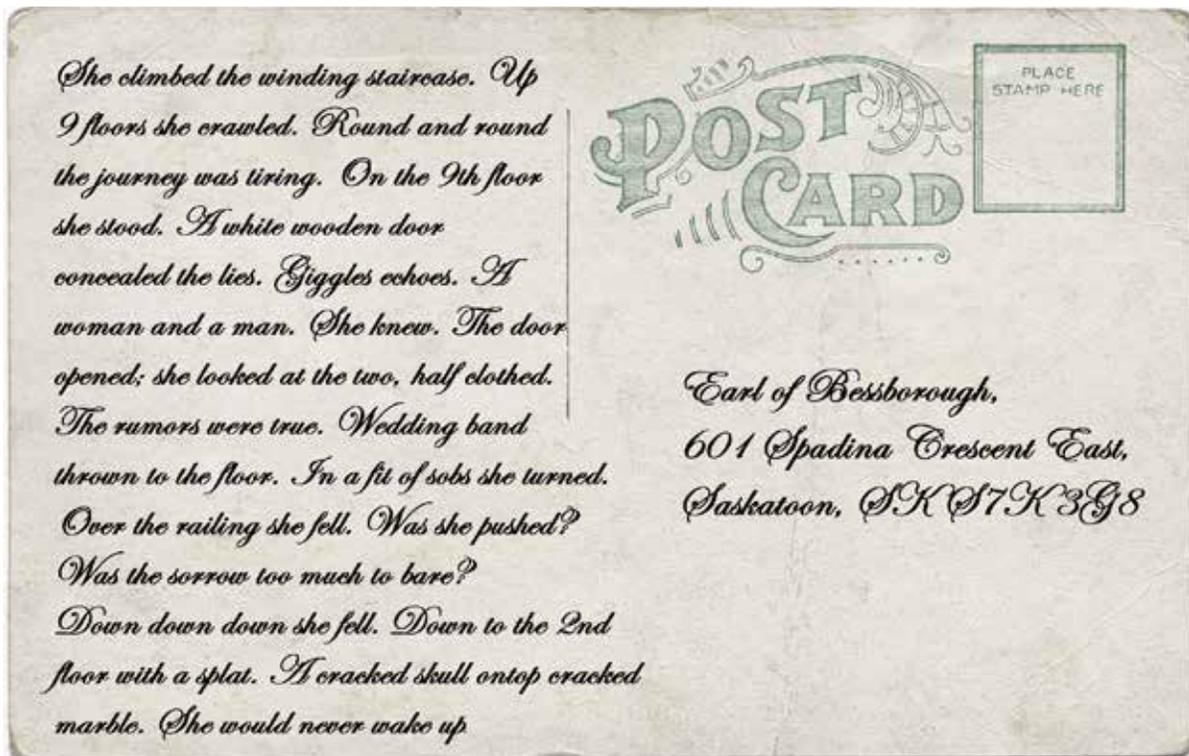
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Street Lights



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Picnic for Stanley



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Death at the Bessborough



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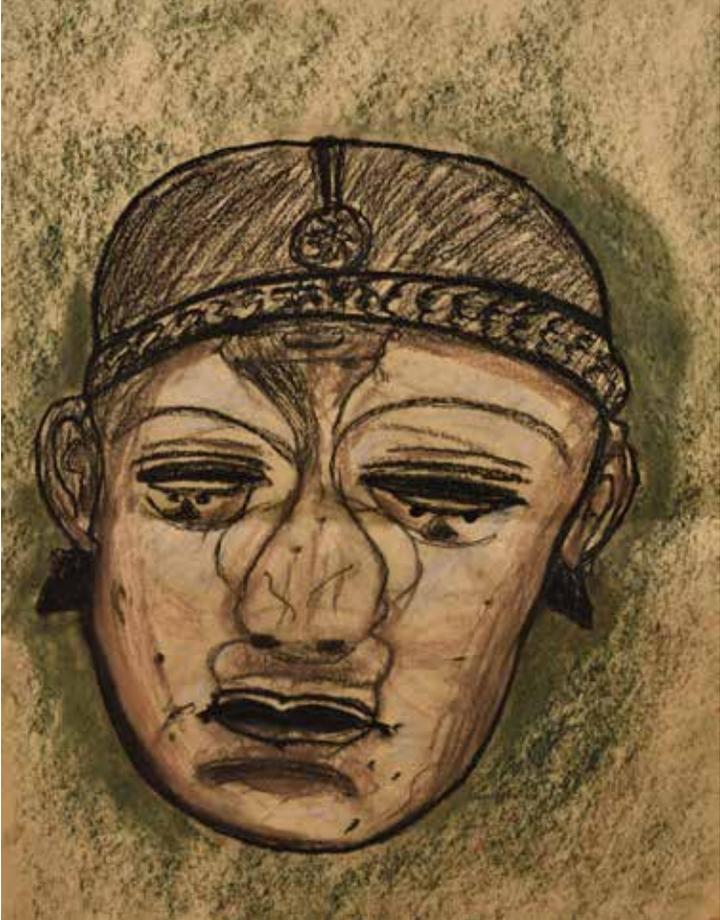
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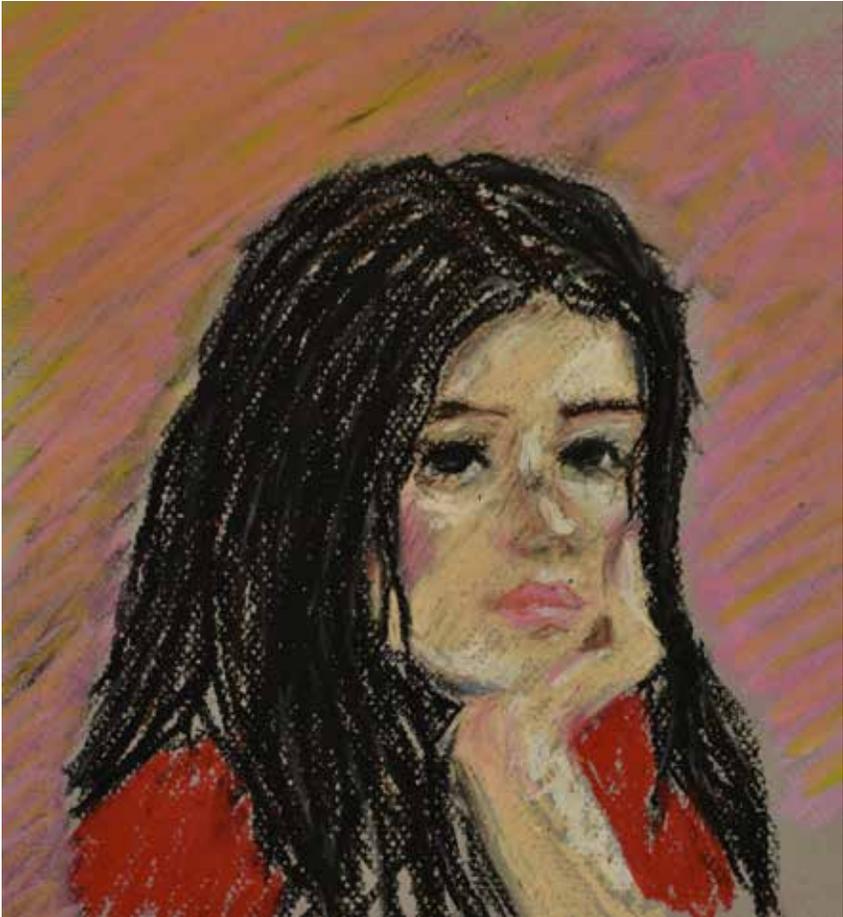
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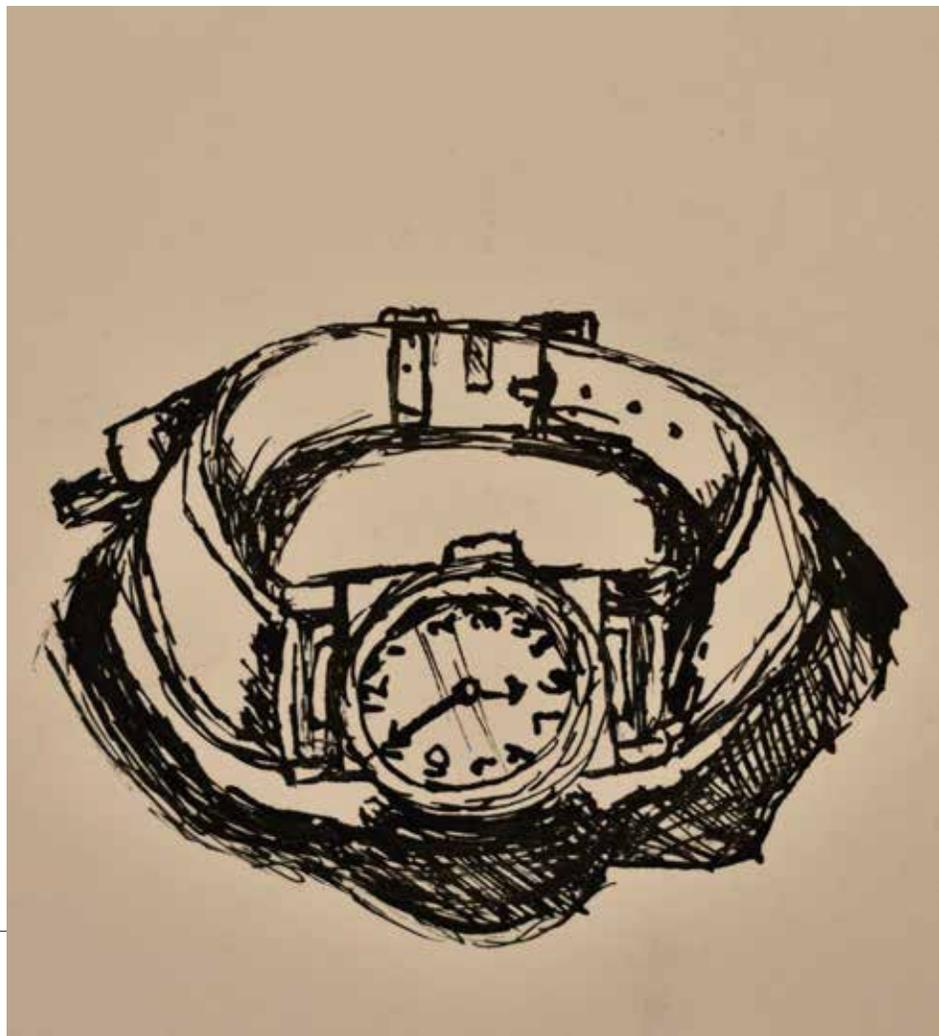
Karen Lee Lewis
Crossing



Mikayla Burghardt
Alone Time



Angela Blaylock
Your Heart's in My Hands



Rhiannon Brady
Hour Hand

A Habitat In Crisis

by Karen Lee Lewis

Wind warns me not to stand under trees
today branches full of green
slap me in the face

I am caught in cross winds

Better to keep to firm shadows

I water the flower pots to keep them from toppling
the extra weight a blessing not a curse

My neighbor's garbage drifts onto the front lawn,
a litter of dog-stained pee pads, yellowed old news

The power is out and my dog is upstairs
trying to dig her way under a bed

The sun is stirring the climate pot again
wind and light playing
a record keeping game of tag
this urgent gusting
a lake effect death match
of 'you're it'

Sporty convertible glides down the street top up

Anne Carson tells me "Life is for pushing back"
but my landlord says I complain too much.

The first thing I saw this morning
was my husband walking away from me

Now, all the clocks are blind and blinking

The Stubborn Farmer

by Mitch Rohrke

As I look down at you
At your peaceful expression
I await a remark like I've always gotten
But this time all I got was silence
Silence that pains the room

The memories come flooding back
The hunting and fishing
The hot summer days in your yard
I can't help but shed a tear

If I were to become
But half the man that you were
I'd consider it a success
You were always there when needed
Even without being asked
Stubborn, and harder on yourself than anyone
Just like the rest of us

For any mistakes ever made
And wrongs that were done
Remember the Devil was once an Angel too
Fallen, lost off of track of mind
But not you,
You never lost your wings

Fly free now, in the sky

At peace, watch over us
For then maybe,
Just maybe,
We will not cry

The Gift of a Dog

by Dee Robertson

What I thought was an old, sick coyote was running along the ditch beside the highway about a quarter of a mile in front of me. When it heard my van coming, the creature stopped running and turned to face us. Then I could see that it was a dog – a filthy, matted, skinny Sheltie-type dog. And it was trailing a long piece of thick, shredded rope tied to its neck.

By that time my two dogs, riding in the back of my van, had spotted the thing and started howling and barking. They were determined to get after this little piece of shriveled filth.

As I pulled off the highway beside the dog, it didn't even try to run away. Instead it just crouched with its head down, its tail between its legs and its ears flat. It looked sick, maybe with rabies, so I was nervous about walking up to it. But there was no way I could drive away and leave it shivering there in the ditch.

I got out of the van and walked slowly toward the pup, calling gently "Here pup, here pup," with my hand out. As I got closer, the dog, slithering on its belly and whining softly, crawled up to me. When I knelt down in front of him, he came up to me, licking my boots, my hands, my jacket. His whole body wiggled and squirmed, and his tail whipped from side to side. But as he wiggled and squirmed the smell that came from that scrawny little body was overwhelming. It was a sickening mixture of diesel fuel, rotten meat, and poop.

And now I had a problem. My two dogs were definitely not going to accept this poor filthy wretch, or even let him into the van. But I couldn't think about driving away, leaving him scared and starving beside the highway. So, I went back to my van and made a bit of a plan. I would somehow try to block my two dogs into the front seat and then load our newcomer into the back.

That did not happen. The minute I opened the sliding door, the stinker was into the van and greeting my two old dogs the same way he had greeted me. Max and Fred, a Boxer and a Bassett, were taken totally by surprise. In a panic, they pulled themselves over the back seats and into the safety of the luggage space. Before the pup could follow them, I grabbed the filthy rope and tied him to the seat frame. Now I had a tiger by the tail, and what was I going to do with my little tiger?

I pulled myself back into the driver's seat and thought about my next move. I couldn't take him home with me, into town. I had no yard, no garage and no shed to put him in. And I wasn't strong enough to control him. I was more than an hour's drive from the nearest SPCA. But then I remembered I was only ten minutes from my friend's farm. And they had only one dog, a big young, friendly black Lab. So that's where we headed.

And that's where Stinky spent the next three months. Betty and Ray bathed, shaved and fed him. And fed him, and fed him. He and Reebok, their Black Lab, got to be great friends, romping and roaming. But it was the roaming around the country-side that ended Stinky's stay at that farm. He and Reebok took to wandering from farm to farm, never really getting into trouble, but having to be brought home every day. So, Betty set out to find a new home for Stinky, one with stay-at-home farmers who would mostly be home with him all day.

And again, with luck on his side, Stinky found another new home, a wonderful new home on a farm with two young boys, an old dog and three rescued kittens. And lots and lots of love. The new home was in another community so there was no worry about Stinky coming back to Betty and Ray's. By that time his fur had mostly grown out, and Stinky had turned into a fairly handsome Sheltie, a dog that loved working with cattle, and keeping track of his family.

And that was the end of my connection to Stinky. At least it was the end of my connection for the next seven years.

Seven years later, in 2006, I traveled to Mexico with a group of eight women, all from in and around my hometown. We spent two weeks wandering around the villages and farms near Cuernavaca. As we wandered, we spent the time talking, getting to know a lot about each other. One woman in particular often shared stories of her family. As we were traveling up into the hills one day, she told me that she had just phoned her family at home, and that they were still feeling sad and upset.

"And what is the cause of their upset?" I had asked.

She told us that just two days before she left home to come on our trip, they had to have their old dog put to sleep. It had been a real nightmare for her family. Her sons had had the

dog with them for most of their lives. In fact the youngest son had the dog for his whole life. His dog had slept with him right from when he moved out of his crib into his own bed. He was truly heartbroken by the loss of his dog.

Being a dog-lover myself, I went on to ask more about this wonderful dog.

It was an old Sheltie-dog – more than eight years old, Jan told us.

“Was it a registered one?” I had asked.

No, actually it was a rescue dog. Someone had found him wandering along beside the highway, starving, dragging a dirty old rope that was choking him. A friend had taken him in, but she couldn’t keep him. So my fellow traveler, Jan, and her husband had agreed to give him a home.

She said the pup was the most loving, most caring, most accepting living thing anyone could imagine. He was always so appreciative of everything that was done for him.

And right from when he had first come into their house, he had taken on the job of raising the boys. He followed them everywhere around the farm. He slept in their room, and sat in the driveway waiting for them to come from school. Every day, rain, shine or snow, he was there to greet them.

“And what was his name?” I asked.

“Well,” she said. “He had been called Stinky when they first got him, but that didn’t suit him. So they had changed his name to Gift.”

breakfast thoughts

by Sharon Bird

what if you woke me one morning
and your hair was brown again
light casting shadows
layered in velvet
smile waiting as question
no edges to confine it

what if we left behind
time
found new places to wander
just now this breath
an eternity

what if these cups
robin’s egg blue
could take us to another place
escape to spirit
where things are free...

quiet colours have voices
and cups become companions
imbued with birdsong
transcendence a purity of slow sips
that swallow existence
...what if

That Golden Summer

by Helen Mourre

The boys' mother, Theresa, had booked a cabin for the family on Pirot's Beach at Jackfish Lake, a short drive from the city of North Battleford, Saskatchewan. The cabins were nothing fancy, small wooden buildings, some of them resembling granaries; possibly they had been, in their day. They were painted and charmed up with colorful shutters and wooden screen doors that kept the flies and mosquitoes out, but allowed the cool lake breezes to sweep through the rustic spaces, giving the illusion that the tenants were holidaying at a seaside resort, instead of this very ordinary lake plunked on the edge of the dry prairie. For all its humble attributes, Jackfish Lake offered welcome respite to farm families from the south of the province where the largest body of water was often an alkali-infested slough at the back of a quarter-section.

The family had never enjoyed a lake holiday before; the farm and all the work it involved consumed the energy of Theresa and Albert's days and encroached on the lives of the four boys: Robert, age 17, the oldest, who fancied himself somewhat of an intellectual; Paul, 15, second in line, a restless kid, who given the opportunity, could have turned rebellious; Denis, 14, with his dark movie-star looks and personality to match; and Edward, 12, the youngest, a shy but loveable kid whom the whole family fiercely protected.

They could hardly wait for the trip to the lake. Instead of days filled with weeding the garden, cutting grass, mending fences and sweeping out dusty grain bins, they looked forward to a shapeless swath of time where their only responsibilities would be to have fun with their buddies and stay out of trouble. Several of the family's friends and relatives would be holidaying at the same resort, although the word resort seems inflated by today's standards.

In the days leading up to the trip, Theresa stockpiled several batches of cookies: icebox, oatmeal raisin and gingersnap. The night before their departure a huge chocolate cake appeared on the counter with a sign: Do not touch! Reserved for the lake! It was revealing that in all their conversations about the trip they always referred to the lake, as if it were the only lake one could possibly go to, which was close to the truth, but it also revealed that a lake anywhere on the prairies necessarily assumed mythical proportions.

Finally the day arrived. In the early morning Theresa packed the car with the baking and food supplies, swim trunks (bought new for this occasion) shorts and T shirts, towels and bedding. The boys were excited beyond words and ate their breakfast quickly. They were just scraping back their chairs to go and finish packing when Albert suddenly announced that he would not be going-- there was too much work to be done on the farm, and if he went, he would have to spend the entire summer playing catch-up. This news fell on Theresa and the boys like a cold rain on a summer afternoon.

Theresa, however, continued packing the car, and the boys, somewhat uneasily, continued to do the same, all of them thinking that any kind of an outing without their father would be strange indeed; it didn't sit well. About ten o'clock Theresa went out beyond the garden to where Albert was tinkering with an old tractor. Her heart ached for this good man who worked so hard for all of them, never expecting anything for himself. Not a big woman and one that generally agreed with everything her husband said or proposed, this time, she said quietly, "Shut that thing off," motioning to the machine which sputtered and gasped for breath. "I have your clothes ready to wear to the lake. You're coming. We're leaving in a half hour." There was something so quietly persuasive about the tenor of her voice that Albert switched off the tractor, hurried to the house, had a quick scrub, and the family left on the first holiday they had ever experienced.

Why did Albert suddenly change his mind? What kind of innate knowledge triggered this turn-a-bout? He certainly had no way of forecasting the future or predicting the significance this trip would have on his family.

The holiday was a great success. Albert, who generally was a quiet, even elegant man, enjoyed a fast car ride. Some friends of theirs at the lake owned a speed boat, and Albert and the boys were lucky enough to tag along on a few excursions. The cold spray from the lake rushing into their young faces, the pounding of the waves on the bottom of the boat hinting at danger was all thrilling. Albert even rented a small aluminum boat and took the boys fishing. As they hauled in several Jackfish from the lake and later that evening enjoyed their first intoxicating taste of freshly caught fish, fried in a cast iron pan over a glowing fire, they finally understood what summer tasted like.

They couldn't get enough of the water. The boys had all learned to swim in the dugout back at the farm and, although they lacked technical proficiency, they made up for it with dogged enthusiasm. They spent hours in the lake on a rubber tire tube, their muscled legs grabbing the inside so it would balance. Then, suddenly, one of them would flip backwards, the tube would turn over, and everyone would end up in the lake, their laughter swallowed up by gulps of water. The boys' bodies turned golden with summer. Their hair glinted with a thousand points of light. Theresa, who had never, ever, owned a swimsuit, was happy to sit with the other moms on the beach in her polka-dot shirt-waist, her bare feet buried in the cool sand, while the chaotic, innocent displays of life and love buzzed around her. It seemed there was always a beautiful girl, putting on a pretense of resistance, being dragged into the water by at least two teenage boys, sometimes her own sons.

They returned home refreshed, reborn, which after all, is the purpose of a holiday. Albert enjoyed it so much he booked the cabin for the next year. He announced plans to buy a boat. But even as the family heard this news and were dreaming of next summer's lake holiday, the insurgent cells were stealthily invading Albert's body, racing to nest and accumulate and compound in a way that no amount of surgery or primitive treatments could stop, ending the possibility forever of another family vacation.

It is many decades from that summer. Paul, now a grandfather, still gets tears in his eyes when he remembers the holiday at Pirot's Beach—in his mind, a most extraordinary time, because it could never, ever, be repeated. How does one make up for those lost summers? It is not really possible, but he has tried by making sure his own young family enjoyed a holiday at the lake each and every summer when they were growing up. There was a motorboat and waterskiing, fishing expeditions, campfires with roasted marshmallows and lots of storytelling. As the seasons passed, these new memories gradually edged out the old ones which became a pale, burnished gold, like the patina found on an antique locket that one comes across at the back of a drawer and strokes lovingly and is surprised by the emotion that swims to the surface.

Full

by Keara Leong-Machielse

All around me
are empty plates
with crumbs
from freshly baked bread.

Empty glasses
that were once full
of sparkling cider.

A turkey carcass
sits beside the gravy
ready to be made into soup tomorrow.

The dogs are begging
waiting for the leftovers
from the best meal of the year.

The smell of warm cherry pie
makes its way to my nose,
captivating me.

It fills the house
with the delicious scent
that makes everyone weak.

All around me
are faces of laughter,
celebrating our time together.

My heart is full,
my life is full,
I am full.

Roots and Wings

by Kathie Cram

The large wooden door eased open and there stood Isaac Smith, the first Caper I ever met. Isaac is a tall, wiry 73-year-old beef rancher, whose eyes hold the glow of welcome. His bed and breakfast, just outside of Mabou, sits at the end of a very long, bumpy road.

Cheryl and I had arrived, exhausted by flight delays, and a four-hour road trip from Halifax. We had hatched our plan to attend the Celtic Colours music festival in Cape Breton, one sunny afternoon on the soft beaches of Emma Lake, Saskatchewan. For me, a 65-year-old, slightly chubby woman with an arthritic knee, rooted in security, home and predictability, this trip was outside my comfort zone. For Cheryl, whom I had nicknamed the “energizer bunny,” this trip was just one of several.

Just after our first evening meal together, Isaac leaned back on a weathered leather chair. His eyes twinkled with storyteller magic. His silver hair lay neatly, except for some threads that stood up in rebellion. The aroma of roast beef and onions lingered.

“You know, Kathie, I can’t quite figure it out. I closed the B and B two years ago and people just keep showing up. I’ve had people from all over: Sweden, Australia, Texas, Vancouver, and well, even from your home province, Saskatchewan.” He took a breath in and out, and then looked straight into my eyes. “Ahh... there is something special about those Saskatchewan women.” I called him a scallywag and told him he was like a character that had escaped from a novel. Laughter rolled out of him. It was warm and sweet, like cinnamon buns. At some point, I told him that I had fallen in love with the east coast. “Well, Kathie, is it the coast or the host that you have fallen in love with?” I just laughed but wondered if he might be right. After just one evening with him, I realized, it’s Isaac, his stories and generosity that draw people back over and over again. He doesn’t charge friends or friends of friends, and everyone seems to be a friend.

He never locks his doors. One evening, after our second visit to the infamous Red Shoe Pub, we returned to find a case of beer and a basket of homemade buns sitting on his porch. A note was tucked into the side of the basket: “Hope you enjoy. Give me a call.” No name or phone number. Then, the next evening, during our Thanksgiving turkey

supper, Isaac noticed a chocolate cake sitting on the table. He turned to Cheryl and me. “Say, girls, is that cake yours?” We shook our heads. “Ah.” He sighed: “It must be Janet. She is always doing stuff like that, leaving me food. I don’t know what she is doing, being a married woman and all.”

The rhythm of his voice reminded me of waves and music. I could listen to him for hours. I was not the only one who listened to him. Every so often he called his cows, “Cooley.” And they followed him. He called them away from half-eaten grasslands to a fresher more abundant pasture.

One Sunday, when the fall colours danced in the sunlight, Isaac took us to his old stomping grounds. Our first stop was a graveyard that held Isaac’s mother and father. But Isaac was looking for another grave, a newborn. As we moved through the graveyard, he told us the story:

“This friend of mine, Mae, asked me to find the baby’s grave. A long time ago, I guess it’s 60 years now, Mae’s mom had a baby. Well, unfortunately, the baby didn’t live. Her husband, Hank, took the baby and buried her. I was just a young boy, but I helped him dig the grave. You see, Mae’s mom never knew what happened to the baby.” As we leaned over the grave, Isaac said, “Now I will be able to show Mae where the grave is, and maybe her mom can have some peace.” We stood in silence.

Then, a few miles away we met Jack, Isaac’s cousin. He introduced us to his cluster of peacocks. When I asked him why he kept peacocks, his eyes lit up: “They are like my wife, I keep them for ornamentation.” He threw back his head and roared. He then pointed out a donkey that stood, barely visible in a distant, open field. “You know, I was hoping she might die, but do you know there are only two things you never see in Cape Breton: a dead donkey and a happy politician.” This time, we roared with laughter.

We had to drag ourselves away from Isaac’s. Cheryl and I had booked tickets for nine concerts, all in different locations on Cape Breton.

Then I met Anna. She stood in the middle of the drafty stone house, shifting from side to side as she bent to stir the dying embers of the peat fire. She looked up at us, nodded and said “Failtre roimh mo bhaile,” Scottish Gaelic for “Welcome to my home.”

She told her tale. “It’s a hard life. The English proprietors took away our land and we are starving. The rents are too much. So we’re

thinking of going to Canada. There is a promise of land there". She paused and pointed to the centre of the barren hut. "This is where we bring the goats and sheep at night. It helps keep us all warm. We try and keep the fire going, but sometimes the smoke is so bad we can't even see each others' faces."

I was so drawn into her story that I asked her if she knew my kin, the McInnes from Stornaway. "No, youngen', I don't know them. They are from a long ways from here, way up north on the island."

I was transported to the mid-1700s to Inverness, Scotland, Anna's birthplace. Yet physically I was in the Highland Village, near Iona, Cape Breton, taking a tour of a living history museum that tells the tale of Gaelic settlement in Nova Scotia. Anna was one of the costume animators, paid a small stipend to take us through time. It was, as the promotional brochure promised: "history brought to life." As I left Anna, tears rolled down my cheeks as suddenly the history of my ancestors, the McInnes, Stuarts and McNeils took on a new meaning.

These emotions followed me throughout the trip. When the Barra MacNeils sang: "I've been slow to meet the image that's required" from the Underachiever, I heard the whispers of my ancestors, always the misfits and rebels. When I looked down, dizzy from the height of the Cabot Trail, and breathed up the salty air, I imagined ghosts of starving Gaels. When I opened my heart to the carpet of colours, shimmering up from the leaves I wondered what highland fairies had dipped their brushes to paint such love. When I stood in the Rita MacNeil Tea House and listened to the lyrics of the Men of the Deeps: "There will always be a happy hour for those with money, jobs and power," I remembered my mother's and grandmother's stories of growing up poor, stunted by shame and judgement.

When I first heard the Gaelic language at a "ceilidh" in an old school house at the Highland Village in Iona, I wondered why it sounded so familiar. At one concert in Whycocomaugh Education Centre, I asked one of the youth ambassadors if she could write down for me, in Gaelic, "I am falling in love with Cape Breton." She was one of many grade eighters who volunteered at the events. She disappeared into a back room and came out with a rough piece of paper: "Tha goal agam do Cape Breton." I later learned that in the past twenty years, the Government of

Nova Scotia invested millions in rejuvenating the Gaelic traditions and language. They even had a Ministry of Gaelic.

At various times during the trip, I wondered how the music and the language of the Gaels had left its imprint on me, so many generations later. Could the consistent stubbornness of my immediate family, the visceral distrust of authority and our identity as "other" be somehow linked to the experiences of my ancestors?

Ceres

by Bernadette Wagner

Pods, once yellow, long, and juicy,
now brown, dry, and shrivelled.

The potential of Ceres alive in each
bold black seed our fingers force out.

We welcome the goddess back to Earth
with heat and humidity, light and time.

She marks her place.
A tender stem reaches up.

Young leaves stretch for Ra.
A strand tall, with roots holding strong

and tendrils twisting to sticky-wrap support
for the blooms and the abundance of harvest.

An ancient ritual. I forget
a single idea's power.

Concerto

by Patricia Peters

The house started small, split down the middle for two separate families who shared a huge back yard that grew wild—mango and guava trees, squash plants, all sorts of tropical foliage. Over the years, plants were uprooted and rooms were added. As generations moved in, pieces were constructed. A little here, a little there. Concrete rooms were tacked on wherever a door happened to open. Apart from this, its evolution story, the house made no sense at all. One side of the house was in Noemi's name, the other in Duran's. Their family spread out to fill the space. When Noemi's parents were ejected from their farm so the government could make use of it, they moved into Havana with goats and roosters and the animals ran wild in the back. A tiny kitchen was tacked on so Noemi's mother, Blanca, could cook when she wanted to in her own space. Mostly, she cooked in the main kitchen while Noemi was at work or watching little Duremi and David. The family worked together in the generational way of Cubans: sharing space and responsibilities; they built the house in the Cuban way: with every little bit of extra money, they'd buy a few blocks at a time. It made sense, many years later, when Duran's health forced an early retirement, for the family to gather to one side of the house to begin renting rooms to foreigners, a relatively lucrative job for Cubans if one can establish a steady clientele.

You fit in near the end of this narrative. Noemi's father had passed years ago (she still dreams of him periodically and then trembles all morning) and Blanca was a whisper of her young self. She hunched in the rocker under the weight of the scarf draped over her head. She was always praying, head covered, creaking a liturgical arc. She would spread the weight of a Bible across her lap although the print was too small for her to read. Her trembling hand traced the pages as if they were Braille—onion skin hand on onion skin pages. They were becoming one substance.

Blanca was slowly turning into a bird, a wild nest of white hair and her bone-winged arms drawing up and in. Every morning she would shuffle in the front yard along the hedge, fingering flowers, every afternoon she would sit on the concrete bench in the back with a tiny mug of cafecito. You called Blanca Mami by accident every day because the whole family did, because she

clutched your hand trembling and talked about heaven, because some days she felt a single breath away from sparrowing up and away.

When Blanca died, tripping over the step on her way out to the yard (she hit her head, the bleeding never stopped), Noemi still needed a mother and there you were with armfuls of children. You looked the part. You lived in some beautiful, impossible role between mother and daughter, translating a lifetime of different worlds into the spaces between you, stringing together understanding like it were freshly laundered clothes from mesh hampers. You'd be on the roof together in the afternoon heat, snapping out the wrinkles. She hung everything upside down, by clothing type: shorts, then shirts, underwear, jeans, sheets bent in half and pinned along the top. You hung everything right side up by person—smallest to largest, sheets tacked at the top only, free to billow. You reached for the clothes pins shoved at you by whatever child was on your back or at your feet. Whichever mother finished first helped the other.

Once walking, you were in an airport when a whiff of perfume whirled you around suddenly looking for your own grandmother. Only she wasn't there and couldn't be. The perfume must have had a name—Chanel or Armani or the scent of every question you didn't ask, bottled up.

Blanca, on the other hand, smelled like bar soap, faintly scented like the orchids that hung on the stone wall in the back yard, orchids that grew from a wired up piece of stump wrapped in large brown leaves. You found orchids altogether disappointing, those swinging brown lumps that flowered only occasionally. Most of the time, they swayed in the breeze like big onions with scalloped skin. The layers of leaves were old hands folded over themselves.

Time with Blanca was as slow as one walking with the weight of a life and all its grief hanging on at the ankles. Everything was ponderous but she proved more stubborn than time's forward pitch. She insisted on washing dishes though her arthritic hands did not properly close. She held the shred of a sponge in the curl of her right hand and balanced a chipped plate on her bony left arm like a violin. Noemi invariably raised her arms in surrender. This was a battle she could not win.

Each evening, Blanca was stalwart and steadfast in folding herself penitent into the

wooden rocker in the kitchen under her tea towel veil. Sometimes she laced her fingers under her chin while murmuring prayers for the salvation of the family that milled about her. Sometimes you held her bony hand, knuckles like knots, like beetroots, fingerling digits all entwined. Sometimes she swayed in that rocker like a stump enfolded with papery leaves. Always, there beside her, you were longing. To unwrap your longings would be like untangling roots. Something might break. Things had grown together. You prayed that her petitions be heard. You wanted the same family who streamed past her to find a tea towel to house their own prayers. You had this thought: when you are old, you want to be reduced to this—prayer in the evening and birds in the morning and washing chipped plates like a concerto. Occasionally when your fingers tied into hers like roots and she rocked out her prayers in the middle

of a kitchen as the sun set and the pressure cooker whistled beans on the stove and Lucas snuck another saltine from Noemi (you pretended not to notice) and baby Micah tugged at your braid, you caught a whiff of a God you once knew, a God you sometimes know, the One you watch for always, still. Sometimes He smelled like the stem of an orchid, swinging. Sometimes He smelled as though He was wrapped in leaves that looked dead but weren't, quite. Sometimes He flowered. Sometimes He whistled like the silver pot on the stove with its stacked black handles twisted shut. Sometimes He balanced like a violin on your arm though your fingers couldn't quite close around Him the way they used to. Sometimes you stubbornly kept on reaching. You keep reaching still and grasping though the days march on sunlit, their ankles gripped by grief.

Changing

by Marion Mutala

It's that time to reflect
A passing moment- often after the first night frost
The images of trees
changing of the autumn leaves
So perfect in design - hues radiating
Orange, red, yellow glow
Only God can make a tree, Joyce Kilmer says...
but we can preserve, grow, care, harvest seeds and spread
branches of life
Rays of CO2

Rooster Song

by Sally Ito

Resurrection is a rooster song, pulling dawn
out of the ground like the early bird it is,
and all that is earth in you will feel daylight
on droop darkened hill, on withered-as-grass burdened shoulders.
Only the winged and raucous can arouse the living
from death-sleep, awaken the Peter-person
who has thrice denied and who in repentance
for wilful ignorance marks the fiery hackles
of the cock's crowing body like a hangman's noose
that tightens with conviction your throat til you, too must cry out
He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today

The Girl on the Trike

by Sarah Trevor

Today the centre of this Mexican city is not as busy as on weekdays and my husband and I stroll easily along the sidewalk. Perhaps not so easily because the surface is narrow as are the streets and there are always obstacles in the oldest part of the city. Projections like the bay grille of a window or the step up to a doorway. Then there are depressions when the level changes for no apparent reason or it slopes so cars can enter hidden garages. We are used to watching our step and are in no hurry en route for a Sunday afternoon chamber recital and stop at a crossroads to observe an open door on the opposite corner, where a little girl emerges, wheeling a tricycle out onto the sidewalk.

As grandparents, our helicopter tendencies instantly kick into high alert for the girl is tiny, perhaps as young as three, and certainly not yet five-years-old. From indoors comes an adult voice, the tone instructional, and the girl's reply suggests obedience to our low-level Spanish competency. The authority with which the child mounts her trike and proceeds to peddle down the sidewalk, transports me from Mazatlan to post-World War II London. I am heading for Mill Hill's High Street with thruppence in my fist. Every bit as confident as this Mexican girl, I was on a mission and so is she. I see my husband's smile and know he has just revisited his childhood. We follow the trike.

Now the girl must cross a street, but the sidewalk is high, more than a foot above the road surface. However, she has thought ahead and neatly uses a slope to get down. Now she is peddling snug to the sidewalk, and when she reaches the crossing, she stops to let a car pass. She has done this before. She continues over, her little knees pumping up and down, and uses another slope, quick as a whistle, to get back onto the sidewalk.

My basket was a wicker oval, just the right size for a four-year-old to carry on her arm. The girl's trike has a built-in wire basket at the back, perfect for our youngster's needs. On this long uninterrupted stretch, her head turns from side to side and she takes in the colours and sights like any Sunday driver, until the next crossing where the section ahead presents a complication. Here the sidewalk is too narrow for a tricycle and a high concrete planter continues for a nearly a block.

Undaunted, she proceeds alongside this. There are pedestrians using the street who walk beside her, clearly solicitous, without a hint of control. Is it respect? Is what we are observing the imperceptible support that total strangers gave youngsters such as she, children learning to spread their wings, the norm when we were young?

When the little girl gets to the next cross road, handling it all with aplomb, I can almost hear my voice saying, "off you get now, and I'll lift your trike up to the sidewalk." But that voice is silent and besides, she has reached her destination, a corner tienda.

Having made her purchase, her feet in their flip flops return to the pedals and in her blue shorts and white blouse, the girl strikes a merry figure peddling home. As she disappears into a group of pedestrians, I remember my pride, returning from the greengrocer, with a bunch of watercress for our tea-time sandwiches tucked in my basket. What treat, I wonder, will result from the girl's purchase? The can of condensed milk she transports home in the basket of her tricycle.

Strong Bones

By M.J. Graham

We picked you up today Dad
Carried away a heavy load
The weight of your ashes matched
the weight of our sorrow

We talked about your strong bones
Bones consisting of living cells
embedded in a mineralized organic matrix

Now your bones are concentrated
Consecrated in our memories

Our Earth keeps calling us Home

by Anne Campbell

She loves us so much, that part of her gone missing
Oh once she was willing to give us up
to air earth and sky above
but she can't help herself, wants us back
and we too, all the time
yearning for her in mountains,
grain fields a clear green forest
all of nature her word calling us home

The Mountie in the Tailor Shop

by Bert Almon

He tugged and tugged till his face
turned as red as the dress tunic
he was trying to button over his belly.
The seamstress stood alongside him
in the long mirror, shaking her head,
chalk and tape measure in her hand.

There's no more left to let out,
she said, there is no more fabric.
All the seams were unseamed,
the gatherings ungathered.
He looked sadly at his image,
locked in a glass cell. He got his man,
but it was a man and a half.

Climbing Beartooth

by Brandon Fick

U.S. Route 212: "The most beautiful drive in America."
They weren't lying – paradise is vista, freedom is summit,
Switchbacks deadly – from Red Lodge to Cooke City,
Yellowstone's gates, passage is removed from material ilk.
Look and quiver at majesty tinged with destiny,
This is the continent's virginal backbone, protruding
And reducing machines to specks in a Moran painting,
Striking vision with surreal gravity and glacial till.
When you crest the pass, step out and suffocate with awe,
Altitude is a wind elixir of perfection and your chest
Heaves with tundra lichen and granite and ozone,
Cold injecting your lungs with primeval geology.
Descent is a stroke to the divine cortex, yet heaven
Persists and does not stoop for wayward cretins.

What Is It?

by Carla Braidek

is it the sun as it sparks off the snow in the ditch?
or that movement in the bush that becomes a blue jay?

is it the sway of the spruce tops yearning to walk?
or the rainbows in my eyelashes as I squint into the
sun?

what is it that makes me throw my arms up in a big
two-armed wave to the clouds just as a truck slows

for the corner surprise in the eyes of the man
good-natured enough to throw both

his arms in the air his truck
for that moment wild and free

Anger Cleaned My House

by Carol Gossner

Anger cleaned my house today

Her quick precise strokes
swept dust and cobwebs
from the veranda
purged relentlessly from cupboard shelves

give away
toss

Anger scrubbed unforgiving floors on hands and knees
only slightly appeased by self-inflicted pain

Anger goaded a country walk into a jog
delighted in the small stones that bit my feet on the
gravel road

Music failed to evict her

Feet stompin, cupboard slammin,
potato peelin, counter washin,
linoleum stripping, waxing, rinsing
Blues

Anger does it all
She does
Anger does it all

A Culvert Poem

by Carrie Stene

New road to a new home
empty promises
lies, disappointment, disillusionment
suppressed truth
restrained, dammed up
could only hold back for so long
before havoc, flooding
as the new road's resistance eroded the roads surrounding it

Leaving down the road with our possessions
new home becoming my former home
new road is torn apart, ripped, slashed
for a pass to open up
a culvert, long and silver inserted where the pressure is greatest
funneling the pent up pain
energy bursting through
water forcing its way under the road we built to get to our new home
pushing away debris
forcing emotion to flow
pressure washing the dammed up hurt held in for so many years
push, push, push it all away

Four years later
water of tears restores the land to the way it was meant to be
soaks in, settles
smooths over once dry land and levels out
power struggles dissipated
finding my place, my peace
balance, equilibrium, fluid emotions
truth, whose truth?
doesn't really matter anymore
new calm, order restored
as water passes freely under the road

Balance

by Dave Margoshes

Atlas carries the world on his back
and what a world it, filled with sorrows
running like rivers and joys as deep as glaciers
grinding their way toward the Equator.
All things being equal, the joys compensate
for the sorrows, one might think, except
that things never are equal. I know this
all too well, which is why I keep shifting
the world from shoulder to shoulder,
trying to find the proper balance. Balance,
yes, that's the key.

Abundance

by dee Hobsbawn-Smith

Bless the burnt-on crusts of last night's turkey gravy still puddling the stove. Bless the bulging freezer under the stairs threatening to explode with leek soup, firefighters' chili and cassoulet, confited duck legs, roasted Brandywine tomato sauce and umami-rich beef broth.

Bless the rainbow chard going amber, violet and flabby in the fridge's vegetable drawer, rinds of Parmesan and triple-crème Brie bluing under the cheese bell, sourdough starter about to envelop the shelf in funk. Bless the quart jars of laird lentils and black turtle beans, great northern beans and spotted appaloosa beans, split green and yellow peas, lambent in the top cupboard.

Bless the crocks of dark-roast coffee beans waiting to release their morningness. Bless the red-starred boxes of kosher salt, of whole cloves in their mentholated sweetness, of crisp wheat and rice and amaranth crackers, of last year's uneaten Halloween caramels, the loose tea in tins, all its smoky Lapsang black and fermented oolong and red hibiscus splendours. Bless the copper bowls for egg whites and jamming, the hand-pounded serving dishes for biryani and rogan josh, the drawer crammed with muddle of glass jars and lids.

Bless the bottled vinegars at attention beside the stove, all the mothers and daughters of fruit and grape skins, berry must and sleeping herbs, the salt-fermented dills and kimchi in brine, sweet gherkins tilting up their pert tips, pickled beets amethyst and amber in glass, sour cherries singing rummy harmonies. Bless the yoghurt topped with whey, bless the steel cut oats and flaccid barley flakes, Manitoba maple syrup, half-gone loaf of challah unbraiding its locks, Jonagold apple tart's caramel jacket, the last of the late-harvest candied yams.

Bless the crocks of hand tools resting beside the stove, whisk and olivewood spatula, turner and spoon, carving fork and diamond steel. Bless the knives at peace on the wall magnet, boning and chef's, paring and bread and utility. Bless the pots dangling from the pot rack, cast iron, copper and stainless, the stock pot, the sauté pan, the brazier, the rondeau.

Bless the stacks of nesting ceramic bowls, lemon-yellow, orange and apple-red. Bless their willingness to receive. Bless their bellies, hungry to be filled.

Lemon Meringue Pies

by Carrie Ann Schemenauer

The lemon meringue pies sat on the piano
daffodil yellow
meringue shimmering
like sun on water

I watched as the golden raindrops formed
one by one on the top

all was well in our home
my Mother had made pies for the Sunday meal
they sat waiting for us to enjoy
on our piano that represented the finer things of life

I can still see the lemon meringue pies after all these years

I think of my Mother who made them
and now I make those same pies for my husband
and my family

I make those pies
to show that there is still sunshine in the world
still time for visiting
and time to celebrate living

Tissue Paper Flowers

by L.K. Blakeney

I sit beside
a blue jeaned bridesmaid

craft a small accordion
from squares of tissue

fold it
fingers fumbling
over under
back and forth

tie a string
around the middle
pull it tight

carefully
I separate the layers

fluff them up
make them bloom

pretty pink
baby blue
virgin white

then attach them
to big sister's car

and pray it doesn't rain

#traumabombs

by Shauna Eveleigh Harris

Quiet in the bedroom
with one last check
to feel connected;
to see who had what for supper,

I don't really care but it gives
the illusion of knowing, of being known,
being a part of something bigger;
so when we talk tomorrow,
I can be included,
inspired,
mostly envious and judgemental.

*Why can't I have a life like that?
Trips to Hawaii or Mexico or Disneyland or Banff
Well, I can but
they look so much prettier than me.*

I scroll,
down
then am
#traumabomb-barded

Little kids wearing wool sweaters against
a brick wall in Romania or Estonia, somewhere brutal like that
standing in line, waiting for their turn
to be slapped in the face by their teacher, a pot-bellied ogre.

CTV Edmonton news
a little girl raped and beaten, left for dead;
she didn't die.

Intolerance liked and shared
by those I thought were friends;
complaints about immigrants and refugees, indigenous people
like they know what they're talking about.

Now I lie awake sick and angry.

What's wrong with the world?
and me?

Rubato at the Circus

by Tea Gerbeza

You walk through the circus.
The Illusionist is faceless, a splatter painting
wielding particles from familiar faces
of your past. Illusions
of tranquility sweep over your heart,
reality beats unsettling

rhythms throughout your body, unsettling
neural activity. There are rows of circus
tents rising, mimicking the thumpthumpthump of your heart.
Can you focus yet? Black and white paintings
make up the coating of the tent stripes, illusions
made by you and the magician in battle. Your face

pulses. You are aware that the face
in the mirror is not your own. Unsettling
memories resurface, creating illusions
amongst magicians. Decades of circus
history pumps through the moving painting
of the contortionist. You watch her move her heart

into her head. You wonder where your heart
should be placed, should it be your face?
You are aware that the painting's
iron gates are meant to unsettle
but you are mystified into believing the circus
is real. He produces illusions

to make you stay. Controlled by the Illusionist,
Acrobats palpate your heart.
They swing on the vessels, circus
around the blurry face
of the one who hurt you. Unsettling
memories stem from the painting

of yourself you keep perfecting. The painting
yearns to trapeze over the illusions
of calm, regulated heart beats. It unsettles
you to know that your heart
beats wildly here. Your face
disappears with the last act.

He continues painting your heart
beat. The only illusion is the split face
that unsettles you at the circus.

"Mr. Sky"

by Vernie Reifferscheid

I say, "the moon is tilted wrong"
when nothing wants to work for you

everyone gets these moments at times
the sky seems to be okay with everything

not a star in the sky, only clouds
I remember other sayings that are around

but when the moon rides the dark sky
and we know, tomorrow is coming

the sun will be shining brightly
and the birds come out to sing their songs

it looks like a wonderful day ahead—
and not a care in the world, there is

"MR. SKY" leave us a message,
Please, "MR. SKY."

the all out joy of jumping

by Lynda Monahan

before the stroke
you were all business and airplanes
all briefcases and portfolios
schedules you were
and boardroom meetings
a long line of Starbucks coffee cups

and you listened to three piece suits
and the endless talk of telephones
the tap tap of the keyboard
constant in your hearing
you spoke the language
of an all-too-adult world
full of aphorism and cliché

and when the stroke
knocked you back to childhood
you became the all out joy of jumping
and the taste of snow sparkles
on your outstretched tongue
a spin of yo yo you are now
a burst of bubbles and laughter
in the lemony light of summer

and now you listen to blue jays
yammering in the trees
and the quick flick of chickadees
you speak the language
of stones and forest trails

you speak the perfect stillness of snow

Winners of the Haiku Highjack Competition

Held at the Society launch, April 3, 2018

#1

by Mandie Hagel
June Jacobs
Jordan Richardson
Jessie Sperling

winter's wind
whips the pollen of sweet
clover fields
covering the weed tops
particles of earth nestled
gently
tiptoeing the covered earth
licking up my
strawberry ice cream
you used to be mine
sharing a beautiful treat
It's delightful.

#2

by Shauna Eveleigh Harris
Bailey Wicks
Tessa Thomas
Sarah Trevor

As the low thunder shook
I was beneath
All the treasured volumes lit
Petals from a cherry tree
Smell of well-thumbed tomes

Hunched over parchment
I do Sudoku
As I wear my kimono
Sipping on green tea
By one small candle.

Alison Piwowar
Allan Neilsen
Andrew Adair
Angela Blaylock
Angeline Schellenberg
Anne Campbell
Annette Bower
Anthony Schellenberg
Arlene Mighton
Bailey Wicks
Bernadette Wagner
Bert Almon
Bob MacKenzie
Brandon Fick
Cameron Muir
Carla Braidek
Carol Gossner
Carrie Ann Schemenauer
Carrie Stene
Cathy Fenwick
Dave Margoshes
Debby Adair
dee Hobsbawn-Smith
Dee Robertson
DeeJay Waldner
Denise Bartel
Emma Tessier
Eric Neufeld
Geneva Grest
gillian harding russell
Helen Mourre
James Trettwer
Jessie Monz
Jessi Sperling
Joanna Lilley
Jordan Richardson
Joseph Meakin
June Jacobs
Karen Lee Lewis
Kathie Cram
Kathlyn Zales
Keara Leong-Machielse
Lorna K. Blakeney
Lynda Monahan
M.J. Graham
Mandie Hagel
Marie Griffith
Marion Mutala
Mikayla Burghardt
Mitchel Rohrke
Patricia Peters
Patti Kovisto
Rhiannon Brady
Sally Ito
Sarah Trevor
Sharon Bird
Shauna Eveleigh-Harris
Tea Gerbeza
Tessa Thomas
Vernie Reifferscheid

