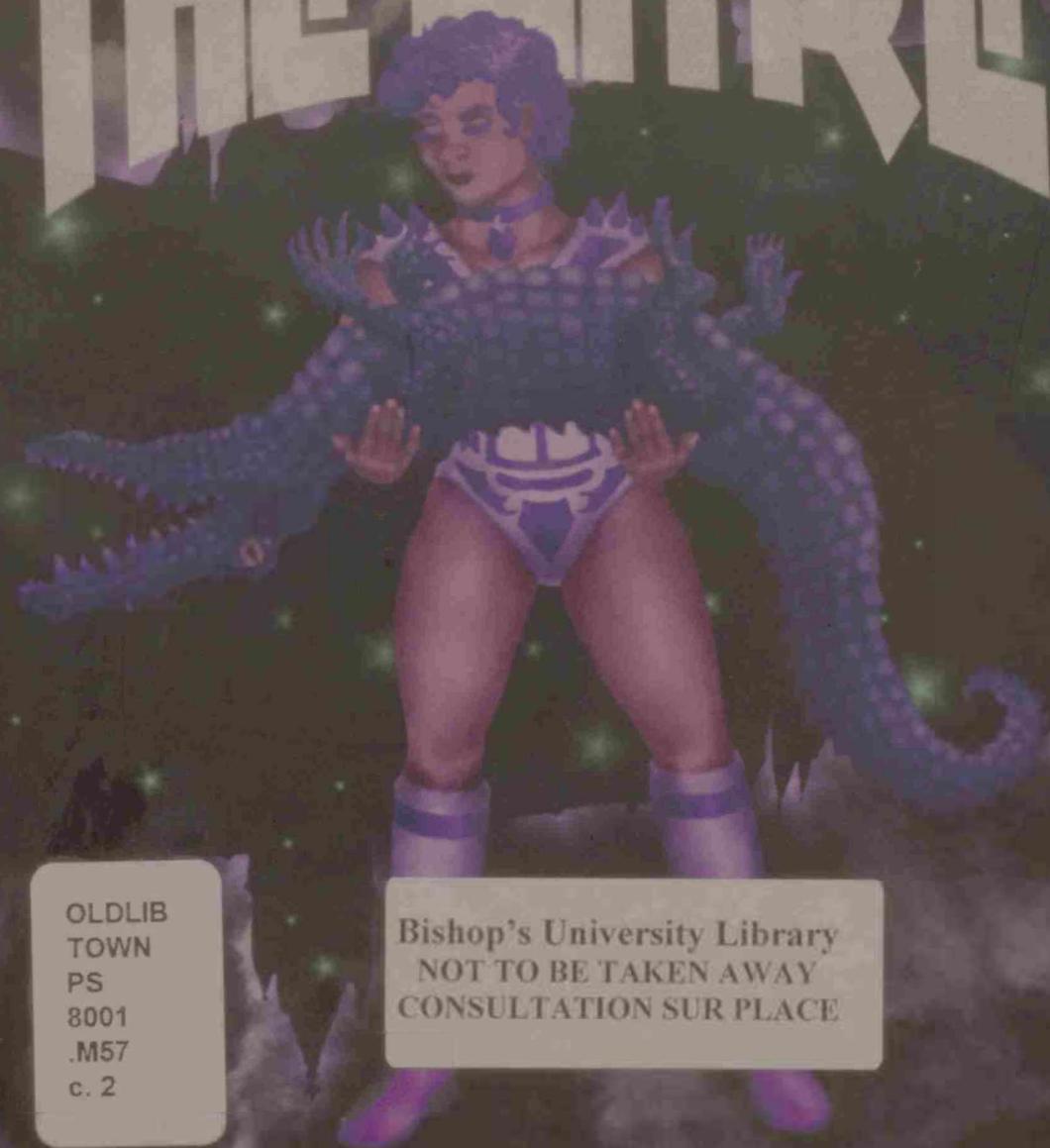


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FANTASTIC TALES

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THE MITRE

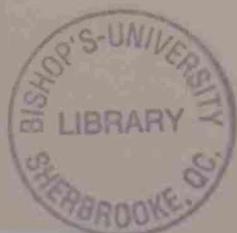


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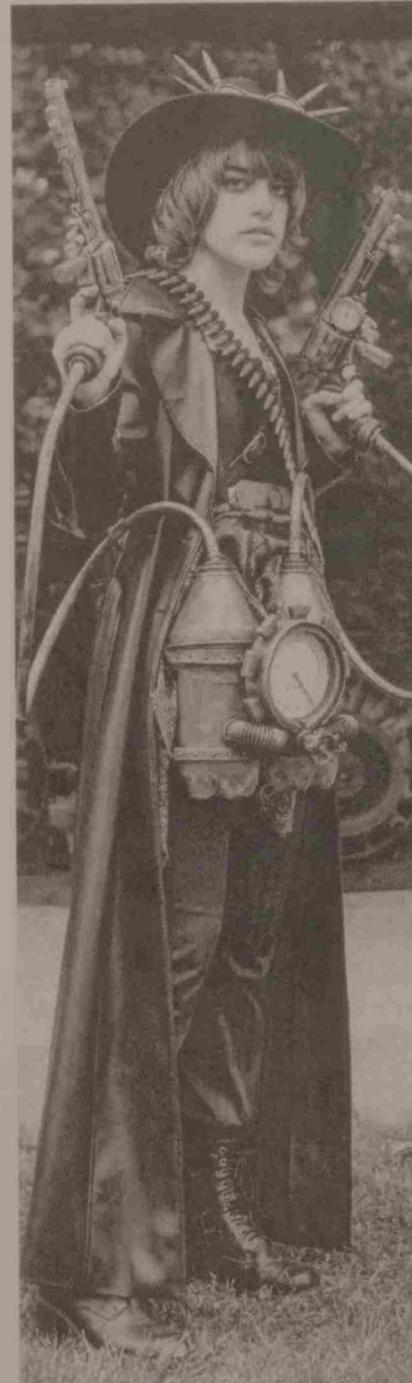
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The SRC, for funding what would otherwise be an InDesign file buried in a laptop—or far less copies of a much shorter book.

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Zach Shron, for convincing me to apply in the first place and for believing in me from 700 km away. I love you.

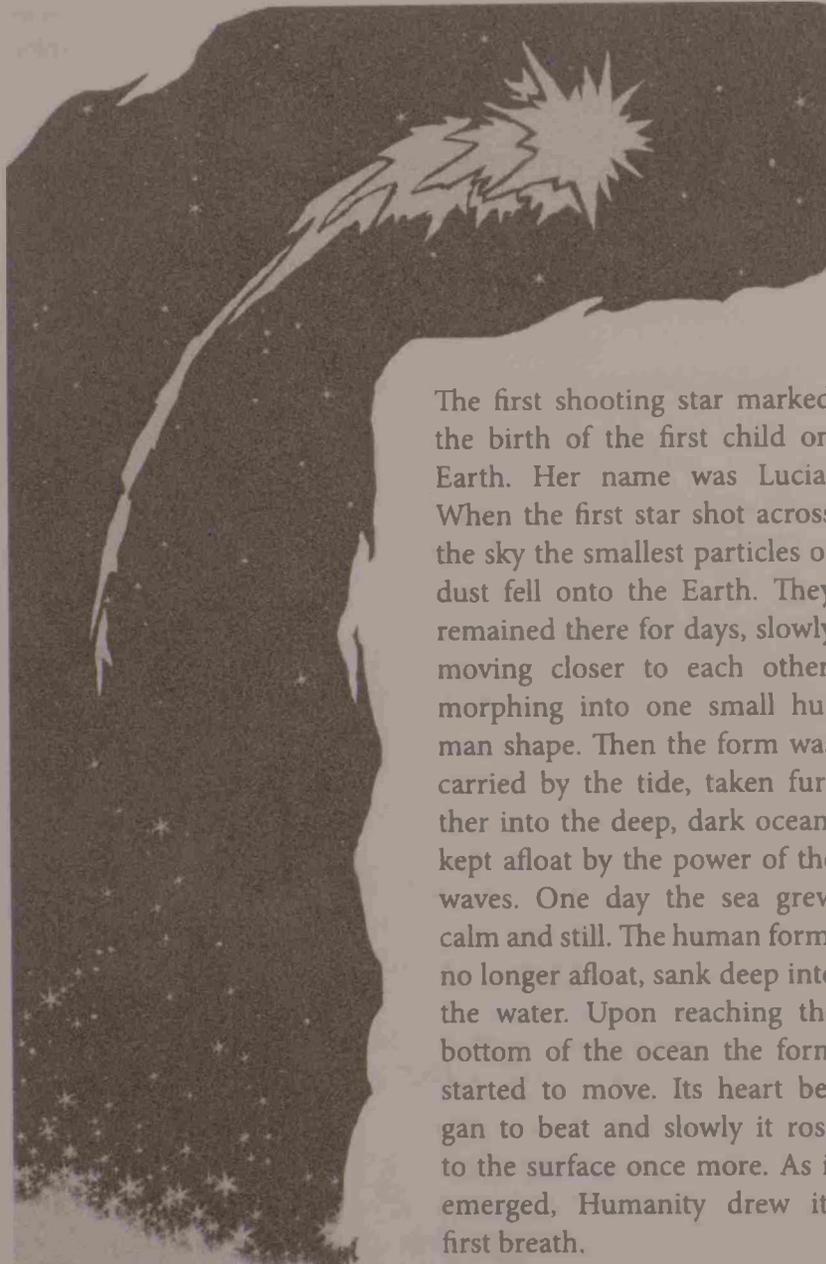
The 123rd edition of the Mitre is dedicated to my mum and dad,

who always told me to do what I love—

and here I am.

A MYTH ABOUT HUMANITY

Giulia Xuereb



The first shooting star marked the birth of the first child on Earth. Her name was Lucia. When the first star shot across the sky the smallest particles of dust fell onto the Earth. They remained there for days, slowly moving closer to each other, morphing into one small human shape. Then the form was carried by the tide, taken further into the deep, dark ocean, kept afloat by the power of the waves. One day the sea grew calm and still. The human form, no longer afloat, sank deep into the water. Upon reaching the bottom of the ocean the form started to move. Its heart began to beat and slowly it rose to the surface once more. As it emerged, Humanity drew its first breath.

STRANDED ON ANOTHER PLANET, I COME ACROSS MY CHILDHOOD HOME

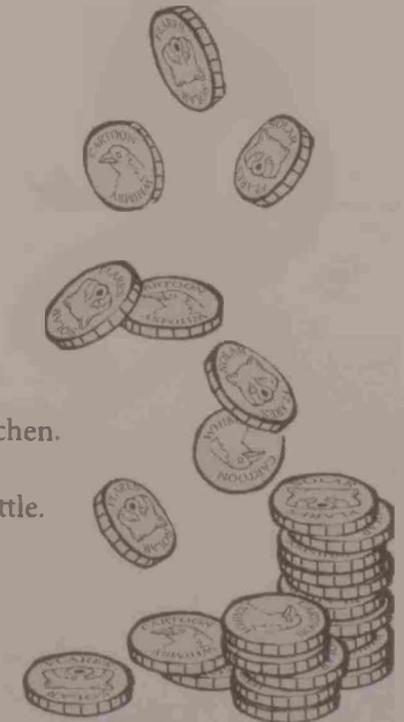
Jeff Parent

First thing stands out?
A penny.
Wide as a tractor wheel,
thin as the air,
hung on the wall over the bed
and Queenside out.
She whispers coarse secrets
and nursery stories
that smell like crayons
or tar.

Meanwhile,
two magpies,
mad-eyed and crooked
with cartoon whimsy,
pluck dark coins
from a rough hole
in the upturned gut
of a piggy bank.
Swallow each one whole
with cash register sounds.

I hear a box of cereal,
walk down through the shakes,
find a family of raccoons in the kitchen.
"Visiting from the attic," says one,
takes a hard swig from the milk bottle.
Others, small and scraggly,
pass around the free toy.
"Watch this," says another
tugs my sleeve.
She's wearing a tiara.

She pulls a penny from my ear.
Flips it, eyes it,
shrugs,
"Always tails."
She licks it, bites it,
announces,
"No school today, Slugger."
Weatherman says solar flares
again."
The roof of my mouth
tastes of copper.



MRS WHITAKER'S WEREWOLF

Emily Baldwin

On Thursday evening Mrs Whitaker makes sure all the doors of the house are locked, and changes into her least favourite nightgown. (She doesn't rip her clothes, not anymore, but it doesn't hurt to be cautious.) She considers sleeping in the bed this time, but decides against it, as she has no desire to buy new sheets. Instead, she gathers her collection of rummage sale pillows and blankets and lays them out in the bathtub before gingerly climbing in. She sleeps through the change, her paws twitching in memory of some long-ago chase.



THE MARINE BIOLOGIST

Giulia Xuereb

It was during the late hours of the morning, I had been enjoying the sunlight in Stanley Park for just over an hour when the sound of hurried footsteps caught my attention. A skinny, middle-aged man was running right behind me holding a large bundle to his chest. He had coarse, tanned skin, and wore a black jumper and a panicked expression on his weather-beaten face. His mop of grizzled grey hair, accompanied by eyes that darted from bench to bench, gave him the appearance of an eccentric scientist who had decided to go for a walk halfway through an experiment. He told me later that he was a marine biologist. As he came to a halt in front of me I realised that the bundle he was carrying contained a squirming baby.



NEWTON'S LAWS OF MOTION

Kristy Bockus

Newton's first law: an object either remains at rest or continues to move at a constant velocity until acted on by an External force.

I never expected Ace to be an External. I should have known, looking back at it now. His eyes should have given him away from the start. There was a spark in them that burned so bright I was blind to everything else when I looked at him. The cigarette that perched between his lips faded into the background; the smell of smoke shifted, no longer making my nose twitch but encouraged a deep inhale instead. I thought I was finally at State Constant, that it was time to join everyone else that had settled. I was such a fool.

I wasn't at Rest. No one is really at Rest anymore, not since

our minds filled with questions that burned so bright they kept us tossing and turning even after the sky had gone dark. Attempts were made, of course, to regain State Rest—meditation, yoga, drugs—but humanity had become too restless. So we continued to move, thinking of the paths we'd journey down, yet always alert to the speed of the ones before us. Some people never get hit by an External, others by many. I thought I'd had my share, but then Ace came. I tried to steer clear of him—honest, I did. The thing about Externals is that they're persistent. He forced me to stop.

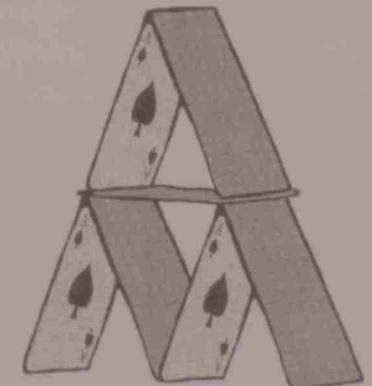
Newton's second law: the power of an External force is calculated by the mass of an object multiplied by acceleration: $F=ma$.

Ace was never supposed to be part of the equation. It didn't make any sense. His mass did not equate to the weight of the words that hung heavy in the air after escaping chapped, bleeding lips and settling into my mind. It was a weight that bore down on me every day, drooping my shoulders a little more with each additional word, buckling my knees as I forced one foot in front of the other. No one could know the truth behind the weight I carried. I thought it made me safe; surely, there would never be anything strong enough to counter it. Ace didn't

make sense. It shouldn't have been possible. The numbers didn't add up. But then again, perhaps it was me, tiny and fragile, beneath all those layers that allowed him to become an External. He stripped me of my words. The acceleration of it all snatched the air from my lungs and made it impossible for me to cover my nakedness. There was no time to think. He thrust me forward at a speed I knew not how to control. It was exhilarating. It was new. I let him take my hand and pull me forward, the wind painting my cheeks red. We ran together.

Newton's third law: for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.

The thing is, Ace may be my External, but it turns out that I'm also his.



TRUE LOVE'S KISS

By TINA GOLAB

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away there lived a princess so beautiful that one would fall in love with her at the mention of her name.

Her hair was as black as the night, her eyes as green as the sea, and her skin so white that snow seemed dark in comparison.

The princess was so exquisite, both inside and out, that it was no surprise when a prince from a large, neighbouring kingdom began to court her.

The princess' father, the king, was no doubt overjoyed at having such a promising young man show interest in his daughter. In the hopes that the prince and the princess would fall in love, the king threw a royal ball in their honour every night for two years.

After two years of sweeping the princess off her feet, the prince finally got down on one knee and asked his beloved if she would marry him.

Naturally she said yes!

The entire kingdom rejoiced



for the union of the prince and princess.

Everyone from both kingdoms was invited to the wedding celebration; the young and old, rich and poor, law-abiding citizens and criminals, everyone wanted to celebrate.

That is, all but one.

As in every fairy tale there has to be a wicked witch and this one is no exception.

The wicked witch Pertiernyu, beautiful to behold on the outside, but foul and evil within, fancied the prince and had made her feelings known to him. She promised to give him anything he wanted, whenever he wanted. But the prince could see the wickedness that lied within and so he spurned her and turned her away.

Furious at the prince's rejection, Pertiernyu vowed to get her revenge on him.

But how?

When the prince and the princess were officially wed, Pertiernyu silently rejoiced for she had found her revenge. She would act when the princess moved into the prince's palace.

The princess, who had been thrilled when the prince proposed, now moved to his king-

dom, where their seat of power would be. The prince declared that she could bring as many belongings to the castle as she wished. But the princess insisted that all she needed was her faithful dog, who never left her side. Everything else she could live without because she would be with her beloved prince.

On the day the princess moved into the castle, the prince held a ball in her honour. As was custom, everyone was invited. It was such a glorious celebration that the party lasted three days and three nights.

On the third night, after hours of dancing, the princess sat down for a drink to replenish her thirst.

Pertiernyu, disguised as an old hag, offered the princess a glass of rare wine in honour of her marriage, a wine so rare that there was only enough for one cup.

The princess thanked Pertiernyu and drank the wine eagerly, for she was parched.

Little did the princess know, however, that the wine was poisoned!

As soon as the princess finished the wine, she fell to the floor . . . dead! And Pertiernyu

vanished into the night, cackling all the way for her successful revenge on the prince.

The prince, of course, was devastated. He begged and pleaded for anyone to revive his wife. But no one could help.

He refused to have the princess buried. He was certain that one day his wife would be saved. In the meantime, she was laid out on her bed, where her husband visited every day, while her dog sat and never left her side.

Then, one stormy night, a merchant came stumbling into the castle, asking for food, wine, and a room for the night while she waited for the storm to pass. In return for this kindness, the merchant would help the prince bring his wife back to life.

The prince eagerly obliged, and after the woman had had her fill she told the prince what he must do.

First the prince must travel to distant lands and battle fearsome creatures. The creature that did *not* die once defeated would hold the answer to saving the princess.

The prince left immediately in search of such a being, leaving the faithful dog to guard his

love.

The prince travelled many miles and faced many beasts. He slew wise dragons and duelled with magnificent unicorns. He killed gruesome griffins and felled grotesque giants, fished for melodic mermaids, and trapped terrible trolls. But all of them perished.

It was only after he'd faced a leprechaun in an exhausting battle of wits that he discovered how to save his wife.

The leprechaun, begging for mercy, for he could no longer bear the sharp mind of the prince, told him that in order to save the princess she must receive true love's kiss.

Of course! How could he have been so stupid?

The prince raced back to his palace, and ran up the steps to his wife's bedside. He looked into her eyes, leaned in, and kissed her softly on the lips.

He pulled back, waiting to see his wife's eyes flicker open . . . but nothing happened.

He leaned in and kissed the princess again . . . and again, and again, and again. But nothing happened.

The prince held his head in his hands, fighting back tears

as he faced the fact that his wife was truly gone.

The princess' ever-loyal dog howled as the prince cried. The dog then turned to his mistress, and with one paw on the bed, he nudged her limp hand, and licked it.

All of a sudden, the princess' fingers began to twitch. Soon she was lifting her arm to scratch the dog's head. She opened her eyes and threw herself at the dog, hugging him

close to her with tears rolling down her cheeks, thanking him for saving her, telling him that he was, and always would be, her true love.

The prince sat there, baffled by what had just happened.

He said to the princess that *he* thought he was her true love.

The princess smiled and told her prince that she did love him, but she simply loved her dog more.



ANY GIVEN TONGUE

Jeff Parent

Here's an example of a tongue,
tagged and boxed,
with all the other tongues,
each in various states of freshness
or trauma
or decay.

The latter, of course, occurs with the really old ones;
ancient Egyptian, Babylonian, that sort of thing.
So this one, recently acquired by donation
is still shiny, slightly tacky to the touch,
and a white scar on the tip
where its former owner bit through it
when, aged eleven, he fell off his bike.

They're developing techniques
using lasers and digital rendering
to recreate the last word spoken
by any given tongue.
It's very advanced and precision is key
but there's a fringe notion—
wildly unscientific—
the lab techs talk about over drinks.
By night, they say, when the lab is dark and still,
to catch the faint click of a tongue's last word
all you need is a good ear, but
that's unlikely.
We keep those at a lab upstate.

WHIP-POOR-WILL

Frank Willdig

That night we heard the whip-poor-will
sing just beyond our window sill,
clearly in the moonlit night,
close to us but out of sight.

'Twas something ancient that we heard,
articulate without a word,
speaking its arboreal tongue,
a voice I heard when I was young.

And far from any urban sprawl,
beyond the traffic's droning call
we knew this moment would be rare,
grasped one day it would not be there.

And will our children hear it still,
that music of the whip-poor-will?

**STATUS REPORT**

Aqil Henry-Cotnam

It's been at least twelve years since I returned home to Echo-163, a godforsaken cyborg planet.

In the early 30th century, humans exiled cyborgs from Earth, forcing them to settle on Echo, in the Andromeda Galaxy. Around the same time, Earth began decaying as a result of thousands of years of reckless endangerment to the humans' only home. This left them scrambling to find a new homeland. Eventually they found the perfect planet, Polaris, also located in Andromeda.

Simultaneously a rebel group called the PRA (Planetary Revolutionary Alliance) staged a coup against the central government on Echo and led the planet into a civil war. Millions of cyborgs were forced to flee, becoming refugees of the galaxy. With the outbreaks of violence and need for humanitarian aid, positions opened up in the Galactic Guard, or the Peacekeepers as they're known. I decided to enlist to make use of my talents.

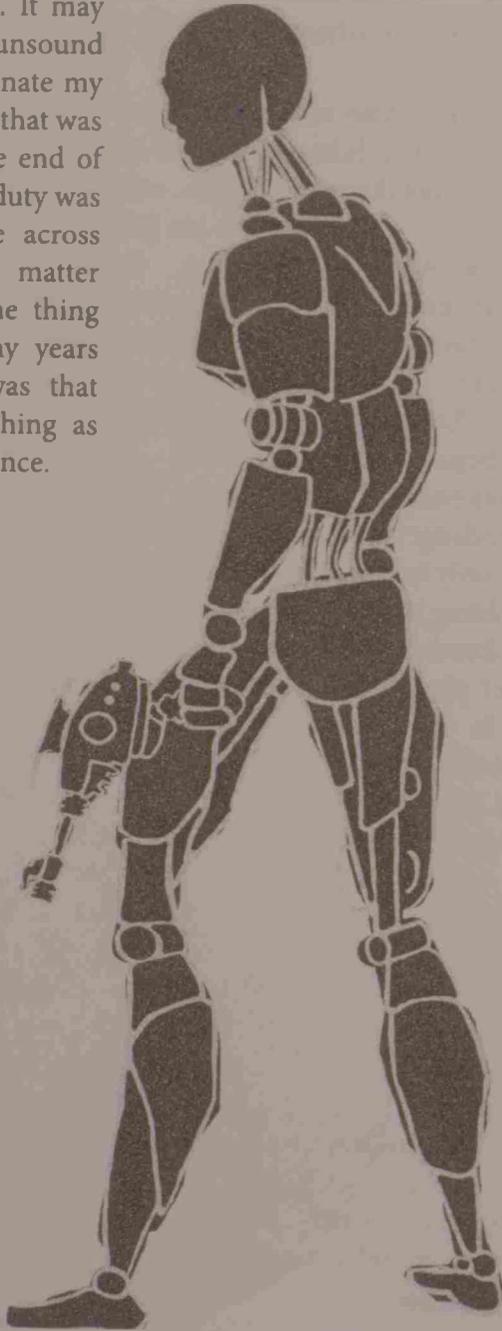
The day finally came when I had to ship out for my first mission, stationed on none other than Echo. The PRA was holding the planet's central control, exactly the area where our mission was focused. These regions were rampant with rebel violence, severely lacked food and clean water, and were becoming overpopulated.

Seeing Echo like this was hard for me. It was nothing like the planet I had left behind. Landmarks I recalled as beautiful were now rubble, slowly decaying as if from an ancient time. We set up our base camp in what used to be an early education centre. It was nearly sundown, and we were planning our initiative for the next morning. We were ordered to rest up for the big day ahead of us.

I was up before dawn that morning. The mission would be a long one. The cyborgs of Echo had suffered so much already, the least we could do was restore some order and help these poor, pathetic beings.

That day my mission was to

exterminate the unruly cyborgs of Echo-163. It may seem ethically unsound that I had to terminate my fellow cyborgs, but that was my mission. At the end of the day, my sworn duty was to keep the peace across the universe, no matter what. Although one thing I learned in all my years of peacekeeping was that there is no such thing as peace, only compliance.



MUD

Katie Manners

When I was seven, I made a pact with spit and palms and hurried nods that I would let nothing but mud fill my lungs. I was driven by fear, like everyone was—the fear of infection and of alienation. In my dreams, I would sneeze and wake up bathed in sweat. I buried deeper and deeper to escape the dust that floated above, but still I dreamt of its bodily intrusion.

When I was eight, I found slips of paper scrawled in sinister juices. No clumps or clods ate away at the script and I studied the associated pulp intently. At once I felt a sharp *pang* between my eyes that pulsed fear throughout my being. And so I did what I was taught to do: bury the flesh beneath the mud; if the alien cannot be destroyed, it must be suppressed. I dove so deep with crushed paper in hand that at once I figured myself lost, but such thoughts screamed blasphemy—*mud is existence, beyond which is only death*. The paper read:

BLOW OUT SALE
90% OFF

When I was nine, Skid disappeared. Not right before my eyes, but in my mind. Like an air bubble *pop*, he was suddenly gone from me. I felt the mud dredge up around him before he was surrendered to the dust. I was alone. My fears realized, I searched my palm for the spit of aged agreements, but I saw only dirt. Dried.

When I was ten, they consumed my arm—those minuscule souls that float through the mud with no need to dig. *Cursed*, some call them. *Formed in the air*. An alien occurrence that, every so often, brings about calamity. The dirt that appeared a year before had spread from palm to wrist and from wrist to shoulder. Mud could not cleanse the wound, though I tried. Instead dirt blossomed until flesh gave way to bone.

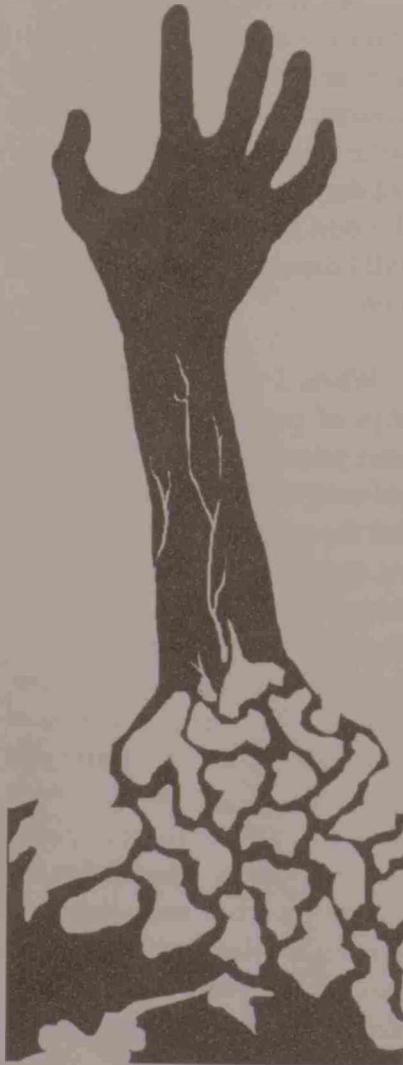
I sensed ink-scrawled paper floating through the mud, seemingly untouched after all these years—once a warning, now a reminder. I was punished for my curiosity, and justly so.

I am eleven, and I can feel dust on my skin. The harshest breeze licks fingertips that sprout from the mud. One arm consumed, the other exposed. No palms left for pacts. No fingers left to burrow. The mud has a way of cleansing its infections, and I am one of them. I suck in my surroundings and my lungs grow heavy, but the swirling dust about my fingers does not slow. My skin is chapped, my knuckles cracked. And then all at once, I am wrenched from the mud.

I am not twelve, and I am not breathing.

I am not thirteen, and I am not afraid.

I am not seven, and I am not buried deep in the mud.



THE ONLY HUMANS

Connor Richter

The Beetle bears a mark:
 a sinful stain,
 that twists its form until the beast called Only Human is born.
 Its shell is struck,
 a splinter splits
 to show the skin, soft flesh, and bone.
 The fetal figure fights and squirms,
 it frees itself, but from sunlight burns.
 So it drapes itself in a dim disguise,
 to hide the world from its own dark savagery.
 These clever clothes tell the lie that its weakness comes from its
 own mortality.

The Beetle never used to cry.
 Pain drops would bead and fall away against its hollow
 exoskeleton.
 But now a conflict of wonder and suffering consumes the beasts
 called Only Human—
 it clogs its eyes like an intestine filled with gelatine.
 To satiate this lonely contrast
 it contracts a voice—
 but only to declare itself prophetic.
 How pathetic.

Now Only Human roams across this world.
 It creates to destroy.
 And hates, to love.

With all the noise its tools make,
 the beast's own head is heavy with an ache.
 A tumour grows,
 and now the only thought the beast can make, is that

it knows . . .
 it knows . . .
 it knows . . .

But despite this ignorant cancer,
 something unexpected came . . .
 from the Only Humans' spark of purity
 a stone formed within its heart.

It hatched itself and from this crude matter,
 gave life to a most luminous being.

This formless creature rose out of the Only Human carcass.

Free from the physical,
 it danced and intertwined with the infinite.

The other Only Humans were still trapped upon the ground.

They all stood watching . . .
 like a ghost caught in the headlights.



FLIVKITET

\
Matthew Duffy

the crash haks over.

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BEAN NIGHE

By EMILY BALDWIN

Laura poked her head into Susan's room.

"Well, I'm out. Don't wait up, okay?"

Susan narrowed her eyes. "That is *my* Nirvana T-shirt. You been going through my drawers again?"

Laura bit her lip and opened her eyes wide. "No, would I do a thing like that?"

Susan harrumphed.

"You left it on the floor in my bedroom," said Laura. "That makes it mine. Besides, I look hella cute and I don't have time to change my outfit before leaving. Bye!"

She waved cheerily and was out the apartment door before Susan could shout, "Be careful!" Susan waited until Laura was gone before cracking a smile. Even though that was Susan's favourite T-shirt (she had ripped up the back herself and stuck it together with safety pins), Laura had looked cute.

Susan couldn't say as much for herself. All her favourite clothes were dirty and she was

lounging around in a pair of old sweats. Glaring at the pile of dirty laundry behind the door, she thought to herself, "Well I may as well do it while I'm thinking of it."

The laundry room downstairs was empty except for an old woman in a ratty green sweat-shirt. Susan didn't recognize her, but then again there were forty apartments in her building and the old woman didn't look like she got out much. There was a faint smell coming from her laundry basket. Susan turned up her nose and picked the farthest machine. As she was shoving her underwear into the washer, she noticed the old woman take out a jar of salt. Watching out of the corner of her eye, she saw the woman carefully, almost reverently, remove a yellow T-shirt from her hamper. She rubbed salt around the collar and placed it in the wash.

Probably got wine stains on it, Susan thought to herself, but continued her spying.

Next the old woman reached into her hamper, and drew out a wife-beater with a red stain all down the front. It got the same

treatment as the yellow T-shirt before it. Salt was rubbed into the stains, and into the wash it went. The smell was getting stronger now, and the old woman drew out her next item: a policeman's uniform. Susan's heart jumped in her chest. This time, there was no pretending. There were three red splotches on the shirt: shoulder, gut, and heart. The old woman must have noticed, because she smiled over at Susan.

"Not to worry, duckie, not to worry," she said. "Yours isn't in here. Tell me, will you be going to the protest today?"

Susan shook her head no.

"All for the best, I suppose. Anyone you know going?"

Susan nodded her head yes.

"And why not you, love?"

"Not really my style. I've never been political."

The old woman smiled understandingly. "True, true. Best to stay neutral in these affairs, I think." She pulled out a tiny sundress, checked it for stains, and placed it in the wash unsalted. "I've got to wash them all, just the same. Now," she fixed Susan with a wry grin, "you get to ask me your questions."

"What?"

"Three for three, fair's fair. Ask."

Susan gulped as another policeman's shirt was pulled out of the hamper, this time with only a trace of blood on the collar.

"Who do those clothes belong to?"

"Lots of people, dearie. This one belongs to a young man named Toby. Bit of a troublemaker, always sticks up for his brother, though. This one belongs to Officer Blake. Nice, honest man, if prone to panic when in a tight spot. And this one..."

Susan stopped her as she held up the sundress.

"Thank you." She took a deep breath to collect her thoughts. "Why are you washing blood

out of the clothes?"

"They've got to look nice and clean when they meet their maker, the poor dears."

This opened up more questions than it answered, but Susan was determined to make her last question count. "What happened to all these people?"

"Not what *has* happened, what *will* happen." The old woman sighed. "Such a waste, such a waste. There's a battle coming, and not one fought by soldiers."

Susan shuddered. She stared at her washing machine, trying to will it to go faster. She no longer wanted to be in the same room as this woman. The smell of blood was almost choking her now, and she stopped her machine and shoved the wet clothes back into her hamper. She could always come back later, once the old woman was gone.

She rushed past the old woman, trying not to meet her eyes, and so didn't see the next item pulled out of the bloody hamper.

It was a Nirvana T-shirt, ripped up the back and held together with safety pins.



TROUBLE

Connor Richter

The trouble with trouble is that we searched
and then trouble found us,
trouble bound us,
trouble ground us into ground meat
when trouble became a thing to separate the ground from our feet
and then the word "trouble" lost its meaning
because the meaning was fleeting
and its departure caused our blood to stop speaking,
our emptiness became grieving,
our perspective started vanishing,
before totally leaving—
now we're just dry heaving.



THURSDAY

Taryn Buskard

I puked on a church . . .
I puked on a church, and you
called it poetic—

ironic, isn't it?
Creating the evidence of a sin, instead of confessing to one?

And while I'm busy confessing to things
I'll admit that I hate chocolate cake,
but I rather like you

. . . and I'm not sure why.



SPRING CLEANING

Asha-Maria Bost

I stand in front of the mirror
holding my thigh in my fingers
trying to catch the fat in one hand.

Red lines snake
like a maze expanding from my hips
to cover my inner thighs.

My inner thigh is dotted
in thumbprint-like valleys
and black scars from shaving.

I calculate the fat
I would have to shear off
in order to get the thigh gap.

One inch, two inches, maybe ten—
almost my full leg should be thinned—
but where are my bones?

There's a skinny girl inside
wearing short shorts running,
without feeling the thunder of thighs.

She's fed up with being stuck in this vessel,
fed up with clogged arteries,
sugar highs, and cheap tequila.

I feel like a washed up whale,
helpless as the water dries out,
hating the image in the mirror.

I feel like Undesirable No. 1,
wanted for murder but my crime
is how fast my body is inflating.

I yank my pants up like a tug of war,
jiggling my legs into each pant leg until
I've eased enough in to close the front button.

I could buy bigger jeans
but then I would have to stand
in the mirror all over again.



REPOSE

Laura Alessandrini



ONE BAD DAY DESERVES ANOTHER

By NICK WALLING

“Gormley! Get in here right now!”

Chuck really—*really*—didn’t want to get in there. But he was going to. Because he had to. His daughter was being difficult this morning and refused to go to school. It wasn’t the first time Chuck had been late for work, but this was the latest he’d ever been. He could sense Higgins losing his patience bit by bit, day after day. What could he do? Family came first. It wasn’t his fault Higgins fell apart. He hated the way the man said his name. He pronounced it as if there as an extra “o” in the middle. *Goormley*. It was subtle, but it was enough. Chuck took a minute to prepare himself for the verbal beat down he was about to receive and his eyes lingered on the picture he had taped to his cubicle wall. Whether she knew it or not, Lizzy got him through each and every day.

“Gormley! My office. Now!”

Chuck started to get up, but smacked his knee on the re-

tractable tray that held his keyboard. The jolt toppled his large coffee off the table and onto his pants. Chuck sighed. It hurt. He looked up at the picture of Lizzy. There was nothing he could do about this now. He wiped up what he could and made his way through rows upon rows of cubicles, each housing a person he didn't know—didn't *want* to know. He doubted they even counted as people while they were here. Drones. Slaves. They managed to imbue their blank cubicle spaces with bits of themselves—pictures, posters, toys, mugs, funny mouse pads, to-do lists, and god knows what other superficial crap they decided represented who they are—but nobody was really happy in a place like this. Chuck knew he wasn't different. Wasn't special. But he chose to pretend he was anyway.

"Gormley!"

Chuck opened the door to Higgins' office just as the final syllables left the bastard's mouth.

"Finally. What's your problem, Gormley? You arrive to work an hour late, you take your sweet-ass time getting to my office when you're called

and—what happened to your pants?"

"I'm sorry sir. I spilled coffee on them."

"That figures. Did you finish the reports at least?"

"No sir, I still have—"

"I don't care what you still have to do. Get it done. And stop coming in late."

"My daughter—"

"Spare me the sob story, Gormley. You start at 9 a.m., you be here at 9 a.m. End of discussion. Get back to work."

"Sir, I—"

"Look Gormley, I don't want to be the asshole, but you've forced my hand. You can't keep coming in late like this. Everyone has families. Everyone has problems. Deal with it like everyone else does. We're running a business here."

"My daughter was bawling her eyes out! What could I do! I needed to get her to school!"

"Number one rule of running a business, Gormley: someone is going to be unhappy. It doesn't matter what you do or what you decide. Oh! You're having a good day? Guaranteed someone else is having a bad one because of it. Guaranteed."

Chuck let loose a sigh and

left Higgins' office. Sighs occupied his mouth more frequently than words these days. He trudged back to his desk and sat down in his uncomfortable chair and did nothing. He was especially good at doing nothing. The constant buzz of co-workers and artificial lights annoyed him. The faint, musky smell of humanity barely diluted by the office's air circulation system annoyed him. He looked at Lizzy. He sighed, turned on his computer and pulled up the reports.

Lizzy looked up at her dad with eyes as wet as she could make them.

"I don't want to go to school!"

"Why not? Why don't you want to go to school?"

"I just don't! I don't like it!"

"I don't like work either. But I go anyway."

"So?"

"I'm going to be late, Lizzy. Please just get in the car."

"No."

Chuck sighed. He heard the front door of his house open and turned to see Jen march out. She didn't look happy.

"Elizabeth Belinda Gormley,

you get in your father's car this instant."

"No!"

"Well, I'll just have to gather up Elisa, Monique, and Anabelle and tell them you can't play today. Where are they? On your bed?"

He was never good at punishment. He couldn't bear to see his daughter unhappy, especially because of him. Jen was good at it, though. "Tough love" she called it. She could get a little harsh and abrasive sometimes, but she was a softy at heart. He also knew she didn't exactly appreciate the fact that she had to be the bad guy all the time.

"Nononono wait!"

"Yes?"

Lizzy looked up at her mother and wiped her sniffling nose.

"The kids at school make fun of me because of my name."

"Elizabeth is a beautiful name, honey."

"Not 'Lizzy'! 'Gormley'! 'Gormley'! It's ugly!"

Jen knelt down next to Lizzy and hugged her. She looked at Chuck from over their daughter's shoulder. That look hurt Chuck, but not because it was accusatory—it wasn't. Jen felt bad for Chuck. His legacy, his

name, was causing his daughter grief. This was the first time his daughter mentioned anything about being bullied because of her name. His name. It wasn't fair. He didn't want Jen to feel bad for him, to acknowledge the effect the stupidity of twenty-five first graders had on him.

Jen held her daughter at arm's length.

"Gormley is a great name. Did you know that it comes from Ireland?"

"No . . ."

Chuck knelt down beside his wife and daughter.

"Yup. It means 'blue spearman'. Isn't that cool?"

"Why were they blue, Daddy?"

"Well, up there in Ireland, the water's all funny, and it sometimes causes Irish babies to be born blue. The clans would gather up all the blue babies and train them to be warriors, and that's where we come from."

"Why aren't we blue then?"

"Umm . . . because . . . our water is normal?"

This was getting hard.

"Ah, well why—"

Jen gave Chuck a look that said he should stop what he was doing and get to work.

"I'll tell you more about it after school. Okay?"

"Okay . . ."

"So you'll go?"

"I guess . . ."

Jen chimed in.

"Great. I'll let the girls know."

Jen gave Lizzy another hug and helped her into the car.

"Thanks, Jen."

"Anytime, *Gormley*."

She gave him a kiss and walked back inside to get ready for work. He wished he'd stop hearing his last name so often. It made him feel better when she said it though, like her voice somehow purified what was otherwise sullied daily by Higgins and seven year-olds.

Chuck got out of the office at 9:35 p.m. and stepped out onto 23rd Street, four and half hours later than he was supposed to. The night was young, but far from beautiful. He could feel the electricity and water waiting to douse the city in light and sound. He walked towards the parking complex a couple of blocks away from the office building. He noticed something laying near a storm drain about twenty feet in front him. It was

a doll. Just like the ones Lizzy played with. It was dirty though. Damp with the filth of the city. Hair that used to be yellow had turned brown. A face, that was once beautiful in its falsehood and endearing in its simplicity had a crack snaking down the crown of her forehead and across the bridge of her nose, splitting her right cheek in two. A tattered rag wrapped around her tiny body was all that was left of the dress.

Chuck bent down to pick her up.

"What's your name?"

No response. He felt stupid for half-expecting one.

"Probably something pretty . . . like . . . 'Jenean'."

He turned the doll over in his hands. Apart from the crack in the face and the tattered dress, it was in decent condition. She could be fixed. Lizzy liked playing doctor. She got that from her mother.

"Well, let's get you some place warm where we can get you fixed up. I think I know a little girl who'd love to meet you."

He was excited. He knew the kids at Lizzy's school wouldn't care where her name came from. Or even about the dumb

story he told her about blue Irish babies. But this would brighten her day. Maybe this would make her feel a little better. For a while at least. He started again towards the parking complex and disappeared around the corner a block away.

"I'm sure I lost her here, Papa!"

"On 23rd?"

"Yes! There was a dog and he barked at me and I got scared and ran away and I dropped Becky but I didn't notice until I got really, really, really far!"

"Okay, okay. Calm down, I know."

John and Maggie had walked up and down 23rd Street three times that night and there was



no doll to be found. It was getting late, almost 10:00 p.m.

"I don't think she's here anymore."

"She has to be!"

"It's getting late. I'll get you a new doll on the weekend, okay?"

"I want Becky! Becky! Where are you?"

"Don't shout like that! Come on, let's go."

"Not until we find Becky!"

Maggie sat down on the sidewalk with a storm drain between her feet and pouted. Tears welled up in her eyes. John moved onto the street and crouched in front of his daughter.

"Someone might have taken her. We don't know where she is. We've been out here for a long time. Let's go home."

Thunder pealed through the sky. Rain drops sporadically tapped on their heads. Maggie looked up at her father and a tear rolled down the right side of her face. John opened his arms and his daughter fell into them.

Maggie sobbed.

John sighed.

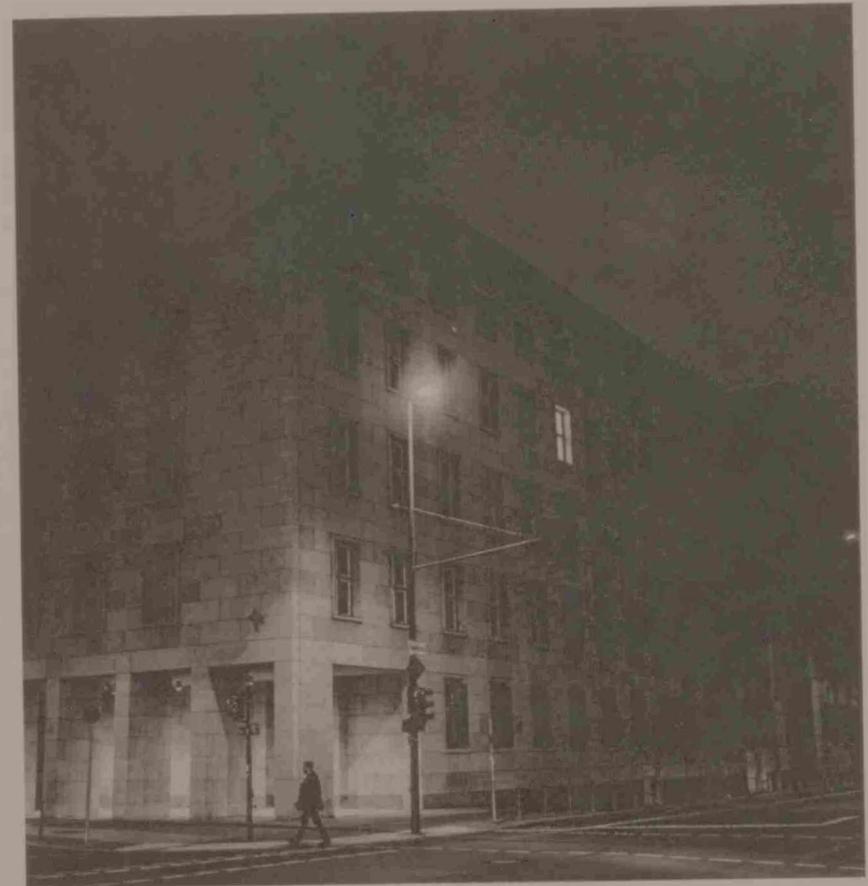
Chuck paused in front of his car on the roof of the parking garage. He had heard something. A name, maybe? He wasn't sure. Peggy? Becky? There it was again. Becky. He walked to the edge of the parking garage and looked down towards 23rd Street. There was a man and a girl. It looked like they were looking for something.

"Not until we find Becky!"

Chuck looked down in his hands at Becky. He looked at his car and then at the father and daughter on 23rd. Does one bad day deserve another? Thunder roared and echoed across the city as it started to rain. Chuck turned away from the ledge and got into his black sedan.

As he pulled out of the parking garage, the rain started pouring in earnest. He could see the sombre duo huddled under an umbrella, walking towards him. He turned left, in their direction, and drove passed them. In his rear-view mirror he could see them turn around and watch as he sped down the street. Higgins' words echoed in his head like the thunder did in the city.

Chuck sighed.



DIVISION ACROSS THE STREET

Stephanie Martin

STRING THEORY

Andie Warner

You said

What's up butterscotch-i-scream baby girl?

I said

I feel trapped—I'm in a bubble
that I blew with everyone I know.

You said

Well why dontcha leave?

I said

I can't.

You said

Free will is encoded in your DNA—
a billion, million paths
of maybe's and what if's,
in a strand that could
go on a round trip to the sun
and still come visit me.

I said

Bullshit.

You can't be free if
your choices are written down.

We aren't free at all.

If we were,
you would be here.

You said

Well, I don't know,
maybe I messed up when I was seven
and I left the dog outside at night.
Or when I hit my sister with a bat.
Just kidding.
I didn't do that.

I said

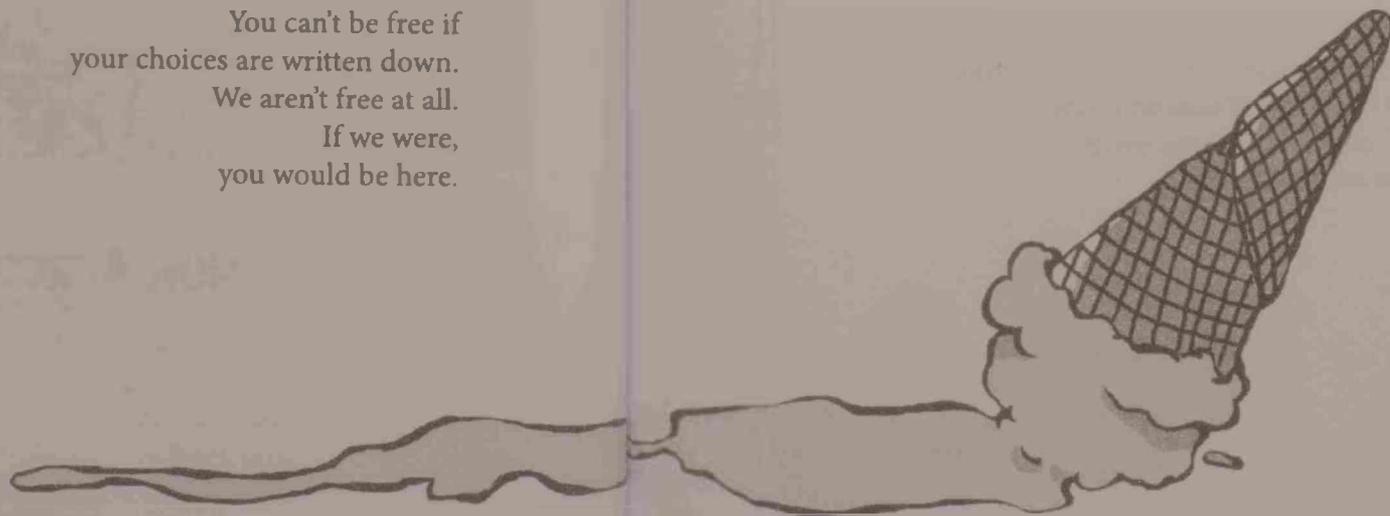
I miss you, you know?

You said

I know.
But maybe we can figure out a choice soon
that makes this work somehow.

I said

Lets just build a time machine
and don't leave the dog out this time.



COUPLE'S PRACTICE

Katie Manners

To whom it may concern,

Take me.

Please find attached:
nudes over toast.

Spread with fingers
soused in sweat
and jam.

Disguise the aftertaste
with mouthfuls of crumbs,
and bee-lined consoles
screaming dial-up tones.

Quick!

Find me,

before the tooth in the dryer
(*dried*)
finds its way into my open mouth.



THE SPACE BETWEEN US

Andie Warner

I woke up to
your hand on my back,
sheets on the floor,
my hair in your mouth,
the space between us—
how small is small before it's nothing?

Someone's in the kitchen,
they can't see
your pants in the corner,
my shirt right-side in,
your fingers tapping a rhythm on my snare bum—
what's left to say?

My hand finds yours to silence the quiet.
Three squeezes mean
three words.

We can't let go now,
not even for an itch.
I wonder if you can see
the space between us.

HIPPIE FLIPPING

By JOE FLANNERY

All the leaves are brown, the sky, grey. As I leave my apartment block, I realize that nature has chameleoned to the streets, the Magnacar waste built up in the gutters, the monochrome of the pedestrians. Like much of my generation, waving signs saying hooray for peace, love, and acid, I had been afraid 1984 would look like it did. But it hadn't mattered, our hopes for change and green pastures. The bombs in the east had dropped, this time on the jungles of Vietnam instead of the cities of Japan, and the technology of the New American Conglomerate had blossomed like the flowers we painted on our Volkswagens. As massive computer banks passed the mantle of Washington, Lincoln, and Roosevelt, as floating cars lifted from garage blocks, as citizenship tests were exchanged for employment aptitude surveys, America gave up on dancing barefoot in the park and settled into their TV room chairs. Eventually, even I put down my marijuana and guitar



and accepted the NAC's Compassionex pills and employee conduct booklet, and with that exchange, I was okay.

Do I love my job? I'm okay with it. Do I love my apartment block? It's okay. Do I love my wife? I'm okay with her. I'm okay with life. I'm okay with death. What I do love is my impressive employee rank, my weekly paycheck, and my portable television. I've felt this way for some time now, without really realizing that I did. Last week I found something in my storage unit that made me feel like I haven't felt since Walter Cronkite solemnly removed his spectacles and told the American public (still known as citizens in those days) that two atomic bombs had been dropped on key Viet Cong targets with significant enemy and civilian casualties alike. That day I felt that wrong had been done, I felt anger, rage. Last Saturday, when I opened the wooden chest from my college days that held so many memories and snapshots of how life had been back then, I came across a leather-bound volume with *Journal* embossed on the front. As I opened it and read the first entry of triumphant,

thick pencil, an entry about a blissful night I had spent with some California girl I met in an airport, heady memories of writing those words wafted about me like sweet perfume. That night became a blur as I found myself engrossed in the words of my former self. I had wanted to be a journalist, had been a devotee of the sublimely bizarre Hunter Thompson, and my memoirs proved refreshing reading. Then I came to my furious scribbblings on the page dated with that fateful, atomic date of September 12, 1972, beginning with: "The rat bastards really did it! The pigs nuked Nam!" Washed in a sense of nostalgia and loss, I felt the same way I had penning those words. I remembered, Jesus how could I have forgotten, rage, rage of injustice. In that moment, almost enjoying the rush of such intense emotion, that rage moved from the past to the present. I felt rage that the vibrant, exciting times of my youth had been torn away from me as I grew up, as the world grew up around me, grew into something homogenizing, sedated, and boring. I began to perceive the absence of emotion

that had crept into my life, and how it had been replaced before my eyes, yet somehow without my knowledge, by a trite obsession with things that held no tangible meaning to me. As the next morning's dishwater dawn shone on my TV room, chairs, and non-portable set pushed away to make room for a collage of images and artifacts from my flower years, I felt another emotion resurrected from the past:

Loneliness.

It is strange to feel as though you are the only being who cares about something you know to be essential, but which others have forgotten. It is the feeling of doctors whose cures have been rejected, of scientists whose theories are denied. It was the feeling of all us longhaired hip-

pies who prescribed love for an ill earth, and were in two atomic blasts, told that Earth's inhabitants wanted nothing to do with it. It is a feeling that to me approximates loneliness. It is this feeling that permeates every inch of me as I skulk along the narrow sidewalk this dull morning. I have stopped taking the white pills labeled Compassionex that the NAC has prescribed to each and every one of their employees. I suffered violent cramps in my body and inexplicable nail biting episodes that first day without the pill. I'm still chewing my nails, now bloody, as I walk down the street and stumble as a painful cramp stabs my calf. On the second day without my medication I didn't leave my house



for work as a pervading sense of helplessness and deep depression combined forces with my withdrawal to keep me in bed. I slept constantly, swimming in dreams full of more emotion and colour than coherence. By the fourth day without my dose of Compassionex, I awoke and felt the depression's absence instantly. I turned to see my wife's face highlighted in grey by a ray of sun from the window. In that moment, regarding her familiar face, I was overcome by a feeling that tugged butterflies through my stomach, a feeling I had once known when lovely Cecilia said that she would go with me to the senior prom. I kissed my wife to wake her and took her in my arms. She ener-

getically returned the kiss and after reaching into the bedside table, positioned herself on top of me. Before we began I whispered, "I love you." She only smiled lewdly as she chewed an Eroticex stimulant pill and dug her fingers into my hair.

After we made love, I quickly went to wash up in the bathroom. I came back to my wife nude, cross legged with her portable TV resting on one thigh, cackling as the newsmen told her about the latest celebrity scandal.

During that fourth day and those following I was shocked with an overload of emotional stimuli. Deep abandonment sent me sulking to the kitchen after my wife had pushed me



away when I tried to affectionately nestle my head between her and the miniature screen. Numbing joy left me staring, open-mouthed, at the perfectly formed French omelette I had for the first time coaxed away from the Teflon of my electric pan, unblemished by brown overcooked patches. Insane animal rage had me screaming vulgarities after my shocked neighbour whose late night, computerized game sessions had made me lose countless hours of sleep in the past year. I felt absolutely paralyzed by fear as I tried to justify another sick day as my boss bellowed about me jeopardizing my future with his prestigious department. As I sat on the sofa staring at a sketchbook an old friend had gifted to me, enthralled by the strange feelings charcoal figures delivered, that sense of loneliness suddenly settled over me. Was I the only man in this vast city who remembered what real emotions felt like? Was I the only one who cared that somehow these emotions had been quietly removed from our minds and replaced with pills and the perfect white of the newscaster's smile?

I enter the monolithic regional NAC office block, coughing from the exhaust of a passing Magnacar. I walk across the limestone floor, beneath the brilliantly gold logo of the NAC inlaid in the high ceiling, and enter the same elevator I have used every week for the last five years. I hate them all: the floor, the ceiling, and the elevator. I ride the dull, steel box to my office's level and cross the massive ocean of beige cubicles until I reach my boss' corner room. I walk in, kick over his desk, and throw my work kit in his face. His nose lets go a gush of bright red.

"You're doing the devil's work," I tell him, my face calm, not betraying the storm of rage beneath. Then I smile with mirth as he stammers in absolute confusion and uselessly tries not to bleed on his suit. I laugh the entire way to the elevator. I laugh all the way down to the lobby. I laugh tears from my eyes until the two NAC security men tackle me and shove a white hypodermic needle, bearing a familiar brand name, into my arm. Then I don't laugh anymore. I don't need to.

ESCAPE

Nicole Gavreau

I open my eyes: darkness. Blacker than ebony on velvet.

I hold my hand mere centimetres from my face; I cannot see it. I reach out and feel to my sides, behind me, stretching as far as I can to the front: no walls.

I close my eyes and tilt my head up, no warmth on my skin, no sun. I open my eyes and search above: no stars.

Have I gone blind?

I have to leave wherever I am, and find out what's wrong. Am I blind or trapped in a room with no light? Surely nature cannot find parallel in this blackness.

Once more reaching out, I begin to take small steps, hoping to find a wall. After perhaps ten paces, I feel something rough: stones. Could I be in a cave? I reach up. The stone is not continuous, telling me I am indeed inside. But where might I find stone walls? Who built them? Why was I within them?

A wind begins to blow. No, it howls and nearly bowls me over. I try walking into it; the source would bring exit.

As I approach what must

have been the source, the wind's direction changes, making me a weathervane.

Then water begins to drip, a leak in the ceiling; it seems odd for such a room to have plumbing.

The sound of water meeting stone, a surprisingly loud plunk, begins to annoy me. In desperation to stop the sound I move under the drip, for it seems as though hours have passed and my thirst overwhelms all but my annoyance.

The water tastes of iron, almost like blood.

In an instant the drip increases its pace, and another drip joins the dissonance.

I scurry to the new drip, desperate to cleanse my mouth of the iron. I stick out my tongue, only to find salt.

More water that I cannot drink.

I abandon the second drip and retreat to the wall. After five minutes of searching I know something is wrong: the wall is gone.

I change course, the constant

tattoo of the water beating in my head. If only I could find a door, then everything would stop.

What seems to be hours later, my legs tired and my throat parched, I collapse to the ground.

I close my eyes, but cannot sleep: the drips disrupt my rest.

Needing reprieve, I cover my ears. The sound of dripping continues.

I lie awake, my eyes beginning to burn—I cannot blink.

Time passes, and I am no more rested, but still I rise again and resume my quest.

I notice that one drip has grown into a steady stream, a puddle surely forming on the ground.

A distant voice, just barely audible, permeates the room. I have to find the source, my sure escape. Rescue.

No matter how much I concentrate, the voice is omnipresent. A whisper I cannot trace, strange and distant, yet familiar.

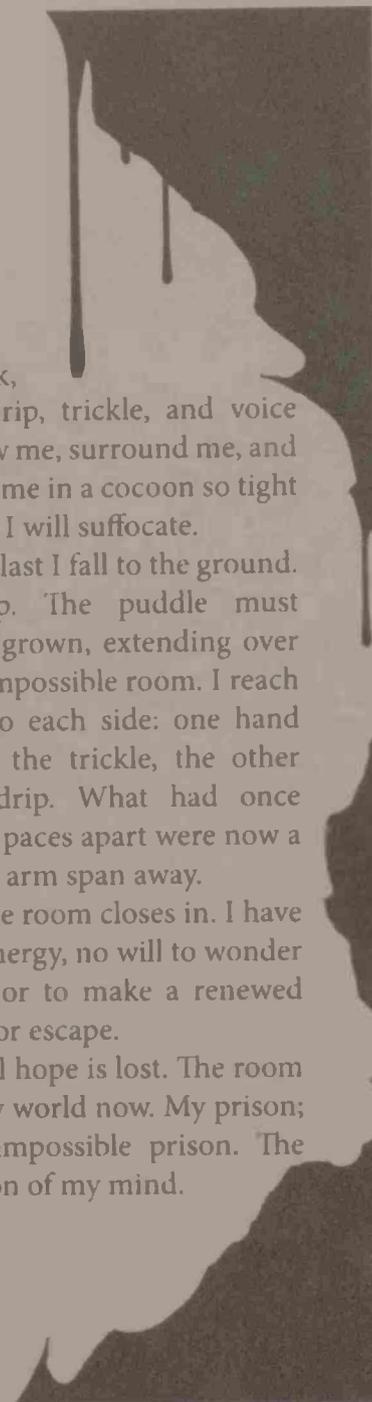
I wander once more, walking what feels like an eternity. No matter how far,

I walk, the drip, trickle, and voice follow me, surround me, and wrap me in a cocoon so tight I fear I will suffocate.

At last I fall to the ground. Damp. The puddle must have grown, extending over the impossible room. I reach out to each side: one hand finds the trickle, the other the drip. What had once been paces apart were now a mere arm span away.

The room closes in. I have no energy, no will to wonder why or to make a renewed bid for escape.

All hope is lost. The room is my world now. My prison; my impossible prison. The prison of my mind.



HELLO, GOODBYE

By ASHLEY SHINDER

Here I am, four years later. No change. I think. Twenty now. I aged—that's a change. Still single. Cold—that's another change. That's probably why I'm single. Cold . . . as . . . ice. Yup, that's me: a cold, single twenty-year-old girl. I'm going to keep talking to myself. I need to keep talking to myself. Or else. Or else I'm going to think about it. Him. Or else I'm going to think about him. Shit, now I'm thinking about him. Think about something. Now. Think, think, think. Anything.

An encounter with Nana-bush in Native American fiction means that death is approaching. Buddhists believe in Nirvana. It means "perfect peace", or something. They need to escape the cycle of death and rebirth. Hindus believe in reincarnation. The soul moves from one body to the next. Greek Orthodox believes in eternal life. So even after you go you're not really gone. Muslims put their faith in Judgement Day. You go to Heaven or to Hell. Sucks. Sci-

entology—like that's even a religion. Anyways, they "believe" that people are immortal spiritual beings with multiple lives. So, when you die, you just move to a new life. Catholics believe that you have to repent for your sins. Don't atone for your misdemeanors and you won't see God in the afterlife. You are not welcomed into the full glory of Heaven. Uh, what else? What's another religion? Aren't there like hundreds of religions in the world? Like maybe even thousands?

Wait, why am I talking about death . . . and dying? Shit, now I'm thinking about death. Shit, now I'm thinking about him. Okay. It's okay. Remember what works. Sit down. No, sit in your spot. Lean back. Close your eyes. Breath in. One . . . two . . . three. And out . . . two . . . three. Well fuck, that didn't work. You know, I don't even believe in this religion stuff. Like, what's religion anyways? I don't believe in any of these. I'm cold.

"Meg!" my mom calls from the bathroom that joins with her bedroom.

"Yeah?" I answer quickly. She's not going to hear me. I know it.

"Meghan!" Her voice is thunderous. Impatient.

I won't pick a fight. She's angry today, too. I walk the hallway from the TV room to her bedroom. Stare at the floor, don't look at the walls. He redid these floors. Close your eyes and feel your way there.

"Mom? I heard you, I was in the living room."

A sudden gasp escapes her lips as his favourite coffee mug meets the floor.

"Calisse de tabernac," she spits as she storms out of her bathroom. "I'm cleaning this up and we're leaving. Are you ready?"

Mom blinks profusely. I suspect she is trying to hold back tears. I know her too well.

"Yeah. I'm ready."

"Where's your sister? Is she coming?"

"You're joking, right?" The sarcasm is a big mistake. "She does this on her own."

My mom understands. She does. It's just—today. Today's hard.

"Well, it would be nice to do it as a family." As the words escape her mouth, she seems repelled. Her lips twitch. Forming a slight grin, maybe. "We all

deal with it differently."

The drive is not long. From Dollard to Beaconsfield it takes roughly fifteen minutes. Depending on the route you take time can vary. Go by St Charles Boulevard and you're bound to hit traffic at the light above the overpass. Take Hymus Road and you'll feel like you're playing bumper cars because of all the stop signs. Either way the drive is about fifteen minutes. I never actually timed it. I should.

The drive feels longer this time. Anticipation, maybe. Maybe I'm reluctant. I'm always reluctant. The window is cold against the side of my forehead. I pull back because I think I'm getting brain freeze. Last night's foundation stains the glass. A foggy white ring wraps around the beige dot then fades away. That's weird. Is it always this cold in February?

The silence in the car is loud. Mom focuses on the road ahead. She took Hymus. I start fogging up the window and draw smiley faces. Smiley faces—it's an odd day to be doodling that. Wash it off. I lean my head against the window again. It's still cold. It freezes out the intensity of the



quiet.

The quiet is actual quiet now. Haunting. Still. Shit, I can't deal with quiet. Think about something.

"Did you know that two million doilies are manufactured every single day?" This is my attempt at breaking the silence.

Nothing.

"The length from your wrist to your elbow is the size of your foot!" I keep going. "If you spread your arms out widthwise, you can see how tall you are from your middle finger to your *other* middle finger! . . . If you touch your tongue to your pallet it stops a sneeze. Or, you can press your thumb to the palm of your hand."

Nothing.

"You know ice cream has like three ingredients. Cream, sugar and milk. Well I guess four if you include the flavours. Or five actually if it's something like Rocky Road that has brownies and cookie dough. Sucks for lactose intolerant people. Their fake ice cream must taste like crap."

"We're here." My mom interrupts me. I think she's thankful that she cut me off. I think I'm thankful she cut me off.

"Okay?" she asks.

"Yeah . . ." I lie.

It's been four years but the drive feels so routine. I know the cemetery well. Is that weird to know your way around a cemetery? We pull in past the rusty iron gates. The sign reads "Beth Zion." It looks like it's collecting mold. That's nice. Just because the people here are dead doesn't mean the upkeep has to die along with them.

We drive straight to the end of the narrow road. We pass rows upon rows of identical tombstones. Jewish people are so anal. You are literally given the choice between a charcoal grey and black tombstone. Like death isn't morbid enough you have to emphasize it with a black stone. "Here lies John Doe, if you aren't already heart-broken that he's dead let me reinforce it by planting this really, really black tombstone at the head of his grave with the most cliché quote like 'forever in our hearts, or some shit.'" I hate this. I hate this day.

It's just another hello, and another goodbye.

SAD MAN

Emily Baldwin

There was a sad man who sat beside my bed.

He is one of the first things I remember. Other kids' imaginary friends were much more exciting. They had cowboys and princesses and animals of every description. But all I had was my Sad Man, and he wasn't exciting at all.

All he ever did was sit there, and read his book (a different one each time, not that I could tell the difference. This was before I learned to read). Sometimes he would hum snatches of Gilbert & Sullivan to himself (I didn't know what they were at the time. It was only later, when I was 19 and saw the Pirates of Penzance for the first time that I recognized the music as the songs my Sad Man would sing). And he would say weird things:

"I tried to smuggle some gin into your room," he said once, "but they caught me." Or once, "Remember when your parents found out you were gay?" (I couldn't.) And on one memorable occasion, "How did you manage to blow up that hotel

room?" (I didn't know.)

Sad Man liked to pretend he wasn't sad by telling me these things, but I knew better. He would smile, but the smile would wither when it reached his eyes. Sometimes he cried a little when he thought I was sleeping, his fingers quickly coming up to wipe away the renegade teardrops. I let him think I didn't notice.

I didn't know what he was sad about. I didn't want to ask, in case thinking about it would make him sadder. Instead I asked him to read to me, which he did. I never liked any of his books, though. They were grown-up, and therefore boring and incomprehensible.

Later, when I was old enough to read, I mentioned one of those books to my mother, who assumed I had found it lying around somewhere and read it by myself. (Ten Little Indians, I think it was.) She, of course, assumed I was a genius and was sorely disappointed when she was proven wrong.

I stopped seeing Sad Man

when I was eight.

He appeared in my room one night, just like all the other times, but this time he held my hand until I closed my eyes, and pressed a kiss to my forehead, and cried.

I didn't see him again.

I had others, after him. There was Nigel the giant rabbit, and Lachesis the goddess of Destiny, and the lizard girl. And they were more exciting than Sad Man, but they never seemed to be quite real. I grew tired of them all, eventually. I grew older, grew up. I acquired real friends, and went to high school, and college, and was never once tempted to blow

anything up.

It was as I was walking through the park that I saw him again. He was walking with a woman, and they were laughing about something, and I met his eyes and smiled.

He smiled back, but there was confusion there. "Do I know you?" he asked. "You look incredibly familiar."

I looked at him. He was older than I remembered. His hair was grey, and there were crow's feet around his eyes, but he was happy. For the first time in my life, I saw him smile without a hint of bitterness.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I've never seen you before in my life."



THE PERFECT SPACE

Froy Choi (Natchasiri)

*There is a girl trapped in a body of flesh and fluids.
Her clustered mind digs through remains
of rusty lenses and horoscope cut-outs.
While looking up, she presses on the walls
mapping constellations,
and drawing unconventional
stellar shapes—
five fire escapes, twelve underground exits.*

*Then comes a boy who soaks her in—
tiny cardiacs,
latching on closely, spilling truth of an 18-year-old.
His well organized mind flashes through
the epitome of freedom.
He moves through her veins, and finally learns
the ins and outs of a maze
never meant for two.
Soon he leaves her compass swaying,
and her heart starts swinging back and forth
between calm rain
and monstrous floods.*

Last Christmas by the fireplace,
you and I learned about the three types:
the platonic: rising intimacy,
the erotic: two reckless magnets,
lastly, the unconditional: selfless instinct.
I felt it so suddenly, out of question,
the grip of our cradling bodies,
intertwined on a rocking chair,
where your mother used to sit, resting her tired spine,
heavy from carrying the little boy
swimming in the warmth of an unfamiliar womb.

Our idea of love struck on a timeline of chaos,
colliding on tectonic mismatches,
the crest and dips of a selfish graph,
now only a passing storm of a miscalculated hindsight.

I wish you endless nights of twists and turns, the sweatiness
of an open palm.

I wish you a body to tread through thunders and a mind freed
from clouded boundaries.

I wish you eight hundred and forty-two laughs with the new souls
you'll lift.

I wish you four walls of a home, the quiet solitude of wet Sunday
mornings.

I wish you finally, the perfect space, that longs for us, a soiled
ground to grow.

Si



Froy Choi (Natchasiri)

THE LINE NOT TAKEN

Samantha Maliszewski

Two lines diverged in a dirty station,
And sorry I could not take both tracks
And be one traveler, amongst the crowd,
And looked down the blue line as far as I could
To where it bent on the concrete overpass;

Then took the yellow line, just as busy,
And having perhaps the safer claim
Because it was actually running,
Though as for crowds travelling the line
It has slowed it down about the same,

And both that morning equally squeaked
On rails no maintenance worker checked.
Oh, I marked the blue for another day!
Yet knowing how failure leads on to failure
I doubted if I should ever try again.

I shall be telling profs with a sigh
Sometime hours and hours hence:
Two lines diverged in a station, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference
In arriving to my class on time.

THERSITES SPEAKS HIS MIND

Frank Willdig

By the shores of Ilium, I remain
old and exiled on this desolate plain,
the riotous, wooly-haired oaf of no worth,
now sits alone on this sacrificed earth

remembering the days not long ago
when I rose from the ranks and shouted out, "No."
The first common man to take the world's stage,
I won't be the last to shout out my rage.

My scars bear witness to the will of kings,
each welt a reminder of the stings
that fell on my back for speaking out
and of being shamed by that cruel lout,

Odysseus! The lying son of Laertes!
Whose only goal in crossing these seas
was to reap the glory and eternal fame
and ensure the bards would remember his name.

Well, I remember, I remember them all,
gathered around their long ships in thrall,
how they stood like sheep by the wine-dark sea
and cheered as that windbag humiliated me.

Homer called me a babbling fool,
the foul-mouthed brute who flaunted the rule
that kings were the only ones meant to be heard
and the grunts were never to utter a word.

"Obey the commands of your betters," they said,
though my rage and rants were just for those dead
who, in my mind's eye, are lying there still,
and were never quite sure why they were killed.

Kudos and praise to the undeserving;
all booty and women to those self-serving
sons of Atreus, whose lust and greed
will always outweigh those humble in need.

We were there to applaud the deeds of fools
and when the time came to die in pools
of blood from unsung and hapless men
whose reward was never to breathe again.

No one remembers the youth who dies
believing in all those heroic lies
of kings who'd kill their own daughters for gain,
(as for a fair wind, Iphigenia was slain).

Now, even those heroes have turned to dust
their noble swords are nothing but rust,
Lord Elephenor, being first to fall
now lies mouldering in Asphodel,

and Ajax, driven completely insane
I see slaying sheep again and again;
the great Agamemnon, returning home
was killed by his wife and is now just bone.

And what of Aornos who died at my side?
I sent his rings back to his grieving bride,
Arcos and Diomedes, both farmers' sons,
no glory for those unfortunate ones.

Here, among the blind terrors of night
 the wounds of the dying were kept out of sight,
 Prince and chieftain, servant and slave,
 I am the only one free of the grave.

Each morning we rose to bury our dead
 and rally the youths who'd stand in their stead;
 no monuments left to those who fell,
 we ignored the wounded who'd never get well.

No poet's praise for their great virtues,
 they silently served their chiefs, win or lose,
 no one noticed their families back home
 and how they were loved before dying alone.

In thankless silence, the unburied dead,
 the nameless, forgotten lie where they bled,
 I still reflect upon what they would give
 for the chance not to die before they lived.

And now descend the high horses of war
 to trample again on this desert floor
 and yes, I know that it was ever thus
 that nothing remains for the rest of us.

Our masters of war still sit on their thrones,
 but now do nothing but send in their drones;
 their sons in high towers, safe and secure
 will raise not a sword, of that I'm sure.

We give kings power and they still abuse it,
 we give men the blade and they still use it
 while the innocent in their youthful flush
 still lie in a great insignificant hush.

RED

Charlotte Peters

The night tears and bleeds, bringing us blushing into day.
 The scraped knees of fallen heroes,
 dying of courage, dying of love.

The anger, the futile: "Stop!"

Christmas and Communism separated only by the blood of
 covenant.

Roses left on graves, sorrows soothed by dark wine,
 love burns in corners, then roars up,
 lights lakes,
 climbs start

to catch the sun, pull it down, welcome it, and
 celebrate it.

"Come, royal, have a rose."



A HEART CHAINED BY FEAR

Kuna Zero

Chained up and alone,
my heart sits in its cell—
the walls are my fear of obsession,
the shackles, my fear of rejection.

Its beat is faint,
nearly motionless,
as if playing dead
to avoid detection.

The walls are covered in images
of beautiful women,
their faces scratched out,
but their eyes remain, empty and soulless.

The shackles are made of memories,
their transient images forming links,
the words wrapping around my heart,
bound to the wall by icy remembrance.

It could end here,
broken and alone,
trapped in a cell made of fear,
the beat growing fainter and fainter.

OUR SCARS ARE DEEPER THAN THEY APPEAR

Samantha Maliszewski

Our scars are deeper than they appear.

They're deep dark fissures,
radiating memories that are more
frightening than those that go
bump in the night.

These crawl through our veins,
filling the cracks like sand.
Millions of jagged shards of glass.
They fill us, but never allow us to
feel complete,
whole,
safe.

The smallest trigger rips them open,
tearing off the emotional Band-Aids.

They say you can never be struck
by lightning twice, but try being
stabbed by millions of bolts
over and
over and
over again.

They tried healing with shocks,
not realizing you can't fight
fire with fire.

Wise, healing words will never replace
those words spoken in another life.

We are branded.
We are tainted.
We are broken.

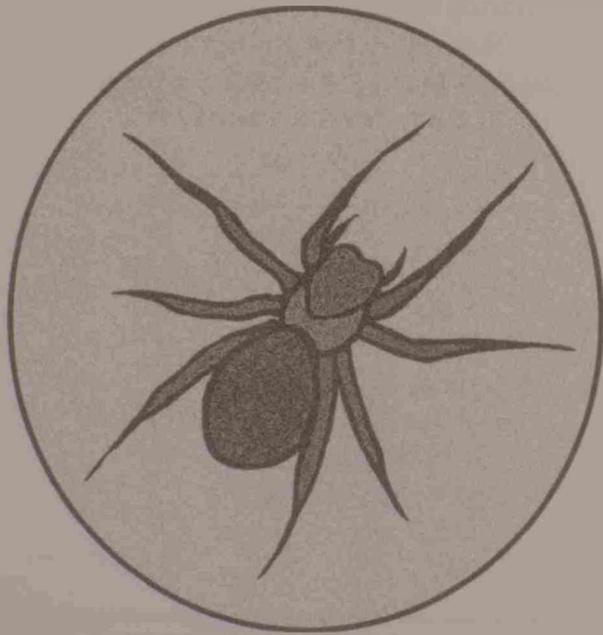
BRUSH

Jeff Parent

Tip toe, tip toe,
a spider goes
across the bathroom ceiling
above the shining basin
where you brush your teeth.

From your lip
a pearly ball
of toothpaste
falls . . .

now a glassy eye
aside your naked foot
fixed upon the ceiling
where a spider goes
tip toe, tip toe.



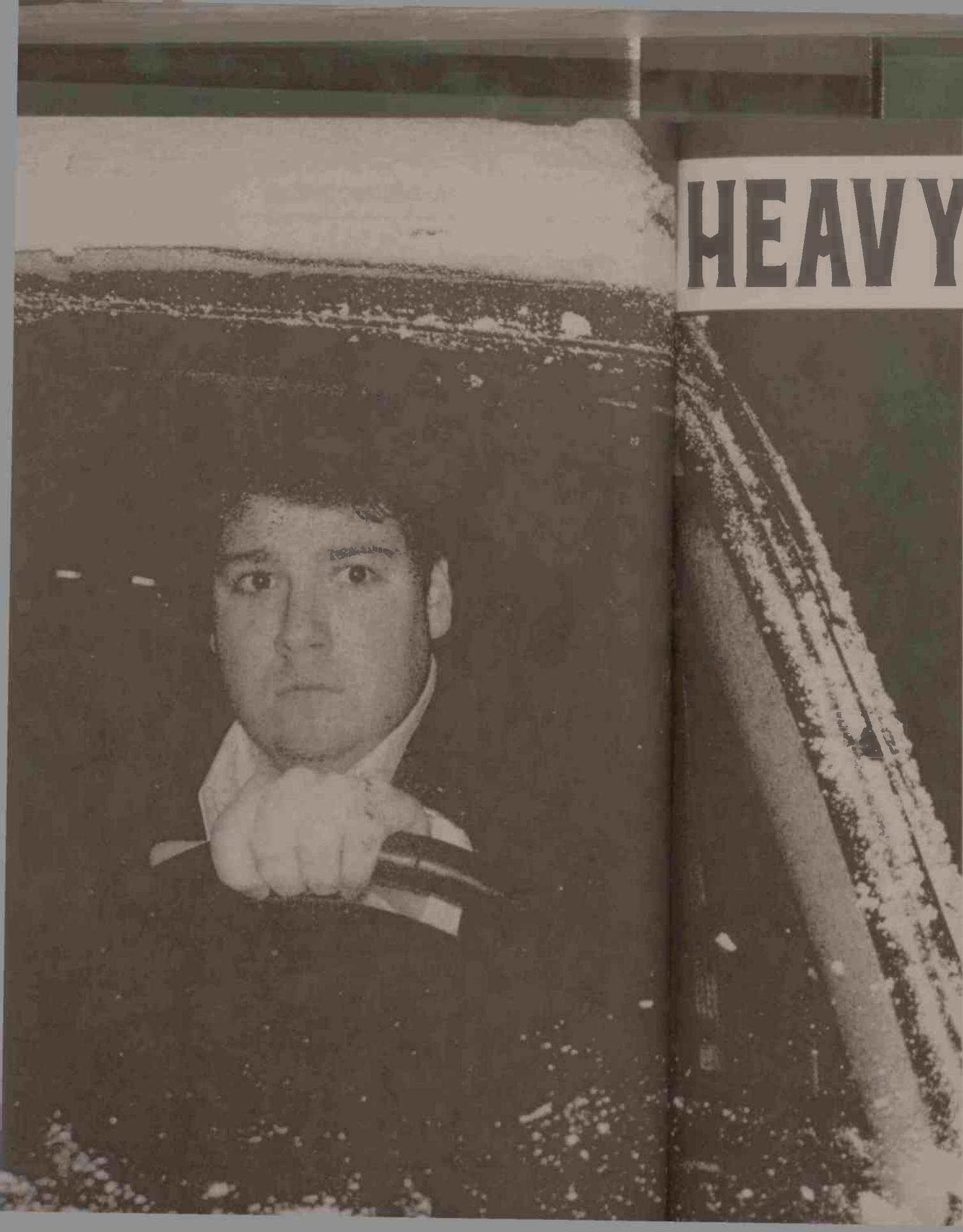
CARE BEARS: THE SHOW MUST GO ON

Aggie Veale

This irascible old bear
sits at a dingy counter,
fur faded from dark indigo
to a careless blue,
his grey raincloud has
become a puff of cigarette smoke,
and amber raindrops
fill his empty glass.

Once full of cheer,
now it's all just an act,
chattering cold pink
that careful painted smile
glances off stiletto talons,
lights seem almost red,
and the rush of wind
that accompanies every lost job
sends goosebumps up her legs.

The ground is littered with trash
but across the way
a thin gleam of metal
in the shattered moonlight shines
with care once shared,
his matted paw,
heliotrope,
steals away the little glimmer.



HEAVY METAL

By CHARLES MANNERS

Bodies. Bloated, tongues distended, eyes jewel-like in life now dull as the late October sky keeping silent requiem above. Spinning.

Robert shakes himself out of his daze, seeing the watery carousel for what it is: the pool skimmer full of frogs. *Bad year for amphibians*, he thinks. He used to gently lift them out, each morning, chiding them to not return, wishing them well. Not any more.

Bad year for non-amphibians as well.

His phone chirps. Text from Sarah: "pls dont b late agn. 3 rmembr?"

His gaze sweeps the back yard, where he had sweated and grimed a basic subdivision lot into a verdant oasis. It had given him pleasure, both that honest labour itself, and then the contemplation of the fruits of his efforts.

But no longer.

He looks up to the swaying purpled moptop tassels crowning a clump of giant Chinese silver grass. He sighs. This is it. Time to go.

Rustling through casual clumps of leaves to his car he closes his eyes, inhales, holds it deep. His mind's eye tries to conjure and hold the past, but fails. He sees only the frogs.

The local Tim Hortons. Sounds of baking ovens mix with the buzz of visored, dun-clad worker bees feeding a continuous stream of drive-thru queens. Robert, inside, wonders why he keeps coming back here. Coffee's not good, but not terrible. How bad does it have to get before you can't take it any more?

His eyes skip over the girl serving him, ignoring her curves. And did he want a pumpkin spice muffin with his coffee? His gut, bloated with last night's rye and 2:00 a.m. refrigerator findings, churns. He hates pumpkin.

"Sure. Why not? What have I got to lose?" She laughs, jiggles. *Christ*, he thinks, noticing at last. *Bet she's not even legal.*

A sudden hand on his shoulder. "Police!"

Robert spins, and is met with a blast of laughter. Stan, a fellow mechanic from the Canadian

Tire Robert used to work at.

"Rob, buddy, how the fuck are ya? Where ya been? You just disappeared. Boss didn't know what the fuck happened to ya. Hired some new guy to replace ya."

"Ah, you know. Just shit happening, right?"

Stan nods. Robert gestures towards Stan's outfit. "Hunting?"

Stan strikes a pose, puckers whiskered lips coquettishly, models his camouflage print coat. "Buddy's gotta camp up near Englehart. A few of us heading up. Moose. I'd say c'mon but I know how y'are about animals."

Robert's turn to shrug. "Yeah, well. Anyway, I gotta run. Goin' to the ex's to pick up my daughter."

"How's that going with, with—uh, what's her—"

"Bitch face?"

Stan laughs. "No, that's my old lady's name. Sandra? Sammy? Sar—"

"Sarah. Going?" Robert exhales nosily, shakes his head, drops a twenty on the counter for his coffee and muffin, tells Miss Jiggly Parts to keep the change, yes, he's sure, yeah, he

knows it's a lot, but what the hell, eh?

"Geez, a twenty? What's that from—an inheritance? Someone die?"

Robert looks at Stan—really looks at him, until the dumb grin on Stan's dumb face withers—then picks up his coffee. "We'll see." He heads out the door. Stan stares at Robert, at the abandoned muffin on the counter, at the young girl behind the till.

Running through looming rock cuts on the highway to Sarah's house. A series of sharp curves, the granite walls tattooed with "George luvs Patti" and "RUSH 4-EVR!!!" share space with the scorched reminders that rock always trumps automobile. The blacktop leading into the curves is similarly graffitied with an assortment of skid marks: different authors screaming the same final message: *SHIT! Too fast!*

The skid marks remind Robert of the scratches that Sarah used to leave on his back, years ago: a desperate grappling before the inevitable loss of control.

Now what does he have? His daughter a couple days a month? He was the one who saw her first emerging into the world, not Sarah. He saw that weirdly misshaped head first. *My God! She's deformed! Her head's the size of an ice cream cone!* So he didn't know a newborn's skull was malleable—how was he to know that was normal? He had walked around the hospital with her a few hours later: a swaddled bundle he held, football-style, in one hand, as he told her about the life they all would have together. And now, four years later? Fuck that. Fuck everything.

A black squirrel bursts from the grass edging the shoulder, freezes.

Robert turns from the highway onto the gravel side road where Sarah now lives, fishtails, barely in control. Black fur and guts coat his wheel well.

Through the locked screen door. "But you took me off your benefits! I can't afford my pills. Just lemme in so we can talk."

Sarah looks at the man she used to love, shakes her head. "No, Robert. Wait in your car.

She'll be out in a minute." Her voice is flat, without heat or nuance. She watches him shuffle back to the old Pontiac. He looks smaller, shorter, as if he's collapsing in on himself.

A tug at her sweater. "Ready, Mommy. Bye, Mommy!"

Sarah sweeps her daughter up, holds her tight, kisses her. "Love you, Pumpkin. Have fun with Daddy. See you soon." She watches Charlotte meet her father, watches them play their peekaboo game before Robert secures her into the child seat in the back. Sarah raises her hand to wave goodbye, but Charlotte doesn't notice. She has her eyes covered again, playing peekaboo.

She loved Robert so much, once upon a time. But now, there's nothing in the world that he could do to make her say that she loves him, even for a moment. She wonders how he will react when she tells him she's moving to British Columbia, taking their daughter three thousand miles away.

"Daddy? Why is there a bear there?"

"Charlotte saw a bear? Wow!

How big was it?"

"It was just little. Like my bears. On some sticks. With flowers. Why is it there?"

They had passed the roadside memorial a few times before, but she had never asked about it until today.

"Hey, lets play peekaboo!"

Charlotte squeals, covers her eyes. Robert starts counting, with Charlotte repeating each number, until he yells "Now!"—her signal that she can look. Already she can count to seventy by herself.

"Daddy? What's metal?"

"Metal? It's hard stuff they make things out of. Like this car; it's made of metal. Why, Honey?" Robert looks in his rearview mirror, sees his daughter's furrowed brow.

"'Cause I heard Mommy say you were metal. But you're not hard stuff like a car. She said you have medicine, but you're still metal."

Robert struggles to control his breathing. "Did Mommy say anything else about metal?"

"I heard her say to Todd that you should go to a metal hospital. Then they laughed."

The car lurches forward, picking up speed. "She did?"

"Daddy, what's Bitish Clumia? I heard Mommy tell Todd we're going to a new house. It's Bitish Clumia. Do you get your own house there too?"

Robert doesn't answer. His right hand clenches, convulsing on the wheel. The speedometer needle continues its clockwise sweep. He begins to rock back and forth, his breath sharp through clenched teeth. The car crests a hill, commences a two-kilometer downhill run punctuated by a sharp curve carved from granite.

"I—don't—my own house?" His entire body shudders. "Okay then."

Robert rasps in a huge breath. "Charlotte, Honey, I really, really need you to play the peekaboo game, right now, okay. Close your—your eyes really tight, okay?"

"Okay, Daddy. Funny, metal Daddy!"

The car is shimmying now, pistons slamming in metal agony. Robert cries out a tortured, "Eyes shut, Honey, I love you! Now count. One—"

"One."

"Two. Smell those leaves? They smell like autumn."

"Two. Whee, Daddy! We're

going fast! Go faster—"

The frenzied banging on her screen door brings Sarah running. Her brother Paul, a volunteer firefighter, in full gear: "Rob. An accident. His car—"

Sarah hears screams through his words. Her screams.

"—rock cut. We could read the rear licence plate, but the fire—there's nothing left of the car."

Time gels, coalesces. She is numb. She is nothing. She is pain incarnate. Paul is trying to comfort her when his shoulder mic crackles. He leans in, listens, shouts for clarification, confirmation. He is crazed, bursting through the screen door toward the police cruiser pulling into the driveway. An officer is handing Paul a child; words are exchanged. Left on the shoulder of the highway? Paul does not care how, or why. He hugs his niece as he runs toward the screen door, toward his sister, who looks out, sees, thinks: *there was one last thing he did that could make me love him one last time.*

AN ATTEMPT AT MERCY

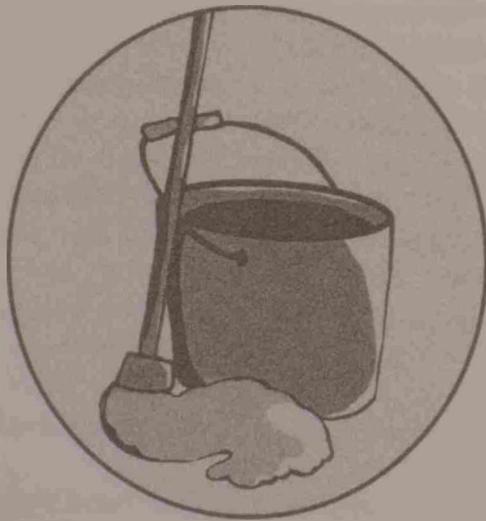
Helen Holmes

As the veil lifts, I'm
finding you in little spaces,

oh you, you never learn!
In death the same battering ram as life!

The unwanted resets of the clock, flashing
figure eights and click, click, click
while buried deep in the bag of bags
suddenly's your pacemaker,
buried in a melted plastic chest,
incessantly recovering from a series of mini strokes
as you whip out a DNR;

the pools of beet juice on the floor,
dripping out the hallway,
down the stairs to the dumpster
(oh god, I'm dreading mopping);



the tablier and cloth to wipe the silver
the same as the day after,
when I wiped the green paint of your room,
cleaning away the evidence of *her*
hanging onto the ceiling in her nightgown

and at the sight you quivered out,
"Oh god, Helen."
(One can only guess why.)

And the last gasp fogged the windows,
sagged the bed, and was felt all the way to Florida—
a great man was dying:
the "Tobert" of the news, and the long shadow at the office
who couldn't be made to resign, so he kicked it instead,

a great man,

I hope the afterlife was everything you thought it would be.





DYING IS ART

By MELISSA MEZZACAPPA

It was in the small things, the way she left the cups lingering on her bedroom floor, returning to them after a long day, untouched. Five large mugs. Tomorrow there would be six. It was in the inches of fabric draped across her bed that she'd solemnly disintegrate into threads. It was in the way the darkness spilled through the cracks of the window and doorframe, surging down her throat. It was her perpetual discomfort, her only reality—it was the decadent taste of all this darkness heaving her into peaceful sleep, and later in the night, anxious dreams. It was in the way the papers lay scattered beneath her bed, thousands of ideas spilling right through the cracks of the hardwood floors. It was the tiny lights that hung around the walls, providing a subtle glimmer to the chaos below—the floorboards, the wood, the papers, the mugs. It was the combination of the sublimity of such tiny, trivial things, the combination of this darkness

suppressing the light, the ideas battling against one another, the cups chiming side by side.

Had it ever been different?

Close your eyes.

There was a time when the sun's rays beating against her alabaster skin wrapped her in a cocoon of warmth. A time of meaningful company. A time of laughter and comfort. He whispered, "I love you" in her ear and her cheeks ached from the smiles those words brought her.

But now, these small joys were lost.

Open.

Close.

Open.

She was suddenly staring out into the abysmal darkness of the early morning sky. Her brain was filled with too many thoughts, all of which she deeply wished to push away. Through the trees, the wind whistled a tune and she replayed it in her head until she turned to mush.

"You don't deserve to be happy."

Close.

She toyed with the concept of sadness. It was *always* there. Tucked beneath her eyelids on sleepless nights. Beneath the sheets. Projected on the walls. Hovering like grey clouds on a stormy evening. But maybe this sadness was being mistaken for happiness, and the tears and overflow of emotions were merely caused by an intense joy. Maybe there was only happiness, to lesser and greater degrees. Maybe sadness existed as an absence of happiness. Were all other emotions then obliterated by this one universal sentiment? What was sadness anyway?

Open.

Close.

Open.

She walked through the cold, stinging air alone, feeling her arms and hands and feet push heavily through the wind. She had no direction, no purpose, only two legs moving her through the breeze. She nestled her fingers into the pockets of her coat and frolicked through the afternoon. Quickening her pace, her feet moved over tiny rocks and crunched-up leaves.

Her hair ran across her face, but she would not touch it. Instead, she allowed the black strands to caress her cheeks, fondle the corners of her lips and the outer edges of her eyelids, until those dark locks were off and away, flying furiously about her face in the frantic wind. She desperately longed for a place to go, somewhere that called for her, lusted for her. But she had nowhere to be. So she travelled quietly through the commotion of the streets, the passing glass windows that displayed pictures and books and clothes she had no desire for, the happy faces that laughed in the company of other happy faces. She felt herself dissipating into the concrete. She walked but she wasn't walking anymore. It was no longer legs or feet carrying

her weight. It was her mind. And yet her mind did not know where to take her. She was evaporating now into the air.

Close.

Open.

Close.

Open.

She was stale coffee left over from Saturday morning on a Sunday afternoon. She was artificial grains of sugar curled up into tiny yellow packets. She was the spoon lying uneasily in a china cup, hand painted with yellow lilies and garden roses, far more suited for prestigious tea gatherings. She was dark rinsed hair dipped in decaying fragrances and grey eyelids painted with shimmering powders. She was red velvet



lips with scabrous peels formed by the icy winter air. She was forgetful, but she kept coffee-ringed napkins stuffed into the linen of her coat pockets with notes detailing her encounters. The first one read:

*Ivory skin
tightened around his neck
like a noose.*

Her writing was scribbles of ground black coffee beans. She was the wilted petal beneath the milky snow cascading over the mountain hill from the outside of her window. She wore her afternoons around her neck, her ears, and her wrists like heavy pieces of gold and silver jewelry. Her face, grey with dust, curved and etched with esoteric lines, was haunting in a most profound and dignified way. The trouble was that she was far too grey for this world. Her black hair was set atop an oval-shaped head, crystal white, with only the plump lips of a ripe sugarplum above her sharp, triangular chin, bursting with color. Her arms were long, as were her hands, and her fingers were the slim bones of a piano player with an aching neces-

sity to share their music with the world. She once had far too many dreams, all nestled up in the framework of her mind and the curvatures of her writing. She was young, but far more dejected than an old man with tender bones. Nevertheless, her manner displayed a kind of quiet serenity—somewhere inside her, a wild fire was burning, but its persistence did not escape her. She was one to remove all expression from her face, after all. Her eyes, round in shape, glossed over in a dark paint, were unassuming, and she had a promising taste for all that was beautiful in an eccentric way. But she was dying . . .

She died upon various occasions. She was dying, for instance, as she emerged from bed in the early morning and made her way to the mirror, staring at the heavy bags beneath her eyes that lay like dark forest leaves on her translucent skin, now worn down even more so, by winter's oppressive air. She was dying as she stuffed breakfast cereal into her mouth and watched the others disappear into the thick, white milk, like a sea of people drowning in a tidal wave. Dying was possible as she walked

through rain and into the dark fog of the morning, holding up a plastic umbrella respectfully shielding her from Zeus' tears. She too found herself dying on the concrete ground, standing by the side of faces carrying expressions of mutual disinterest, with a certain dullness contouring the greyness of their eyes and mouths.

Death was the cacophony of pastel sentiments against the rough canvas of the world. Death was a myriad of painted remorse and loneliness bleeding together. It was the chaotic culmination of colors. It was where the brush completed the stroke and consequently rose from the canvas. Death was all the shades of existing human sentience combining to form this image, polished and complete, yet sad and inanimate.

Dying was art.

Was life not art too?

She could live on. Immortality was found in the eyes that glanced over this page. If one only read these words . . .

"I am lost in these pages without you," she cried.

Close.

Open.

Close.

Dying was her body lying by the shore, flat beneath the blistering sun, but frozen cold.

The beauty of losing all hope, all ambition, and all inspiration, bewildered her. Yet there was ambition in being flung into a tide pool, sinking deep now into the blue canopy of water—this ambition was to reemerge, stronger now than before, skin fleshed away by the water's tides, but prepared to regenerate, to thicken over the bruises and wrinkles. There was inspiration in that water too, the way it consumed her whole, submerging her in its suffocating death, cutting her air supply. There was inspiration in managing to resurface and take one more breath. Hope—there was hope in restoring her peace of mind and finding solace by the shore, amid the white sand, the stench of seawater and the subtle breeze combined with the torch of yellow light patent to her senses.

Open.

THE NARCISSUS INCIDENT

By YANN AUDIN

We had never heard of the town before, but when we learned that the royal family used to vacation there, we decided to stop for the weekend. North X was on our way, as on our bi-annual trips between Maine and Westmount we crossed the border at Derby Line. You might have known by our appearance that we were the kind of people who rarely encountered everyday problems. My wife had a proper Ivy League education and my position allowed me to indulge in any extravagance. It comes as no surprise that North X would have caught our attention sooner rather than later. The landscape was, and still is, the same style found in the paintings my father hung in our family home. Whereas others would decorate their homes with every post-modern piece of crap they could find, my family valued our history and tradition. Right away, I perceived that the inhabitants of North X belonged to this same old world my family



took pride in being a part of. It had one of the most acclaimed restaurants in the province (at which we ate on our first day) an old fashion club (to which we were introduced by a friend of the family), and an ancient lake that had an atmosphere of being out of beat with our time. My wife and I were to spend Friday night through Monday morning around Lake M. During this time, we did not spend much of it together. Our interests in the town varied widely: I wanted to learn about the past of North X while she wanted to enjoy the fruit of its present.

She was always very modern, if you know what I mean. I could never keep up with her jogging or her hot yoga. I would go for a swim once in a while and had always been fond of hiking, but there was something about the institutionalization of bodily recreation that alienated me. Furthermore, this particular lake had a kind of serenity that, although not apparent to everyone, made one loath to disrupt. Still, my wife focused all her energies on lake sports. The same friend who had introduced us to the North X Club had ensured she would

have access to its numerous private beaches accessible only by boat. Thus, as my wife took advantage of the water, I stayed on land to explore North X and meet its people. I find it admirable that although cities have lost their oral tradition, on the margin of the so-called civilized world, history and life still touch each other. Here, I could simply enter the closest antique shop or café to learn both the past and present of the place. I was taught, during various journeys I had taken as a teen with my grandfather, how to get such insights through showing real interest and, sometimes when necessary, flattery.

Between Friday and Sunday evening, I learned how Mrs Y's father built the little green house on Lake M that, because of a rockslide in the 1920s, was now only accessible by boat. I was told of the cult that was dismantled two years ago and whose priest, that could definitively not cure cancer, was now in jail for fraud. I met a French antique dealer who taught me that North X was not polarized between the French and the English as is so often the case in this province, but rather be-

tween locals and affluent tourists. I then spoke with three old ladies at the café, one of whom was a Québécoise from Québec City, and engaged in an extensive conversation about international theatre. I went to the church to make the most of the post-Mass coffee hour. There I was lectured about the local university, and how its founder was forgotten, buried under a church wall. I spent a lot of time at the general store discussing the complication of importing gastronomic delicacies from Europe. My fascination for other people, their lives, and culture was, as ever, a gateway into adventureless adventures such as this one. However, I am aware it is not the story of these people that most interests you, but rather the events of the last night and morning I spent, or ever will spend, around Lake M.

Before I give you the details of the incident that you no doubt have heard of, let me tell you about the lake itself. Lake M is large in the way only Canadian lakes are. The portion that is visible from North X lacks waves, its beaches equally flat, both from the result of human occupation and from the lake's

great age. The shore is bordered on one side by houses and on the other by a forest that has lost its memory, but not its influence, over the lake. Despite its origin in the melting of the Laurentide Ice Sheet, the lake's waters are clouded, hiding its depth. On the north shore of Lake M a few embankments still hold boats of various sizes and ages that lay silent and still on the placid waters. On the bridge at the northern tip of the lake, I spent long hours pondering the secrets of Lake M. You should know that water fascinates me. For many years, I couldn't tell you why, I would stare at the ocean for hours thinking of the stories I had heard and read about in my childhood. Water was the ultimate freedom for my childhood characters, so why did I feel oppressed by it? Whether on a boat or swimming in a pool, water surrounded me, and choked me like nothing else. It impedes a man's motion, restricts him to his boat, and threatens his breath and life. You can flee society on water, but when you are in it, you cannot flee the monsters that lurk, under the lake.

On our last night at North X, I went to bed early. My wife had

met a couple from New York that had one of those white motorboats that would create the infrequent waves on Lake M. That night, I dreamt of city lights breaking the mountains around North X and of a headmaster rotting under a church wall. In the morning, I was alone and the first thought I had was not of my wife, but of the lake. Later, when I learned how she had drowned, I knew it would not have happened, had they sailed a slower, smaller, older boat. Of the wider affair, you will excuse me if I don't want to speak. Just know that the three of them were found on one of the Club's private beaches. Only their faces were submerged. They had drowned in a few centimetres of calm water, so the locals called it the "Narcissus Incident". The dead had the same wounds: one around the neck, one on the mouth, and one on the back of

the head—three parallel lines that the police could not explain. The motorboat that belonged to the couple was found three days later, at the bottom of Lake M, covered in algae.

If such an event had to occur, I am glad it happened where, and in the way that it did. Anywhere else it would have been in newspapers for a couple of days and then forgotten. In North X, she became a part of its history. For generations, people will speak of this night. They will remember the boat and the beach, and describe the corpses and their markings. Their hands shall draw, in the same gesture, three parallel scars as if they were their own, until the day when the city lights will break through the mountains to North X and mute all traditions in the name of progress and modernity.



PILLARS NEVER CEASE

Helen Holmes

How often have you tried to sell your kidney?

Me, once—

for retribution of good deeds done

I met two Mennonite women in the lobby, they looked like women, acted like women, probably tasted like women—

women full of salt. Full of bones that bend and organs that stew to an appetizing mush, and life—
full of life.

But you know there's something.

How often, conversing,

did each word, each word given like legal tender,

sound like organs dripping out of my mouth like

two-year old slobber;

did the fat melt me down, every firm belief
petulant, every strange moment I could imagine
like pudding in my stomach.

I felt every part become as heavy as lead,
heavy as your arms around my shoulders
the insides snaking like ribbons into the night
slowly bleeding out of an ear or something
that is itchy.

But whatever promises I made, whatever else,
Nothing Prepared Me for The Question:
"What support do you have?"

I said:
I am myself a pillar,
my mother is a windmill,
my brother, an institution,
my friends are gazebos and I dance in them.

I am myself a pillar
and this is all I need.



I WILL NOT MARCH

Madeleine Hession

I will not march
in your foolish parade.
I will not bow
to a puerile brigade.
My white flag will not rise
towards your barbaric eyes.

The green on this field
seeps not from the earth,
but from the skin of a girl
who set aside her worth
in attempt to voice
her battle cry.

Vicious and unruly,
and expects me to comply.

I will not fight a fruitless battle.
I will not mount a malicious saddle,
because what was then is not now
and what that is, is not how
you saw what could be, you saw it without me.

I will not feed a fire
that only feeds herself,
for the ashes will burn more
than the fire itself.

STRIAE

Denise St. Pierre

Lights illuminate EMMA, standing center stage. She wears a simple, short robe tied loosely at the waist over neutral undergarments. She looks halfway between trying to impress someone and a woman in the throes of a comfortable relationship.

EMMA: Every once in a while, when I least expect it, I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror and I think I've survived a brutal attack—one that I didn't even feel. Like I was mauled but skipped over the tender, crusty wounds and went straight to scars—valleys, not peaks, that's important—that pain me but never seem to hurt. But that's some melodramatic shit, right? It's not like I'm alone in this. Everyone has them, it's a natural part of being a woman. I see myself constantly expanding like a galaxy or the universe, pulling apart my fucking dermis until it splits apart like tectonic plates in a continental shift. And you don't notice until you're oceans away, and your thighs looks like a tiger went to town on them. And not just your thighs. Your hips, your ass, the backs of your knees. Must have been a bloodbath. But I'm mixing similes . . .

(She hesitates. She places her hands on the tie around her waist. She pauses. She undoes the knot and lets the robe hang open.)

It certainly doesn't help when every encouraging word is coming from the mouth of a friend whose legs are creepily smooth like raw hotdogs. Not that all women aren't great and wonderful and all, but you'd be a fool to think we all root for each other all the time in the real world where we actually have to know each other. See,

I had an unnatural fascination with the legs of others. Throwing surreptitious glances their way, trying to assess the extent of their damage, so to speak. Even those who *did* have them had delicate white stripes, like invisible fissures. Mine were angry and purple and dramatically concave—you could run a river through those things. Didn't I just say oceans? Oceans and continents and rivers, oh my! *(Laughs.)* A more poetic brain would make a better stab at saying this body's an atlas. I'm thinking more along the lines of those globes with raised mountain ranges, like you're reading the world in braille or something. Tangible formations and whatever.

When you go through your whole life thinking you're horrifying and unfuckable, it's nearly impossible to come around to the idea that some people might not actually give a shit about your weird physical flaws and fall in love the way they tell you they do in the movies and stuff. *With everything.* Head, heart, hands, all that. That the things you fret about, the scars, the lines, they're just in your head and that when a man or woman or any human gets down there, they're really not thinking about how your thighs ripple or the fact that your leg isn't an airbrushed hotdog, or god, something else, a Barbie leg, not a hotdog. Anything but a hotdog. *God, I want a hotdog.*

I hate, hate, *hate* that it took a series of people, of *men*, not giving a shit about my legs to convince me not to give a shit about them. Every girl, every woman, hopes it will be on her own terms. That eventually she can look herself in the mirror and not want to dissect and reassemble, not hear a niggling little voice that says you're unworthy, unlovable, unfuckable. The whole gamut. Nobody expects to see someone behind them in that mirror, nodding and smiling and just wanting

to get down to it. No thoughtful meditations on your flaws, no particular attention or ignorance. I know that I wanted it to be me. And it wasn't. But it got me here, I guess. I suppose that's worth something. Sort of like the way that new mothers feel validated by the unadulterated admiration of their own children. Those kids recognize a home they once had. They don't see marks and scars as impediments or barriers or reasons to hate you. They're channels. A way out into the world.

(She shrugs the robe off her shoulders and lets it fall to the ground.)

I'm the globe, see? Peaks and valleys and all. I'm the whole, wide, wide world.



FALLOW

Frank Willdig

I shall let my cornfield go fallow,
and wait for the growing of flowers,
a profusion of forms and colours,
will result from a cornfield gone fallow.

And all through the seasons I'll follow,
the progress of life in each flower,
with sun and rain at the right hour,
my world will be brighter with colour.

But alas, over time must come sorrow,
my flowers will fade some tomorrow,
as trees quickly grow and cast shadow,
they fill the old field that was fallow,

But for now there's joy and wonder to know,
that someday they'll find a new place to grow.

BUCKEYE

Jeff Parent

Shoulda knocked this barn down years ago.
 Even the swallows won't touch it none
 but on half-lit nights like this
 when sleep won't come for coughin, I come out.
 See this old stall here? Smells like piss and mildew?
 I knew the horse once lived there.

Buckeye.

Mean son of a bitch,
 white as January
 with a single black spot size of a dime
 on his left haunch.
 That's his off-switch, we tole the greenhorns
 and only the quick hands
 missed a kick to the head
 for believin it.

Off-switch. On a horse.
 Can you imagine.

Dead now, Buckeye.
 Found him one November
 right here in this stall, on his back.
 Legs straight up
 like holdin up the roof.
 Damnedest thing.
 Crop circles in Liverston Cross that year
 but who can tell what that meant.

Still waitin for it to fall in, this barn.
 Might just never, I think on nights like this,
 cough like a black stone in a tin box.
 Barn air's not helpin. Not really.
 But I'll be damned,
 cursed to fiery hell,
 anyone figures out
 my off-switch.



LOST SOUL'S SONG

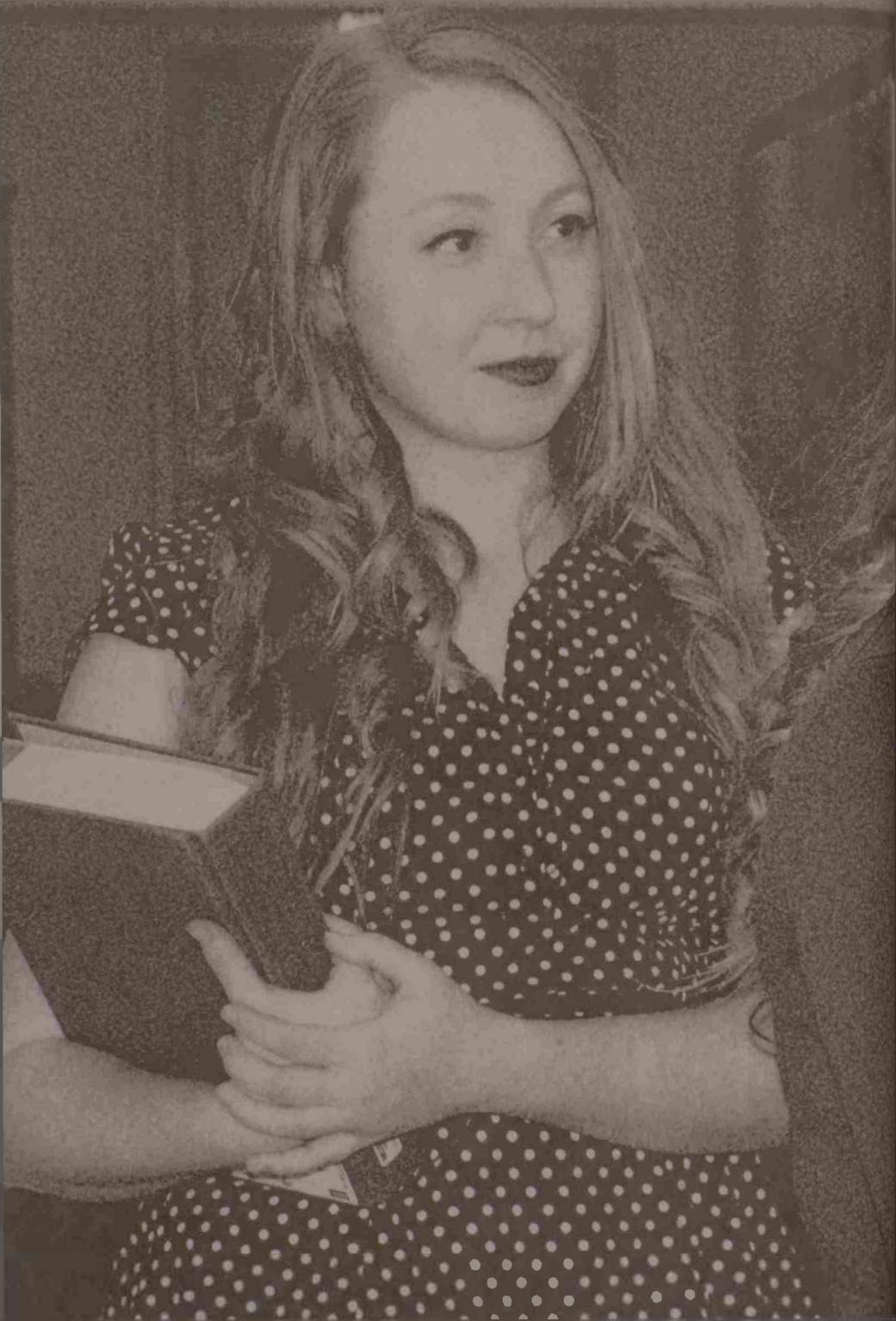
By KATHARINE MUSSELLAM

Silence often scares people. That's why many don't talk to me, because they can't hear my song. For my whole life, I've been the only one who could.

I hear lots of other people's songs. The boys have low ones with erratic time signatures. The girls' songs are floating melodies with regular beats. I've never met anyone with a song like mine: gentle but asymmetrical, a lonely internal monologue of a melody.

Few people can suppress their initial revulsion when they encounter a person whose song they cannot hear, but Adele could. When we first met, she studied me. Her music paused as she listened to see if my song was merely quieter than the rest. After a two-bar rest, her music resumed, but as a variation. Understanding slowly formed on her face as her music returned to its original theme.

"You don't have a song," she said as she approached me. I was tired of answering to people who said this after nineteen



years, so I only shook my head. She looked puzzled.

"I can't hear it," she continued.

"Nobody can," I said. Even though I had told many people before, for some reason sadness seeped into my answer for the first time since I was a child.

"What do you mean?" she asked, an honest question with no malicious intent. I hesitated for a moment.

"You hear that boy's song, right?" I began, gesturing to a red-haired boy who was scrolling through his phone. "Everyone recognizes a boy's song or a girl's song. Everyone is naturally attuned to them. But I'm different. People don't recognize someone like me. Their symphonic receptors just can't pick up my music."

"I've heard of people like you." Adele nodded. "I mean, I never thought I'd ever meet one of you, or that I wouldn't be able to hear your song if I did, I just knew your songs sounded different..."

Adele paused for a few moments, adopting an intense expression. I could tell she was listening again.

"I still can't hear it even

though I know what you are."

"Knowledge is one thing, nature is another," I explained. "Deep inside, there's still a lack of understanding. It's primal."

"But I want to hear your song," she said. "I'm sure it's beautiful."

I shrugged. "Everyone's like you, there's nothing wrong with it."

"But I want to hear it!" she insisted. "It's not fair that nobody else but you gets to hear your song."

"You'll just have to live in ignorance like everyone else," I said. "The doctors said only others like me can hear my music."

This was true, to a point. Instinctively, only others like me *could* hear our kind of song. But there was another condition that I did not disclose to Adele.

Despite what I told her on the day we met, she stuck by me even though I must have been an oddity to her. And even if she couldn't hear me, I could hear her. As we spent more time together, her song gave me a sense of security—especially around those who refused to understand that there were people like me who existed,

who thought I was some kind of freak and violently enacted these beliefs.

"Leave them alone!" Adele shouted at the two boys who had been taunting me in the hallway one day, her music accented with *marcato* notes. "They're not an 'it'. Who cares if you can't hear their music? You don't deserve to hear it!"

That shut the boys up. Four-bar rest, then a *decrescendo* as they walked away.

Sometimes I wondered whether it was difficult for Adele to sympathize with someone who was silent to her. If it bothered her she never said so, though. The most she'd ever done was ask me to explain what my tune sounded like. But even when I tried to explain it as eloquently as I knew how, I still thought I fell short.

Sometimes we would dance, Adele and I. Alone in her room, her music was the only sound, at least for her. It was better, more personal than any recording, and it was all we needed as we held hands and spun around the room. We swayed gracefully to her steady beat, everything else dissolved except the sensa-

tions of where we touched. She couldn't hear my heart harmonizing, so I began to step on the off-beats in order to convey it to her. Adele felt the rhythm, and as we broke out from the initial form, so did the music. Con *abbandono*, we moved faster, straying from regularity, wild and free.

We could no longer continue when we became out of breath, but even when we stopped dancing we could not stop laughing. I noticed her song lilted when she laughed. I loved it.

As we relaxed and our laughing waned, I noticed something unfamiliar change in the music, both emanating from her and playing inside me. Quiet, but happy. An intimate *adagio* slowing as we looked into each other's eyes and our breathing returned to normal.

One night we were leaving class together like we always did, but this time was different. Adele stopped and realized she'd forgotten something. She told me to wait for her at the bottom of the steps as she went back into the still-lit building. I stood there patiently when suddenly I heard voices approach-

ing.

“Look, it’s that *thing!*”

“Freak!”

I listened for Adele’s music, but all I could hear were the sombre drums of my aggressors. Surely Adele had her things by now. Any second and she would appear to tell these guys off. But her melody was absent.

My heart was racing. The thumping in my chest and the overtones of blood ringing in my ears almost drowned out the boys’ songs—almost. They were closing in. My mind’s eye flashed memories of my time before Adele, and I realized the pain I had endured before her song had washed over me.

And so, my instincts kicked

in, and I ran.

My feet beat against the cement of the sidewalk, then asphalt, then sidewalk again. I turned corners, the pumping blood in my ears growing louder. I ran through the gates of the park, down its path and into the trees.

When I could run no longer, I gasped for breath and listened for the songs of my tormentors. Nothing. I had lost them.

I looked around to see where I had ended up and realized that I had no idea where I was. It was somewhere I had never been and the expanse of darkness, filled with only the faint outlines of trees, sent me into a second panic. All sounds faded

away. Pulse, breath—everything. And for once the silence made me very afraid, because I knew that nobody would find me in it.

“Adele!” I cried as I paced about the trees. My only hope of being heard was my voice, the only distress call I had. As the seconds passed and nobody appeared, tears welled up in my eyes. My voice faltered as the seconds turned into minutes. Nobody could hear me, they were deaf to my every sound. And then I heard the drumbeat of Adele’s footsteps, the familiar tune began flowing back into my head.

I turned and saw her, my unknown melody leaping from its

melancholy inversion.

I stared in disbelief.

“I heard you!” she exclaimed, running towards me.

“What?”

“I heard your song!”

I stood, shocked, as she embraced me, before I softened to her touch.

What I had never told Adele was that if someone loves a person like me deeply enough, they will hear my soul’s song.

I had given up on it ever happening, and yet there we were. Our melodies swelled in a crescendo and became one, the themes blending and making new, intricate variations: the symphony of a lost soul’s song finally found.



THROW OURSELVES

Connor Richter

Expression is a lesson,
less than lessons learned
and further from lessons earned,
turned inside out
until everything resides within.

With what's given is not a gift
but a sacrifice to suffice the needs of the other.
Feed it with meat cut from a lover,
or weep for them—
a secret strung from a lung.

What they hear
they will praise
but what they praise
will never last,
it's swallowed fast,
and you're never taught to savour the flavour
while consuming a saviour.

We try to throw ourselves eloquently,
hoping to spit wax poetics
on eternal truths and inner complexities.

Instead we remain
a murder of crows
cawing a noble name
down a drain pipe.

A CITY BIKE IN THE TOWNSHIPS

Rosemin Nathoo

i.
This land demands nothing less than your legs.
Hunched and rotating perennially, your body, at least,
acts the three sisters.¹
If you ditch the spandex, choose an aim
(say, ten kilometers for a beer, take the high road,
past pink volcanoes reduced to backdrop),
then you'll be covered with backpack-lianas or
satchel-lianas or maybe a Guatemalan purse(-liana).
Squash-legged and corn-backed and travelling bag-beaned,
you may even have some to trade.

This is the peak of productivity.

This land demands nothing less than your legs.
Your feet may be bare, but if you are booted,
make sure that they are dirty.
Avoid synthetic leather and if you can,
scratch the toes with a machete or a hatchet,
exhaust the gore-tex quickly, get them
dull and mud-caked.
Then you'll be ready to go.
The pressure is all for your knees.
Choose the narrowest trails.
Park perilously close to the road.

This is the way to the peak.

¹Corn, squash, and beans—these were grown together by Native Americans all over both continents. The plants work together chemically and physically, maximizing the soil's nutrients, with corn as the lattice.

Bred here are the creatures who, truly,
wear plaid like they were born in it. If you
carry on your adventures enough to

cultivate an air of casualness(/ty—in regards to these bodily
thrills).

(Sure, you climbed this one this time,
you biked here to here in the rain,
you're totally used to these mountains, and you
always use a typewriter.)

Then they—he—may just love you.

But he is just a product of this land;
he is all three sisters.
You may measure in this way
but the land will take back more than your legs.

ii.

To avoid exposure,
aim your lungs at
one hundred and eighty degrees,
at least one thousand meters high,
and smoke one hundred cigarettes.

Befriend just the stubborn and stunted spruce,
who so-slowly carve through this
cliff-face still post-glacially bare.

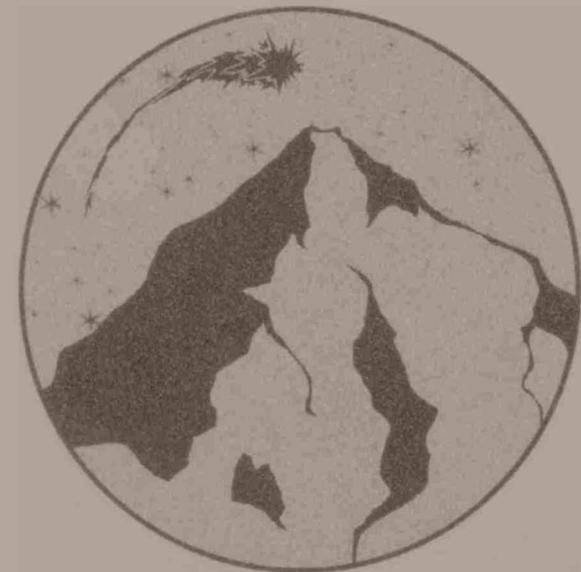
To avoid exposure
cough out your diaphragm,
instead catch the winds from Mount Washington,
catch the winds from Inukjuak.

But that feverish northward lake!
That too-familiar topography of
primary-coloured puzzle bits
seems to have exposed me, have stolen the film from my eyes,
organs-outwards, icy thighs
remembering the Atlantic
(and other fingers, too).

Maybe I'd better climb higher.
Grapple up these cliffs, my dear, until you're
Kilimanjaro-numb
(and the air is too thin for cologne),

then look across the Atlantic.

If you want to get over something,
you first have to get above it.



[Faint, illegible text, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side of the page]

NOT TO BE TAKEN AWAY
 CONSULTATION SUR PLACE

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