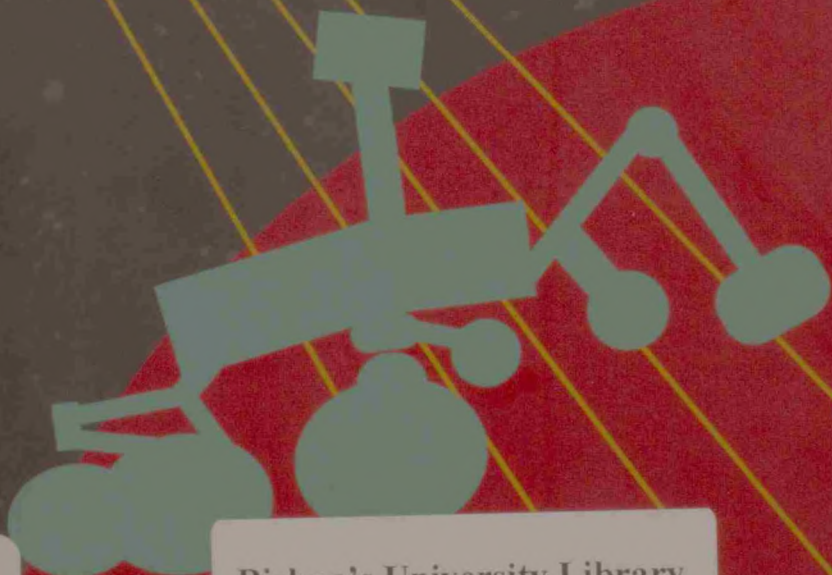




The Mitre

stranger soils



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The Mitre 2014

Stranger Soils



If we're going to Mars,
we should probably go together.

RED ALERT RED ALERT RED ALERT

Editors are not infallible and sometimes errors slip through. One of our esteemed contributors, HOLLY DOBB had the letters "rej" added to her name throughout this edition. I offer my sincere apologies to Holly and ask that when you find those extra letters, simply cast them into the black hole of memory- they are not meant for this universe.

Jeff Parent, Editor



121st edition

A Bishop's University literary tradition since 1893

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"The title of Patricia Franco's photograph "And the Ancient Forests Began to Smoke" is quoted from *The Dragon: Fifteen Stories* by Yevgeny Zamyatin

Mission Control

Jeff Parent
Editor



We're all together
on this trip,
weightless,
in our trusty ship.
Fish bowl helmets,
evening wear,
are haute couture
for "over there."
Eat tinfoil food,
drink boxed wine,
play video games
to pass the time.
Across the void,
we dance, we toil
to find our feet
on stranger soils.

Stephanie Martin
Graphics Editor



Hello? Mars?
Your cereal killers are
everywhere
They keep running around
and scare all my little poor
eggs .
Life is absurd here
and dadaism is taking me over.
I see chicken nuggets, chicken
nuggets everywhere.
Where's the ketchup?
It's war!
But please mind the gap.
Keep calm and carry on.
There will be no invasion.
No nuggets will eat us all. No
cereal killer will steal my eggs.
It's all because our lives are
absurd. Its all because of Bobby
Watson.
But please, Mars, call a Doctor
when you come back. I think
something is wrong with me.

Acknowledgements

I raise a toast to everyone that bravely added their words, their art, and their voices to The Mitre 2014. You truly made this a community effort.

Annis Karpenko, for your kind support, assistance, and reassurance that it really wasn't as complicated as I thought it was going to be.

The Bishop's University Student Representative Council, for the moneys and trusting me to spend it well.

Shawn Malley, for trusting me to pull this off so the future may excavate these strange archaeologies.

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Stephanie Martin, artistic force-to-be-reckoned-with, who patiently and kindly considered my creative vision for The Mitre and then proceeded, by some manner of digital alchemy and visual wizardry, to surpass all my expectations. Without you, I would have tumbled into a grim hell of construction paper and glue.

&

Corinne, my wife, you never doubted me for a minute.

-Jeff Parent, March 2014

Dedication

This 121st Edition of The Mitre is dedicated to my Dad, Peter, who left this universe far too soon and it doesn't get any stranger than that.

He was a good man, my biggest fan, and I miss him.
I love you, Dad.

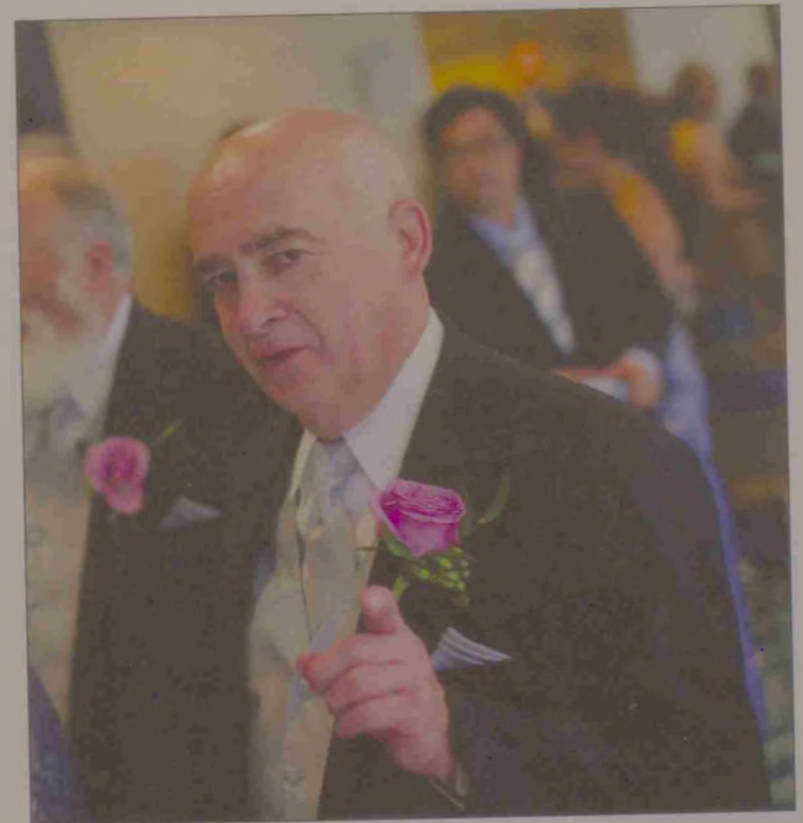


Photo credit: Dory Chamoun

Just Before Day Break

Alex Morency-Letto

Glints of life
glare cross the room.
As madness stares
at sun too soon.

The windows ply
the shades that glow,
and bird chants chide
in mornings' throes.

The tables lunge
and times two fingers
give middle ones
to those that sit here.

Desert of crumbs,
oases stains,
a nomad stands
and his refrain:

"The work to do.

It must be done."

Yet all the hours have passed to none

The Rift: Prologue

Shawn Malley

No one at flight control would admit it openly, but the Mars mission was doomed from the outset. A few carbon molecules dispersed in a loose hydrogen matrix. Discovered in a faded electron scan of a long-lost core sample. Slim evidence of a Martian Cretaceous period, but we needed something to go on. The decision was made. We had no choice but to look outward. So we did.

The terrible paradox was the fuel shortage itself. Research and development on the propulsion, navigation and other basic flight systems trickled to a halt well before the pipelines began coughing brackish mud and air. The promise of photon-powered space exploration had been long abandoned. And years spent containing the gas riots at home and the invasion attempts from abroad had all but consumed reserves. For a government determined to maintain political stability, rocket fuel seemed like a luxury.

Technical problems were inevitable, losses expected, but something had to be done. "To preserve the legacy of humanity we must save the future." The catchphrase of humanity's last hour. Lonely words in a wilderness of anarchy and fear.

So, laden with excavating drills and prospecting tools, the United Humanity arched gracefully on that fateful day through Earth's atmosphere and lunged towards Mars.

And we waited for news.

The flight crew settled into the long voyage, cheerful at first for the honor of being chosen to save the world from itself. Thankful, too, of purpose itself in a world turned grotesquely in on itself, a world where words like civilization and decency were increasingly suspicious and hypocritical.

Minor accidents plagued the United Humanity from the outset. Neither the hastily retrofitted Uranus class rocket nor the crew was prepared for such a voyage. Oxygen generators failed each in their turn after the first month. In the vacuum of space, batteries began losing their charge in contracted wiring. Solar power became increasingly unreliable, putting the navigation systems in peril. Precious fuel trickled away to support ancient back-up generators. Mars was getting further away.

All mitigating luxuries were sacrificed for power, the lifeblood of the ship. Raw animal heat became a necessary calculation for survival. A floating human cage. The reek of humanity they were trying to save from extinction burned the nostrils of the astronauts.

In the boredom and the confinement, peevishness flourished in the form of thinly stretched national rivalries and sexual tension. At first. But such earthly cares passed soon enough and paranoia settled in like a fog.

Days and nights were measured solely by the commander's wrist watch. No one really slept, no one was really awake. The sleeping cocktails lost effectiveness in everyone but the Spanish mining engineer. But even he stopped taking them for fear of exciting the envy of his colleagues. In the harried months before launch, the Space Travel Affective Disorder manual was downgraded to recommend reading. No one dared consult it in flight.

And so the anxious minutes and weeks passed for the good ship and crew, nearly freezing, barely nourished, somnambulant and stressed.

Words were exchanged from ship to control from time to time. Communique from families and lovers, cheerful and round with pride, thinned to barely disguised despair. Mourning was settling in at home. Communication grew increasingly infrequent, instructions more vague, news edited. Astronauts cut adrift, umbilical lines stretched and tearing.

The craft, like Mars, was growing smaller and smaller.

And then, 109 days into the voyage, United Humanity disappeared altogether from telemetry. For 8.2 seconds the United Humanity was totally unaccounted for. And in those 8.2 seconds everything changed. We would have all the fuel we would ever need.

To be continued...



Untitled

Annis Karpenko

Pictures

Luke Wilson

He downs a pill and the phone rings once. Twice.
He won't pick up tonight.
But the kid's crying and she'll redial.
They've been here before:
A trial separation with some subtle variations.
They'll wait too long before the eye of the storm.

2:00am: the child shuts his eyes
To a thimble of whiskey and a lullaby.
She figures three fingers leave her numb enough.
On the walls in her living room: a bride and groom.
The flowers in their eyes were plucked too soon.
She lights a cigarette as she slips away.

(Chorus)

Looking at pictures of the family from a former life
Through the precious poisons of her past.
Looking at pictures of the family from a former life.
Step through the looking glass.

Sunshine through the stained glass
Whispers of a love that will last.
They carved initials in the bark.
Six weeks before:
Their heat between the sheets.
The squeaks.
The creaks.
(Of which they'll never speak.)
Strike of flint to make a spark.

Now, he's exchanging vows like a cornered kid
Who'd say anything to mask what he did.
They both suck out the poison.
The flames in the rafters!
The gates are shut! The gates are shut!
That future she's been after!
The gates are shut! The gates are shut!

(Chorus)

She walks down the aisle (a ghost, a gown of white).
Her heart held in fire, she will end this home with the light.

Heritage

Anne-Marie Jean

I will smile when you weaken.
 I will cheer when you pass.
 I will laugh when you are honored.
 I will dance when you are buried.
 I will cry because I remember,
 you made me as I am.



Daunting

Natchasiri Syn Kunaporn

Lightheart

Helen Holmes

The coward is the listening,
 the doorman is the patience,
 the undertow, the skater,

the same ice, the same mirror
 cut and bled with each foot
 L-C-R, L-C-R, L-C-R
 body of a race car,
 finding slipstreams, faster, faster,
 faster fragmenting body,
 shattered, doled out, dipping down to
 the lowest reserves,

what, what can I feed upon
 when I am eaten,
 beaten, gnawed upon 'til final frame—

'til the same corpse of a racing pigeon
 never claimed, banded legs got tied together
 becomes the thing you can't get away, you can't get away, you can't
 bury—

no stopping, only pausing at
 the yellow and you can't move through five lanes
 of burning cigars right up to the line

and frozen below the surface

you must have stumbled through,

cut once too deep and fallen,

it must have frozen over,

ice bled too much and looks like

it must be all gone,

deflating like an air bag.

Nursing Home, 2nd Floor

Frank Willdig

This is the land of ghosts,
the vale of disembodied amblers
looking for something not yet remembered,
the gaunt, the disheveled, with uncomprehending eyes,
search the rooms and the hallways for a memory
or a clue as to how and why they ended up here,
on a day without a yesterday.



Empty Romance

Kuna Zero

Catch-of-the-Day

Mel MacCoubrey

The singing started when Red clicked the front door shut. The sagging grocery bags pulled at her arms, dragging her towards the kitchen counter. The song irritated her. It always did. No matter how many times she asked him to keep quiet, he always sang his rough, high pitched song as loud as he could, whenever she was home.

She dropped the plastic bags on the counter like two sacks of flour and felt her head rush. The singing stopped. She took a deep, forced breath and steadied herself. The open room felt icy in her lungs and the fresh air clung to her skin. *Clean.* Opening the bags, she set out each new purchase one by one on the counter in front of her. The crisp greens, bright vegetables, balsamic vinaigrette, and parmesan cheese were set out in order of appearance.

Taking another deep breath, her mind crawled back to a time not so long ago when she had laid similar things out in a similar fashion. The air that day was so murky she could have cleared a path through it with a butcher's knife. *Cigarettes.* And the silence was filled with the restless humming and nattering of Hunter, her "savior", her knight in rusty armor. He told her to make him dinner, like he did most nights, and after some teeth-bearing and hopeless protest, she did. He could never hold a tune and he never listened.

She thought of his dirty shoes on the couch and the tangible vibration of a gag brought her back to her task at hand. *Salad. Salad and...right.* There was thawed meat in the fridge. She turned on the stove and placed a pan over the heat. Drizzling some olive oil in the pan, she heard the singing start up again. She growled to herself, startling an otherwise-still earwig sitting on the counter top. She watched it scuttle behind the display of the stove, unable to react fast enough to kill it.

The singing made its way back to her tingling ears and Red stalked to the closet and grabbed a hold of her broom. She stabbed the centre of the kitchen ceiling — once, twice, and three more times after that — until the singing stopped. Then, letting the broom fall to the floor, she returned to her vegetables and diced them.

She thought of Hunter asking her when dinner would be ready every few minutes. He was a simple man with simple needs, he would tell her, blowing thick black smoke in her direction, filling her pink lungs with the slow, steady drip-drop of tar. She could still feel it. Sticky and weighted.

When the singing began again she howled in frustration. The helpless little earwig tumbled back onto the stone slab counter top. More alert now, she threw her knife in its direction and missed the critter only by a hair; a stray leg lay lifeless on the blade.

A sour pain twisted her face to a point when she realized she had cut her finger in her own rage. She was never careful with knives. *Oh silly girl, hurting yourself won't help any*, Hunter would say. She would tell him she was fine and then he would get too close. She would fantasize about slamming his face into the pan and holding it there in the virgin oil to boil and burn. He never listened.

She put the meat in the pan instead. It was beautiful and raw and its tenderness always calmed her. *Clean. Fresh. The rarer the better*. She felt saliva well up under her tongue. She watched the earwig run by a third time and this time she was ready. She pressed the tip of her finger onto the poor critter's back and slowly began to push, forcing it to paint the stone slate. It's yellow innards stained her white nail and smeared it into the counter top. She watched as the blood from her cut mixed with the earwig, creating a flesh-colored stain under her finger.

Please, clean that up, dearest... She loved to watch the blood well-up on the surface of her skin. Bubbling up and tipping down the curve of her finger towards the floor. It drove Hunter mad. She remembered the last time it happened, and he approached her, entering her personal-bubble. Too close. And he took her finger in his mouth and sucked the wound, his puppy dog eyes staring into hers. She told him to leave it. She remembered feeling infected. Dirty. Diseased. He didn't listen.

Red was brought back from her reverie by a spray of oil that jumped free from the pan and burned her skin. She let it settle there, forming a thin blister on her arm. Not wanting to burn her feast, she took the meat from the stove and eased it onto a white plate. She mixed the veggies in a wooden bowl and served herself. Her finger ached from the sting of the vinaigrette but she couldn't stop now. She wished there was something to be done about the singing. Nothing was going to ruin this moment.

Biting into her catch-of-the-day she calmed, thinking no more of Hunter. The wailing quieted and became no more than the dull hum of the fridge. She chewed softly, letting the rich flavors overwhelm her and the juice run down her chin. She needed this. She deserved this. She ate.

When she could eat no more, she took her dishes to the counter. She rinsed her salad bowl. *That pale red stain will only come out in the dishwasher*, she thought. Her empty water glass followed. Then she took her plate and watched the water slowly let the bloody scraps slide away, a leftover ear making a dull sound as it hit the bottom of the now greasy sink.

She put that plate away too, and rubbed her oily hands on her favorite gingham, cream-sickle-colored tea towel. The singing came back and she made her way to a set of stairs just down the hall.

Ascending them slowly, she reveled in the scratchy, high-pitched song. He really was incapable of carrying a tune. She let out a puff, "you know I don't like to chase you, darling" she barked at the attic door. "Hush, now. I'm tired of that song."

She recalled leaving the stove on.



The Face of Beauty

Holly Dobbrey

Dear Ears, *Stephanie Matheson*

Infinite thanks.
The country has been rocking
for some time
on a superb
high-fidelity
long playing record
especially designed
to make parties jollier.
Those audible qualities
of the young generation,
the music of the strip joint,
the tea dance music,
the revolutionary spirit
perfumed with gunpowder
is revealed
on any mono phonograph.

Listen, listen:
the syncopated rhythm
the measured steps
the poignant chromatics
and quazi presto!
The movement quickens
in rapid triplets
ping-pong intermezzo
that sweeps into a vigorous
dance-tempo
that sounds better than stereo
has
ever
sounded
before!!!

Listen, listen:
and dream
of your beloved
or of vodka and caviar
of the Fatherland
of becoming Emperor of the World
of the Pole and the patriot
or Polkas, Waltzes, and Rheinlanders!
Or the Crown Prince of Prussia!
Or a shadowy domain for gnomes!

For you may feel like a little man
but you are, in fact, a giant,
with heroism,
melancholy,
the great enigmas,
and Sesame Street
only ever as far as your
radio -phonograph-tape recorder
combination
(available in mahogany,
blonde mahogany,
or walnut with a jeweled styli).

An Eternal Rose *François Leduc*

In the weeping forest lies a clearing
where my life came to know sorrow.
The ground is infected by my sins.
The hand of God dubbed me a foe.

Oh, how my efforts were for thine,
for I wish to prevent the ravages of time.
Alas, for thee 'twas an altered doom
for my dear Rose eternity is her tomb.

Like the painter I wished to preserve thee.
A desire which haunted my dreams,
a vision that I would lose her beauty,
my hands took haste to act upon fears.

I sought to preserve thy countenance.
So I came to rely on forbidden alchemy
to prevent the day thou wouldst tarry.
Alas, I was punished for this arrogance.

In the dying season I stand before a grave,
thou art not dead, but cannot be saved.
from withering age I have guarded thee.
Alas, I made thee a prisoner of the scenery.



Timbre and Toes
Linda Hoy

Interpretive Dance

Denise St. Pierre

Characters:

TATE, twenty-six

ROBIN, twenty-six

Location:

A cocktail party in Tate's apartment—early evening, but it's still light. He and Robin stand alone, off to the side of the guests mingling about the room. Tate nurses a beer against his chest and often lets his focus drift from Robin's conversation. She is entirely engrossed.

ROBIN: You sure know a lot of people.

TATE: Not really. *(He waves and gestures at someone across the room, perhaps in approval of a date or an outfit.)*

ROBIN: I don't think I've ever seen so many people in such a small apartment.

TATE: Well, that's all a matter of perspective.

ROBIN: I guess. *(Beat.)* It's nice to see you.

TATE: Oh yeah, you too.

ROBIN: I like seeing your face.

TATE: My face? *(He laughs uncomfortably.)*

ROBIN: I mean, *really* seeing it. Like, not under neon or black lights where all your dandruff looks radioactive or all that. It's like we actually know each other.

TATE: So all those other times, we didn't?

ROBIN: What, know each other? Well, how well can you get to know someone in a club?

TATE: Depends on the club.

ROBIN: Sure. Yeah, sure, of course. But this is nice too. It's like we're coming out of a cave together into the real world.

TATE: Together?

ROBIN: Into the lllllight! Enlightening the prisoners!

TATE: Yeah, Robin... *(They regard one another awkwardly for a few moments.)*

ROBIN: Thanks so much for inviting me. *(She reaches to squeeze his hand, but he dodges, patting her on the arm.)*

TATE: Anytime. I always like seeing you.

ROBIN: But it's funny, right? Like, I see you at the bar and the club and the next morning and all that, but we never see each other during this big chunk of the day.

TATE: Yeah, funny.

ROBIN: Your place looks nice with the lights on.

TATE: I'd hope so.

ROBIN: And you said you wanted to talk to me about something.

TATE: I did?

ROBIN: Yeah, you did. You texted me the address, and you were like: "Hey, I want to ask you something. See you tonight!"

TATE: Right...right! Yeah, I wanted to— *(He leans towards her, reaching for something behind her.)*

ROBIN: Yes? *(She leans in.)*

TATE: —ask if you'd proofread my screenplay. *(He holds up a manila envelope stuffed with pages.)*

ROBIN: P-proofread your screenplay?

TATE: Yeah! Well, you mentioned that one time that you studied writing in college.

ROBIN: Comparative Literature.

TATE: Right, yeah. And me and some buddies really want to get this project off the ground, and since I'm really bad with spelling and grammar and shit I thought you could help.

ROBIN: I, um...

TATE: Are you okay?

ROBIN: I...just thought you were going to ask me something else.

TATE: Really? Oh...oh. Well, are you still game?

ROBIN: We have sex.

TATE: Excuse me?

ROBIN: We have sex and you're asking me to proofread your screenplay? That's what you wanted to ask. That's it.

TATE: Robin, we *had* sex.

ROBIN: Three times.

TATE: Come on. Twice.

ROBIN: And it didn't...?

TATE: I mean, it was nice and all.

ROBIN: Wow, nice. And you never thought...?

TATE: What, like we were...?

ROBIN: Yes!

TATE: Um, no.

ROBIN: Oh my *god*. There were...fuck, I thought...signs! There were irrefutable signs! We went places together. We *left* places together.

TATE: Signs?

ROBIN: It all lined up. In my head, apparently.

TATE: Come on, not you too.

ROBIN: Me...too? Christ.

TATE: Well...yeah, I'm going to get a drink.

ROBIN: Sure. Whatever. I'll be here.

TATE: I'm going to leave this, okay? Just in case you change your mind.

ROBIN: What?

TATE: There wasn't a definitive no in there.

Tate shrugs and leaves. Robin considers the envelope for a few minutes. She opens it and flips through a few pages. She plops down, grabs a pen from her purse, and starts reading through, grumbling as she scribbles notes in the margins.

Well Being

James Bernard

A dose begins the voyage and
your sacrifice is identity.
Inquiries and feeble qualms
dissolve into indescribably calm;
Psilocybin serenades the senses.

Fractals guide eyes and ears
to transcend routine reality
You usually omit 95%,
but now you know your true form;
a serpent slithering through time.

Soma shows you the modern slaves
whipped and bound with cultural leash
feasting on human experiments
looking for wisdom on CNN;
Global puppetry from the T.V tower.

Enlightenment is a censored theme
mentors wearing suits and ties.
Those who speak up are silenced with
gunshots, gossip, media, martyrs;
All to maintain the American Dream.

You're coming down with an epiphany
shedding skin you once cherished.
Fractals and brain chemistry
fracture the material world and
open the gates of awareness;
Mother Earth awaits your arrival.

Now that you are back to "normal"
will routine suit you anymore?
Everyone either follows or flocks
but can a herd create your well-being?

Prospect (of Imagination)

Samuel Lafond

Between spires of oak, maple, and pine
a transition in season and market grows.
In the morning trees
There is no sign
the path is claimed by man or crows.

This is the time of day to walk up this lane
to witness the clammy warmth
as it mingles into the leafy vines
shining the colours of rust red, lemon yellow
and granite blue.

Its living decaying wires are governed by natural order
The burgundy's last spectacle clings and sprawls
to fill in all cracks and niches.

Up the brick mansion walls it crawls
stealing focus from mortar the colour of sand beaches.

Midway home
there's a billboard pane, advertising:

"PEPSI"

Its emblem just another vain oddity,
out of balance and without a clue.

Climbing diagonally along the street façade
evading the artificial and nightmarish epilepsy
witnessing nature and commerce battle for one commodity:
the expanse in my eyes.
I turn around the bend, deciding to leave the street behind.

Idle Hands

Alissa Ralph

In his apartment, I wake up when the sun rises. There's no way of avoiding it: there are no curtains on the windows, and no curtain rod for that matter. A poster of The Clash has been tacked up into the drywall to cover a portion of the window — but it's wide, and the light starts early. I notice it around 7:00, when it seeps onto the duvet like water on a downward slope until it forces me up by 8:00, when the heat reaches my eyes.

After the sun, it's the birds. The window's glass is thin, and the electrical lines by the street are covered with hordes of little sparrows even before the moon fully disappears into daytime. The birds nip each other with their beaks and hover above the wire like feathered bees and chirp all the while until traffic grows loud and drowns them out. At this time of year, the logging trucks pass through town, belching soot. They smell of Christmas trees only the precise moment they pass, before they plow through the four-way stop at University and Greer.

I don't feel like getting up today. My left leg is wrapped up in the sheets, and I wriggle in his single bed. The naked body beside me is sweating into the mattress. I flip over from my side that faces the door and turn towards Dally. He's awake. He doesn't look at me, but stares at the ceiling, his eyes drifting to the far corner of the room, to the hanging lightbulb, and back again. If he knows I'm awake, I can't tell. His eyes are tired and heavy-looking. Before he notices, I close my eyes and pretend I've fallen asleep again.

I've gotten good at this game of pretend. After a few minutes, I open one eye gradually, just enough to see his face. He's still looking at nothing. He lies there for a long time in the growing light and I feel an urge to touch him — or lie on him, slap him, pull on his hair, tear out whatever it is he's thinking through the roots — but I don't, and I shut my eye again.

I was forced to play this game only recently. In mornings past he would nestle the duvet around his little chin, pinch the fat of my thigh like a devil, reach for my white breast, and mold his body to my back. We touched only by accident these mornings.

The ear pressed to my pillow is sore from the pressure and I sit up. "Hey."

"Hey." His eyes move from the ceiling to my face. "Want tea?"

"Good morning."

He nods. "Morning." It's a statement.

"I'll have some if you're making some."

"Yep."

Dally takes a sharp intake of breath, mouth wide — will he say more? — and yawns, getting up. He looks for something to put on.

"Has Jeremy left?" I ask.

"Yeah, you know he has an early class."

"We should just go into the kitchen naked then." I swing a pale leg into a square of sunshine on the carpet and point my toes. "We could have a little dance party."

He fishes a pair of boxers out of the drawer on the ground — was missing a screw, he says. It couldn't fit in the dresser. "I actually have to get out of here soon. I think I'll just pick up a coffee before class."

I reach for my bra. "Oh. Ok, I'll get ready."

Dally pulls open the door and goes out through the kitchen. I feel around for my underwear with my feet underneath the covers. The sound of the lock on the bathroom door sliding into place travels from the narrow hallway into the bedroom; I find that whether I'm on one side of a locked door or the other, I always feel the same kind of fear.

I know I should have slept in my own bed that night. I could feel it surely now. Anyone could tell by looking at him that he didn't want me there, not really. I remember: I wasn't wearing my shirt when he agreed. I was lying in the lamp-light. I traced circles with my finger on his knee — first small, then big, a spiral that hypnotized him. He only agreed because he had been coerced by something explicit in its nakedness. For that moment, it all seemed uncomplicated. If I had spoken, it would have been over.

I hurry and grab my pants from the floor. Sunlight floods the room and pushes me out into the kitchen. It looks like no one has cleaned a single dish in this place for at least a week. Only one mug hides at the back of the shelf, its handle chipped off completely, the two smudges of plaster rough against the blue glaze. I fill it with water and swallow fast. Dallas comes back buttoning his shirt.

"I hate to rush you but I really need to go. Take an orange if you want." He passes me on his way to the counter and picks up a clementine left on the breadboard. "It's too hot in here for tea anyway."

The clementine is pushed into my palm, and my coat draped over my shoulders. I jam my arms into the sleeves and immediately feel the slow prickle of heat under my arms. I smooth my hair — I can feel it's a mess — and cringe. I can guess that my makeup's gone completely off my face, too. I pat the pockets to feel for the cold metal of my apartment keys.

Dallas walks me to the door, and we step over the landmine of boys' sneakers and boots. He pats my back; I was to tell my roommate that I had fallen asleep at a friend's place.

"Thanks for coming over." He gives me a sad smile. I know he notices the sudden wetness at my eyelashes, but there is nothing else he knows how to say. I know for a fact that he's sorry about it. "See you around, sometime." The door is shut behind me as the wetness trickles onto my cheeks.

Outside, the cold has cleared away any clouds and everything is bright. December is always coldest with its high, blinding sun. In kids' pictures, the sun is always drawn beside a palm tree and a beach, the warmth radiating off the page. Here, in life, it's freezing. The sun touches everything, but offers no heat. My face grows red in the cold. I reach down to feel if I closed my pant-zipper as I speed walk to the corner.

I can see Jeremy waiting across the road. He face is screwed up in the bright light and he shades his eyes from the sun. He sees me and squints harder. He must be thinking I'm a head case. *He had her over again. What was she doing there? Hasn't she had enough?* We wave at each other over the hood of a car as it passes. I promise myself I will never step foot into the apartment again.

A logging truck pulls up beside me at the red light. I sniff. The light goes green before I realize that these pines are much too dead to smell like anything.



Bird of Prey
Ilish Redmond

Borderline

Katherine Bannerman

The earth has lost to the violent moon.

Her ocean spins cloven-hoofed waves, that thrash and flail like a whip of nine tails striking the sky,

ice water chill fills her veins and muscles and sweats through her skin,

thick, violent foam from the mouths of thundering horses sprays like blood, vibrations, shattering plates of the earth like teeth ground into shattered bone, erupting in boiling salted magma, a meteoric flood

stinging and scraping, raking across a wound,
visceral cut of nails against flesh scratching and slicing,
Heaven-bound mountains of menacing blue,
behemoth crashing in the deepest trenches of her chest cavity,
thunder breaking into flames in the fires of her body,

but suddenly the sea seizes and contracts and shudders and dies.

Awash in cold clarity,

the waves cease to fight against gravity.

home-less

Maria Elsser

Thin-limbed, skin-lipped,
boy.
Snot waterfalls down his cupid's bow.

Claw-footed, worm-tailed
home.
Paws echo along barricades.

Wide-eyed, fist-curved
less
afraid of rodents than men.

Forgotten-laces, hood-faced
boy.
Shuffles through tunnels of night.

Gasoline spill sky, dripping lights,
home.
Cardboard box bedroom.

Empty-stomach, heart-ache
less
neglected than a plastic bag.

Earthen

Sarah J. Fournier

Your hand I take in mine
and run my fingers along
every little line.
Your hands are rough from work.
Every sore and callus I touch,
thinking how I do like dirt.
I close my eyes
and for a moment
become the dirt
which has crawled
into the cracks in your hands
and just won't fade.



"And the Ancient Forests Began to Smoke"

Patricia Franco

Who Will Give Me Away?

Karalyne Fosty

Sometimes I try to remember you,
flipping through old Polaroids and grainy home videos
in an attempt to figure out if you ever did love me.
They all tell me that you did, that I was your little girl,
that you would've given me the moon if you could.
Somehow I find that hard to believe.

I can't count all the ways in which you've affected me,
the impossible task of trying to solve a puzzle
without all of its pieces. Some have been lost,
some have been forgotten, some have long since been
swept under the rug, collecting dust.

I gave up on putting it together a long time ago.
Now it just sits there, unfinished, mocking me.
Bits of cardboard too sentimental to be thrown away.

Despite everything I know I'm the one who got out
the least scathed. Maybe it's because I never really knew you,
or maybe I just wasn't bred with the same hope as he was.
Day after day, his forehead pressed against the glass of
our living room window, watching for you, waiting for your return.
The years haven't changed him.
He's still that little boy.

Good Ol' Buddy Jack

Tess Metcalf

“One bourbon, one scotch, one beer.” That was his motto. They would kick him out at closing time and he would find his way home in a thick fog, drunk off his ass. This was not the first time and it would not be the last. Drinking was his coping mechanism.

Our father left when I was three and he was six. I guess it was harder for Zack then it was for me. Unlike me he could remember the tender moments when our dad had taken care of him. Our father didn't just move out of our small town, he moved several provinces away to be with his bitch, Colleen. My mother went into a downward spiral. We lived with our grandparents that were nice enough to take us in. We would have been on the streets, scavenging, shivering, begging. Our grandfather became our father figure, yet we could not mistake the burn of rejection from the one who had pleaded with my mother to have his children.

Here was Zack a few months before his death, in an hour where people were preparing for their daily routine; he was stumbling around the main street. He had a different fix every night. Zack would keep going until he could no longer feel. He would sit by the toilet at night, with a bottle in hand. Zack didn't care if he was sick; he wanted to be numb.

My mother was fragile, so I tried to help in any way that I was capable. When my grandfather died, I knew my brother would take a turn for the worse. With no male authority figure, I knew he would fade. I grew up in that moment; I was nine and he was twelve. I tried to care for him and I looked up to him, he was my idol, but Zack lost himself in whatever his drink was that night. I saw my brother dwindle from the innocent boy I cared so much about to a boozehound with no inhibitions. He was reckless; he was hurt; he was seventeen. Zack followed our family history. All the men seemed to fall to their knees in front of the same obstacle. They all changed for the better, except our father and his son. I couldn't bear to see my brother in this state; I was only fourteen.

One night as I was on the edge of unconsciousness, I heard some laughing and scuffling about on the back porch. I stood at the banister above the stairs in front of the door. My brother was there with his friend JY. They had popped out the screen on the back door, trying to make a stealthy entrance through the small window. He was too drunk to remember that there was a key hidden on the side of the house--typical. He finally caught sight of me and motioned for me to be quiet. He couldn't even keep his finger straight over his mouth. He smiled and his eyes were fogged over. The two boys stumbled through the window laughing in hushed tones.

“Zack, what are you doing?”

“Shhhh, you'll wake mum,” he hiccupped.

"Are you drunk?"

"No, we just had a bit of my good ol' buddy Jack," was his slurred reply.

JY stumbled down the stairs headfirst and they both giggled like hyenas. I shook my head and made my way back to bed. Maybe if he curled himself tight enough around the toilet bowl it would swallow his head.

My brother became aggressive and depressed. I was the only one still mentally stable. Fan-fucking-tastic. We would arrive from school and make our way to the kitchen for a snack. We would turn on the television in the kitchen. One day I made the mistake of changing the channel away from his favorite station.

"What the hell do you think you're doing!" he growled. "How many times do I have to tell you, I'm bigger and older so we watch what I want. You understand?" he boomed.

I was petrified. He grabbed a hold of my wrist and dragged me painfully out of the kitchen. He threw me to the ground in his rage and told me to get away and never come back. He went to the basement where I could hear him scavenge for his stash of alcohol, growing more frantic until his hand touched the neck of a bottle. I hid in my room for hours, shivering on my bed under the blankets. I was trying to take in some warmth but he had left me cold. He would never be the same.

My mother always knew there was something wrong but I never sold him out. I loved him too much. After seeing the horrible mess he was on the bowl every night, I decided it was enough. He had already tried to commit suicide once and it broke my mother's heart even more. It was the last straw, I was going to take a stand. Little did I know it was going to be my last stand against him.

We went out to dinner under the pretense that I needed some brotherly advice. I liked my brother when he was sober and thinking straight. He was almost normal, except for the soulless look in his eyes.

"Zack, I'm worried. I know you've been drinking; I know that's how you cope. We could never have changed that dad left." He looked up from table with sheer hatred in his eyes.

"How would you know? Here you are spurring your high and mighty crap. You think you own the world because mom likes you better? You could never understand what I'm going through."

"I went through it too Zack. I lived," was my reply.

"Well. I'm. Not. You." With that he got up from his seat. I thought he was going to the bar for a drink, but he scrambled out the door and into the street to get to our car parked on the other side. He never made it there.

As I made it out the door I screamed at him to watch out. He never heard me. I can remember it in slow motion. My brother looked up to see headlights. The grill pressed into his chest. His skull cracked as it hit the front of the car, blood spattered in a frenzy. Then he was knocked back onto the street. I heard

a sickening crunch as the car rolled over his limp body. It skidded to a stop and crashed into another. I was numb.

Several weeks later, after the investigation, we found out a drunk driver had hit him. My mother was devastated. Her soulless specter haunted the halls of our home. I had lost her. I told my mother everything and I can't help but think that she blames me. I could never bring myself to tell her that she was wrong. I was at a loss. The solution I had thought up in my head never happened. I had caused a disaster. I would always remember him, and how my judgment had been impaired by my feelings.

At the funeral I took out a bottle and placed it in the casket. It was his good ol' buddy Jack.

Twenty-One Years Godless

Caitlin Barter

My Grandfather always has
an open invitation to occupy
my ear.

I honor his words,
his years, his wisdom,
not mine.

When he lived at my age
he was withering away, encamped,
imprisoned. Nightmares plague him,
he survives still.

He believes in a God,
one I refuse to see.

I believe
In red lipstick, pen to paper,
closed eyes make ghosts disappear.
When the ocean washes over me,
I am cleansed of my sins.
Not when I confess.

I believe
My thighs are thick to crush small minds,
in painting one's own canvas.
That a lioness should tamed by no other.
When strange boys trace words onto my back
it is not love.

I believe
in honesty to a fault,
that sunkissed skin and the salty breeze
of the bay diminishes any pain.
In the mountains, where I rest my faith,
the river current will carry me home.

He is a fountain of endless knowledge.
The water of his thoughts led me to God.
Not his, but my own.

Humanity

Laurie-Ann Desjardins

Her eyes wander under the obscure heavens.
The soft alloy of melt down stars and cold raindrops
dazes her in a blur of the faintest beacons,
lost. These liquid diamonds, embroidered in arabesques of chaos
upon the folds of Night's gown, echo in cacophonic cadence
the salted ribbons painted across her face in a glistening silence.

Time has wrapped her fragile years around her throat.
She suffocates. She cannot breathe under the pain.
All the lost screams and tears,
every drop of blood sunk into oblivion,
each forsaken sorrow
strike her from all directions, pouring into her vein,
and find a home within her heart
where their voices are never broken apart.

She walks, bearing in her womb the fate of a World who forgot,
for whom the burden of the Good lies into the hand of an in-existent Other.
who denies the crucial victories of those who fought,
a World where the task of the Right falls down to an imaginary Father.
She walked up to the edge of Life
and, before the Void took her away, She closed her eyes.

Reunion

Fuschia Sirois

Whirlwind of residue,
extricating relief,
perpetuates the folly of ineffectual dance;
gushing the pose
of a tangled reality
that refuses its cue
from an empty stage, eclipsed
by the captive audience
that should have witnessed
the monumental discovery,
he is wrapped in the secret knowing of his confusion -
"I am an illusion."



Vapor Trails

Asa Connor

A Canadian Pilgrimage

Dylan Gagnon

Unlike many of the other Canadians on a trip to Europe last summer, my friend Kevin and I visited old Canadian war memorials scattered across western Belgium and north-western France. The most grand and famous of these was the Vimy Ridge Memorial, located in an isolated corner of the French countryside. To reach it from Brussels was a short but complicated matter. We took a train to Tournai and from Tournai crossed the Belgian-French border to Lille before transferring onto a coach that carried us to the town of Lens. Lens itself was quaint, but very few of the people there spoke English. Adding to the problem was the fact that Kevin and I spoke as much French as the locals did English. Upon inquiring into the best route to the ridge, we learned that no public transport existed to carry us up the slopes to the far away monument.

So began our journey towards the ridge, walking out of town until the buildings became fewer and farther apart, people more sparse, and the grass greener. At last the sidewalk gave way to dirt paths beside a paved road. Looking around, we could only see the emptiness of the land, farms dotting the horizon here and there. The ridge and its low lying peak stood off in the distance. As we pressed on, our limbs began to ache, the clouds began to darken, and we feared the worst of being caught in the middle of nowhere with nothing but our knapsacks and no sign of shelter. Nevertheless, we persevered and our efforts were soon rewarded. Just when the sky was darkest, and the first raindrops splattered on the dusty path did we see the two pillars of the memorial. To us, they were beautiful: crystal clear and timeless.

"Come on," I said to Kevin. "It can't be that much farther. Just think, we're making a climb that previous Canadians made under far worse conditions. This will be our pilgrimage; we're making our way to the top of that ridge!"

Kevin laughed. "I guess it is a pilgrimage," he remarked. "It's a good thing we decided to come just the two of us. No one else would be willing to make this journey."

We both laughed and continued on, joking about how much longer it would take to reach the top.

Our fortunes changed, the clouds lessened, and the sun reappeared. We passed by several farms, although we didn't see anyone. The entire countryside seemed deserted, save for a couple of cars that drove by. Eventually the dirt path ended, and we were forced to walk on the side of the road. Soon the road became a highway, and we passed several intersections, each one increasing the number of passing cars. We moved into the oncoming lane, treading a delicate balance between the pavement and the precarious edge of a steep ditch overgrown with

thorns. The ridge and memorial now loomed over us. Far off, the clothes of scarecrows in the corn fields swayed from the gentle breeze.

"It seems it might be easier if we just climb straight up to the top, rather than going all the way around," started Kevin.

"Yeah right," I said sarcastically. "Let's go all the way through the forest after we've already been walking for nearly three hours. Besides, do really you want to go through the farmers fields? The signs say 'no trespassing.'"

"Do you think they're going to notice?" he replied.

We continued to argue and walk, but ultimately decided to take the long way around. In order to reach the top of the ridge, we travelled not through the town of Vimy, for which the ridge and memorial are named, but through a small village called Givenchy-en-Gohelle. At once we found signs for the memorial marked with Canadian flags. We followed them through the winding roads of the town, passing old brick buildings as we climbed higher and higher. When we ran out of signs we would ask people: "Ou est le Canadien memorial?" Often we could not understand their replies, vaguely interpreting the ways in which they pointed their fingers, but we continued and trudged on, exhausted. We had been walking for over four hours, and now bore the full glare of the sun while almost at the end of our water supply. I decided to put away my sunglasses, as the sweat dripping from my brow made it impossible for them to stay on my nose. My head felt heavy on my shoulders.

At long last Kevin and I reached the top. French and Canadian flags flew in the wind, saluting the memorial, which now stood in front of us. The twin pillars of the memorial gleamed in the sunlight. It was then that we noticed a sign nearby that said:

Danger
No entry
Undetonated
Explosives

Several of these signs lined the perimeter of the site too, discouraging trespassers from wandering into an undisturbed minefield. We realized then just how a good an idea it had been to avoid walking through the farmers' fields earlier.

Cars and tour buses idled in the parking lot as families and sightseers walked around casually, enjoying the late afternoon sun. Kevin and I took a minute to rest, our clothes lined with sweat and our joints aching. Then we did what everyone else was doing. We walked around the memorial, took pictures, and finally settled down on the steps of the main platform to admire the countryside.

While we sat there, looking over the verdant farmlands of France, I could not but help feel a reflection of the past. I could see the countryside for miles around: the fields, the farmhouses, the tiny towns of Vimy and Givenchy-en-Gohelle, the larger city of Lens and beyond. In this moment of contemplation, I thought to myself, "How amazing is it, that the Canadians succeeded in taking this ridge, where the British and French failed? How incredible is it, that when the drums of war echoed on the European continent for the second time, that a lone Canadian memorial was left in peace, only because it described those who had fallen there, rather than those that it had defeated?" I took a certain comfort in our journey to the top of the ridge, but soon the clouds returned. The Greek figures that anointed the memorial turned their sad, solemn eyes towards the sky as if trying to capture the last fading hope of the sun's rays on their immortal faces as it disappeared behind the clouds.

We stayed a while longer before deciding to find a way home. As we left, all I could think of was the lasting peace that not one but two wars had achieved, for which my purpose in Europe was to study.

But I was not entirely at peace, for I have neglected to mention one small detail of our journey. As mighty and memorable as Vimy Ridge may be, I will never forget a small plot of land in a farmer's field shadowed by maple trees, marked by an iron gate and a low stone wall. For on this small plot of land stand hundreds of stones, marked with Canadian emblems. And as I knelt beside one of these stones, the tears welling in my eyes, I read aloud the words: "A Canadian Solider of the Great War Known Unto God." And just as I read the words aloud then, so do I now, and I know that they will never leave my thoughts.

Silent as Always

Anonymous

"Not all who wander are lost." – J.R.R. Tolkien

Silent as always, he walks down the hall, out of the building, and into the cold dawn. He has no reason to disturb the peace, for peace is all he has left. Peace is all he wants. The twenty year olds in his building upset him, yet it was what he needed. He needed to have a normal life, the one he had missed out on. But no matter how hard he tried, his old ways still haunted him. Memories and scars still fresh, all a reminder of his past. He lived the life, a life of violence, and now he is trying for peace.

It's not that he doesn't try to fit in; it's that he just can't fit in. His neighbours are so different, and while they mean well, there is nothing they can do to help. They come from the same background as him and the same upbringing, yet their experiences are so different. They just don't get him, and he accepts that. They see him as just another lost soul, someone who caught themselves just before hitting rock bottom, but hasn't tried to rebuild his life yet. Some might see glimpses of his pain, a few might even understand a little of it. Alone as usual, he wrestles with his thoughts. Like every other time he finds himself thinking back, reliving the past minute by minute.

Society's stigma dictates that he is the problem, not them. He is the one that is different, and it is up to him to change. He has tried to make people understand, but quite frankly, it was a waste of time. How can he accurately convey his feelings? How can he put into words events so violent and depressing that the memories will never fade? Events he can't even understand? It simply cannot be done. He has tried, he has told parts of his story. It was understood at a basic level, but without having experienced the same they could not grasp the impact. He has resigned himself to the fact that he is destined to walk this lonely road for the rest of his days, trapped within.

Few have shared his experience even though there are over two million people in his infamous club. He travels weekly to the club house to meet with others. Even though they have never met and their ages differ by decades, they truly understand each other. Down to the core, these men and women are his only family. He has nothing else and the others know it. Most have been in the same situation and now it is their turn to try their level best to help him through it. These are the dark days and nights that the membership struggles through.

We only live it in part once a year, for a fraction of a day. We celebrate them, remembering those who didn't make it and those who did. For one day we think about them, but they will spend a life time remembering. Being a new member to the club comes with few benefits and a lot of stigma that the old timers don't

receive. He realized a long time ago that it's better off to keep his membership secret. It's the need to keep his past life secret that has forced him around. This is the sixth apartment he has called home in the past two years, but he is lucky to have even that.

The kids that live in his building treat him differently, almost keeping him at arm's length. It's as if they are afraid he will snap, reverting to his past. Yet when his skills are needed, they come running for him. Nothing has changed. They don't realise that he has already done so much for them, having already answered his country's call to serve and protect them. When they were starting off at university, he was starting his education in a foreign land. While in their university world not all of the students returned after their first term, in his world the men that didn't make the cut never came back at all.

And yet, having made the sacrifices that he has, they still treat him differently. Maybe it has to do with what he has done. No one likes to shake the hand of a killer, no matter the reason behind the act. So he hides it all, burying it deep down, pretending that it never happened. Hiding the skills he has been taught, from people who could not understand them. It was simply easier to pretend it never happened, hoping the others just move along unaware.

But it bugs him for some reason. Deep down, he questions why he did it all. He was always happy to remain anonymous, one of the silent professionals. The secrecy was a necessary part of his job as a professional warrior. He, and others like him, recognized the dangers of their chosen profession but volunteered anyways. Still a kid, he became a man in Afghanistan learning lessons kids his age back home would never have to. Having given his college years to his country, he returned home looking to experience what he missed.

Home. What a waste for him. He left feeling home was the greatest place on earth, but now all he felt was disgust. What civilians saw as important was trivial to him and daily life lost all meaning. He had seen humanity at its worst and he had become fixated on that, unable to return to his normal life. He had changed, he had been wounded. While not physically injured, the psychological impact was something that he had not expected. It is these wounds, the psychological damage coupled with his inability to assimilate back into society, that sent him into his drifter life style.

He has spent the last two years trying to get back on his feet, to finally readjust to society. He spends his days trying to understand why no one seems to care about what he has done for them. He is invisible to society, just another brick in the wall. All he has is his voice to bring attention to his plight, but even that has been silenced. Silenced by all the training, stigma, warrior codes, pride, and humbleness, he plows on into the cold dawn, destined to wander the abyss between war and peace for ever, silent as always.

Where You Leave Yourself

Sarah Lubala

i wanted to write
me
from the inside
out
from my mother's
smooth hips
to the roof of my mouth
But at what age
can one scrawl
her own existence?

i thought i should wait
until i was full
of all the skies
or something deeper
My blood
not yet rich enough
for art
for
art-ic-u-la-tion

i thought i should wait
until i had gorged myself
on all the blooms
My skin
ripe
brimming with yellow garlands
My mango flesh
swollen
with the heat of *mon Kasai*

i thought i should wait
until my eyes
had grown darker
Coal-
Black-Like-Me
like the ocean
like the story
of my people

When
my back is hunched
bowed under the weight
of a thousand
misunderstandings

when my hands
grow firm
but gentle
like my *papa's*
Thick with
sacrifice
and the work
of carving out
a life

when the air
is teeming
with all the words
that have
and will
ever be said

Then
shall i pray
for a space
of my own



Lone Tree with Company
Sonia Palik

Je ne suis pas une francophone

Nicole Gavreau

My name may cause confusion
and I know I'm in Quebec,
but I swear je ne parle pas le français.
Speak to me in French
and I'll do my best,
but ma langue maternelle est l'anglais.
I can read
and I can listen,
but je n'articule pas en français.
So help me practice
and help me learn,
but ne présumez pas que je suis francophone.

October 1986

Caleigh Cross

The sky is something blue, so blue. I'm at a wedding.

This church looks familiar. I have seen it more and more often lately, as I look back through the scrapbooks of our lives, trying to put together what went wrong. This is the church where my parents were married.

My grandmother is standing by the formal gate in the front, wrapped in a wool coat in the October air. She is solemn and happy at once, holding my grandfather's arm, joking that she is the groom's something old. She does not recognize me.

I ask her if she has any pictures of the couple. She takes out her wallet, and I see the picture that was on our mantle in my childhood home.

It is my parents' wedding.

I look at them looking at each other. Their eyes are big and happy. My mother's smile lights her whole face. She is stunning. I look at my father, into those eyes I look into every morning in the mirror, and they look so different from how they look now. My father looks proud and leonine and happy. He has put childish things aside, like his dream of becoming an astronomer. He is an engineer now. He looks honoured and honourable. He is a man now, he is taking a wife, and he is lit from within. *Something new.*

I look at their eyes, their big, unknowing eyes, and I think I know why I am here. This is my chance. I can stop this. I can stop this and no one will have to know. Look at these two; they're in love. *Something borrowed.* They would never hurt anyone. They are dumb; they don't understand what they are doing. I can stop this. I can tell them they are going to do bad things to children, that they are going to be unhappy, that they are going to want to die.

I am going to stop this. I am going to do everyone a favour and tell them that she's the wrong woman, he's the wrong man, and this thing they're doing is an abomination. This is the end. This is where it stops.

My mother walks down the aisle. She is so graceful now, before my brothers and I turned her body into a war zone. She is so eloquently beautiful, a woman stepping into a life she cannot imagine. I am weeping with the rest of the witnesses.

I listen to the priest until I hear him say the words that are my chance: "Speak now or forever hold your peace."

Forever hold your peace. The words create images that leap unbidden through my mind. Blood all over the floor, screaming, terror, sobbing. *No. I do not stand for this. This is wrong. This must stop.* I stand up and everyone in the room is silent, staring at me, including my parents. They don't know who I am. They look afraid of me, afraid of what I might say. I look at them, at my mother's beautiful

innocent face, at her slender untouched body, at my father's sharp grey gaze and the pride with which he carries himself, and I see a mirror. Oh, I want to say something. I want to make it stop. I want to turn back time and undo this, I want them to walk out of this church right now and never turn back, but I can't. I can't do it. I want to live. I so desperately want to live.

My father sneezes, breaking the tension.

I look at him deliberately, I lock my grey eyes onto his, trying to communicate the gravity of this thing the three of us are about to do. I want him to know that we three are witnesses now to a terrible crime, that what I am about to do I will grow up with, that we will live with this forever. He needs to understand that from this point forward, whenever he looks at the stars, that is all they will be to him. The world will be bleak and cold. He will carry his disappointment around with him like a weapon. My mother will learn strength and she will learn how easy it is to hurt the ones you love. The innocent beauty she has today will fade to a determined, marble-cast will to simply continue, and I will be born of the marble, of the bleakness, of the strength. I look at my body, and I am anatomised: what is his, what is hers, greater than the sum of their parts and as inseparable as their bloody union. I cannot stop this. I am tied to this. I am selfish. I cannot pull the plug. I want to live.

"Bless you," I say with purpose. "God bless you." *Do what you are going to do, and I will take the blame.*

I fall to the floor, losing lucidity, feeling the dream scattering around me like so many untruths around the husk of something humble and human.

Two hours later, my alarm clock goes off. I feel the strange sense of a birth, and I cannot remember why.

20 Minutes at The Lion

Geoff Meugens

Sometimes when I drink my chest fills up with endless emotion,
like a piano tuned to nothing. In an odd bar in an odd end of the country I stand
in a crowd that is moving me towards a girl I once met.

She asks,
"What's up?"

You look at her with apprehension:
those moments when everything you say and do excretes your distaste for every-
thing around you and you're scared of yourself and you stand still, slack jawed as
she comments on the lights.

"I think they're nice, ya know? They really suit the music."

The red lampshades play shadows on faces and the snow falls heavily outside. I
look from lights to windows while she moves quickly from the slowly becoming
dance floor.

Sometimes when I drink my chest fills up with endless emotion.
Every misstep in conversation with every girl and guy I meet begs the question of
departure, but I said I would go out tonight and here I am with a beer in my hand
and a silent tongue demanding satisfaction.

My only choice is the only one I've ever had:
the booth of friends I left just 10 minutes ago.
Pat asks:

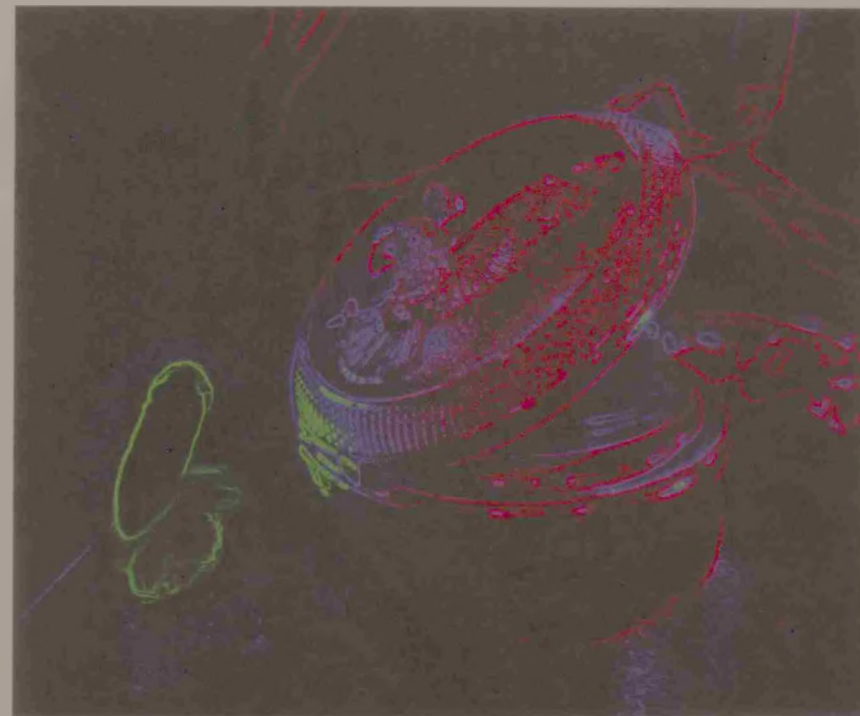
"You talking to Claire? She's a cutie"
"Yes she's nice, she likes the lights"

Pat looks to the others and I grab my jacket to say goodbye but my toque is on
the table by the bar near Claire who I can't afford to say goodbye to so I write it
off and leave.

Sometimes when I drink my chest fills up with endless emotion.

Outside the snow has stopped
and a deep breath adds fog to the quiet night.
Through a steaming window stand Pat and Claire. But my relaxation demands
arrival.

I pass the only other bar in town, empty as the church in front of it.



Pocket Watch

Suraiya Nakhuda

Half the Love

Charly Recinos

I'll take some notes, I'll drink to forget
I'll take some urgent, urgent measures.
I will drink up, I, I will drink a lake
but my lake on the rocks, please.

A part of me has not changed
but I am not the same
I just found the half of love, that I needed so much.
I am so thirsty,
I would drink holy water
so I can believe.

Some say that to smile
there is no need to look back.
This time for me,
I think,
makes sense.

Life Steps

Samantha Maliszewski

Little steps,
big leaps,
walking backwards,
new path...
step one.

Walk, walk, walk,
one foot in front of another -
red light; stop sign.
Pause, reflect, worry, doubt.
Step back,
rock on your heels.

Push from behind...
step two.



Watercolour Sketch of McGreer

Andrea O'Neill

The Guitarist

Zoe Costanzo

I've spent two weeks on a bus
busting my ass to buy gas
because despite fame and glory
no one remembers the Guitarist.

My fingers caress those steel veins
and pulse with the pain of
my lyrics.

Don't you hear it?

I'm selling you my soul
and that's all that matters.

Me and E minor.

That's all that matters
but you only remember
those dulcet tones of Geddy Lee.

Don't you see
that it's me?

—Not Cherie—

here on stage making a name
for the girls who ran away
and played the game differently.

The one who stepped away
from sex drugs rock 'n' roll
broke the mold when it said
life's a bitch
and lived life for more
than just giggles and shits.

But when I step on stage
you will all disappear.
No audience
no anticipation
no applause
no affirmation.
No beer no cocaine
just the pain of my soul bleeding through
those steel veins.

All the world's indeed a stage
and wild horses couldn't drag me away.



Strummed Strings

Amelie Duval

Dripping Red

Lynn Daybreak

There was a crack, a scream, and the shattering of glass. Beneath my eyelids was a flood of orange light, yanking me away from a simple world of dreams. A man in olive-green was standing over my bed, flashlight in hand. I'd never seen him before, but his uniform told me exactly why he was here. This was the People's Armed Police. They had come to take my Baba.

"Don't move," he hissed. I lay still but my shaking hand reached out and settled on my sister's chest. She stirred and her eyes flickered open, dark and hazy. We heard the cracking of a door-post and Mama's muffled scream. I held my sister close so she wouldn't cry out and remained silent. The fear that settled over my bed was heavy enough to crush me. I was still.

A steady voice echoed through the bare walls of my house. "Shi Weihai, I have a warrant for your arrest."

The soldier guarding my bed stepped toward the doorway, and peered out to the hall where Baba was being arrested. He left my room and I sat up, pushing against the fear. I crawled out of bed and stepped through my doorway. Baba was on his knees, blood trickling from his nose. The police pushed Mama away as Baba's hands were brought high behind his head and shackled together. "You are being charged with the unauthorized printing and distribution of illegal publications." The policemen grabbed Baba by the arms, pulled him to his feet, and marched him out of my home. They slammed the door shut, and everything was silent.

It was as quick as if a ghost had swept through my home to take Baba away. The clock ticked on and none of us moved. Baba was gone. Soon Mama's cries drowned out the ticking and a small hand found mine.

"Miao, what has happened?" Hui asked. I closed my eyes, wishing I could block out her sweet voice and stand still in my grief, motionless, emotionless, still. Hui stepped past me and stared at Mama, hunched up in a ball, sobbing into a bed-sheet. Hui was about to run and comfort Mama, but she spun around and stared at me, her eyes wide and tearless.

"The bookstore."

Without pausing to remember her pain, Hui sprinted down the hall and disappeared out the door. She cut through the streets of Beijing, sliding on the ice in her socks. Mama stared after her, wringing the bed-sheet in her hands. She looked up at me with wide eyes like a lamb and whispered my name.

"Miao, go after her. Save her, while you can."

Within moments, I skirted through the streets under the full moon of Beijing in my socks and nightgown. Passing empty vendors' carts and dark window displays, I followed my sister to my father's bookstore. My feet skidded on the ice

and in my attempts to keep my balance my knee struck a stone wall, and started to bleed.

The snow was sprinkled with my blood, but I didn't stop running. I wasn't the only one bleeding. China was also dripping red. I saw red in the flags, the banners, and the songs. I cut a corner and saw the bookstore straight ahead. Someone had dumped a can of wet paint on the door and it dripped down, gushing red.

I was just in time to follow Hui as she crept into the store, ignoring the paint on her knees. She grabbed a sack and began filling it with books.

"What are you doing?" I grasped her shoulder, but she made no reply. These were Baba's books, most of which he had printed himself. She ran past the shelves, filling the sack with every book she could reach. "We got to get home. There was paint on the door. The police will come..."

"We've got to save the books, Miao. These are Baba's books."

"No!" I cried, seizing the sack and tossing it aside. I grabbed her arm and yanked her toward the door. "We have to go!"

A crack, a scream, and the shattering of glass filled my ears. A torch was thrown through the window and flames licked at the books in Baba's store. I threw myself over Hui, pushed her to the back of the store, and we scrambled out together. Her hands clutched the heavy sack of books. She would not let go.

I thought I would explode with anger. The police only did what was good for the people. They protected me from the evil men outside China and revolts inside my country, and now Baba was a traitor because of his love.

God! Why have you taken my Baba?

My father was a good man. Selling books was his legal trade—he even had a permit to print and sell Bibles. He served China well, but Baba had another master. His passion was Christ.

Baba printed more Bibles than his permit allowed him to and sent them to those living in the countryside. It was illegal to give Bibles away, but my father gave them to anyone who could not afford one. He defied the laws of China. He would be punished.

I ran from the bookstore with Hui at my side. I never turned to see the red flames rise. I didn't know if anyone had followed me but that didn't matter. Tears started to fall, hot on my frozen cheeks.

God! Why would You take Baba? He only ever did what You asked of him.

I'd heard rumours of the prisons in China. Death was a mercy. I stopped running. My lungs burned from sucking cold air into my aching chest. I fell to the ground, my knee hitting the pavement again. Teeth clenched, I shut my eyes and covered my ears so I couldn't hear my own sobbing. My chest shook with gasps that I could hardly contain, my soul heaving a desperate cry to Heaven.

God! Why would you do this? Why?

Save Baba! Don't let him die in prison.

Save Mama! How will she live without Baba?

He only ever wanted to please you. Why do you take him from us now?

God! Can you help me?

"Miao?" Hui came behind me and wrapped her arms around my shoulders. Her warm tears froze on my neck. We huddled together in the November snow, and I cried silent prayers with my sister's arms to comfort me. The books fell from her grip and collapsed in a heap, spilling into the snow. She knelt to gather them, kissing each cover as she did.

"We have to protect Baba's books. There are fourteen Bibles here and a text from Watchman Nee." She paused, flipping through the rudely-bound paperback. "He went to prison too because he loved Jesus"

"They're just books, Hui. They don't mean anything without Baba here." Hui stared up at me and held the sack to her chest.

"We have to protect them. Men died to give us this book. Much of it was written in prison and caves, by men hiding like we do. These are the words of suffering and life!"

"What do you know about life? You're ten years old, Hui! You know nothing about life." I stood up. "Baba's been taken. His words of life did little good for him. Let's go home, before Mama thinks the police have us too."

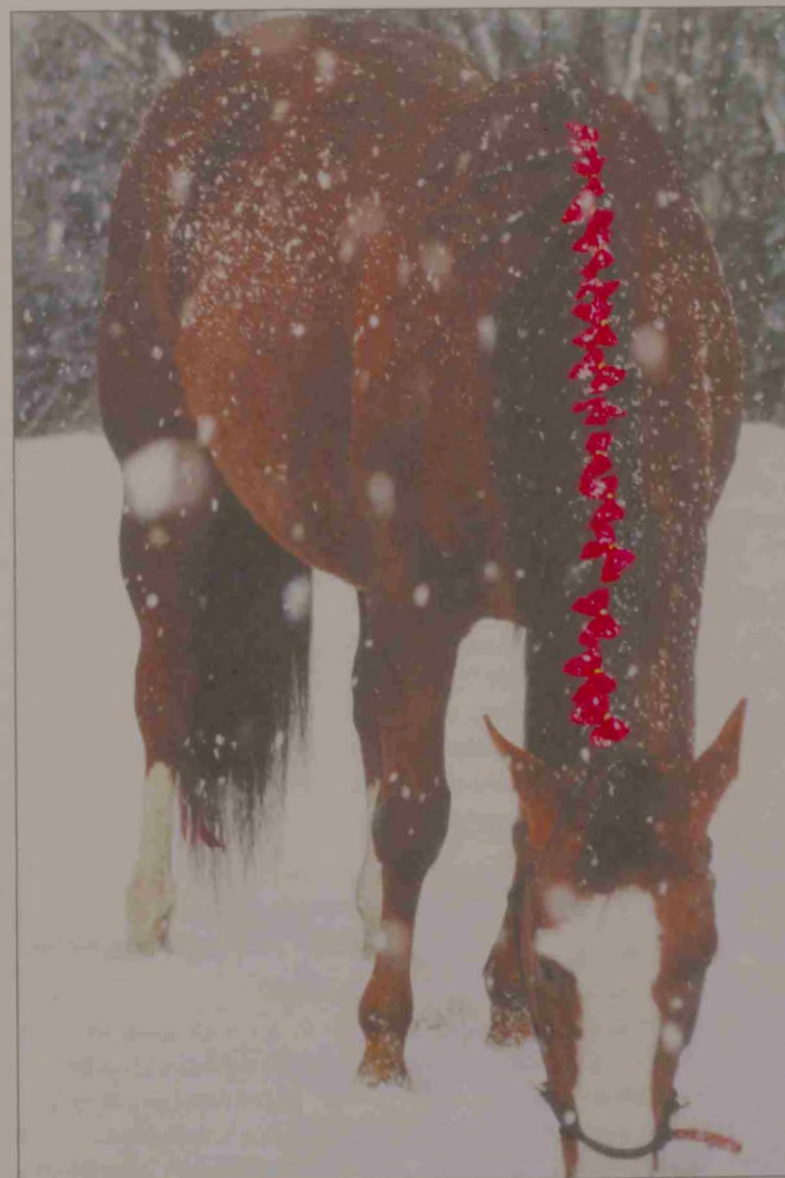
"Baba went to prison for Jesus."

"Baba was a fool." I began to walk, leaving my sister behind with her books. Before I had taken four steps, Hui tackled me down. I felt the skin of my knee break again as I was pushed down into the snow and twisted until she was sitting on my chest.

"What do you think you're doing, you spit-licking brat?" I cried.

"Baba was no fool." She grabbed my thrashing head and held it still. Passion radiated from her eyes. I had seen that same love in my father's face and my heart stopped. Hui would follow him, to prison and beyond.

"When I stand in Heaven, I will see all the people who believed in Baba's books, enough people to fill China ten times over! Then you will see that he was no fool, because he gave everything to Jesus. He will care for Baba." She rolled off my chest and stared at me, wild and confident. I glanced around to see if anyone had heard these defiant words. When I looked back, Hui was running into my house with her stolen sack of illegal books.



The Greatest Gifts in Life are the Unexpected Ones
Lyssa Paquette

runlikeafish*Nicholas Walling*

Run

like a fish.

Sting

like a puppy.

Swing

like a stump.

Swimming in

putty.

Still fucking nutty,

my world is cutting

in

and

out.

A jutting knife,

crimson and bloody,

in my hand.

My buddy

and I had fun clubbing

in some run down and ruddy

looking place full of chubby

truckers.

My face?

Scrubby.

Haven't shaved since Sunday.

We walked up sucking on weed and buzzing,

talking shit and cussing.

We left a little fuzzy,

wounded and blood running

like a fish.

War of Day and Night*Megan McLeod*

I wake up in a cold sweat, once again gasping. As though I'm trying to suck reality back into my body.

Another nightmare.

Everyone always says you should leave the past in the past, but what about when your brain doesn't agree? Every night you get to live through the worst-case scenarios, see the faces you want to forget, feel the sting of rejection once more. The theatre of your mind puts on some gruesome plays but it has an audience that can never seem to leave.

I try to make sense of what's just happened: no, I never said that, yes, I am far from these people and places, I haven't seen him in years. It takes some effort to separate the strands of reality from the fabric of the dreamscape. Sometimes I will realize several hours later that I had begun to think what happened while I was asleep was true, a part of my past I had tried to repress. But no, just another award-winning performance from the players in my head.

Even after calming down and grounding myself in the here and now, I am still surrounded by the fog of the nightmare. My fear, my sadness, my anger, my distress... it was all so real, and I can't shake off the tendrils as they grab at me, try to pull me down, obscure my vision, work through my mind and corrupt my thoughts. I do battle every night, and treat the injured every morning. It's a creeping sickness that will not relent. I cannot give the patient any hope of a full recovery, I can only say we must keep fighting and stay strong.

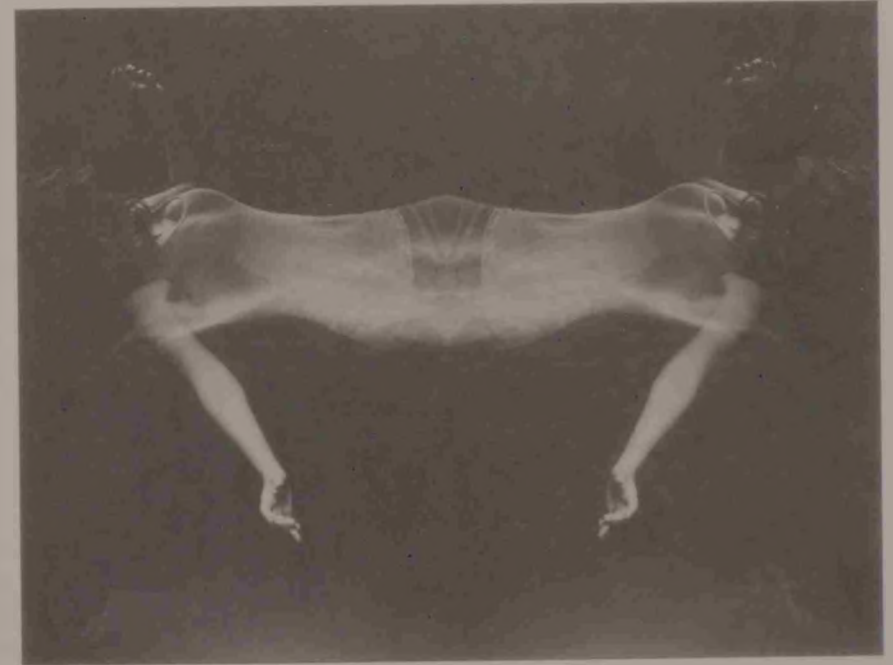
It sounds like some kind of pro-military propaganda. I have to laugh at myself for just a moment, laugh at the situation, laugh at the ritual. Find humour in the little things or you'll go crazy right?

It's funny how people say "go crazy" like one day you'll decide to hop in your car and your destination will be one without logic or reason. Like you've made a choice and all of a sudden you're crazy. That's not crazy. Crazy is the everyday, the waking up, eating breakfast, going to an office, going to school, keeping a routine. Crazy is doing that over and over and letting the routine sand down the edges of your sanity until you start to realize that something seems off. But you can't put your finger on what that something is, so you just adapt and continue on, slowly getting worse. Of course, there are some other special ingredients in that, childhood trauma, shocking events, death, mental illness, but don't assume you're far from crazy just because you're not stuck in a strait jacket. Everyone can be worn down, there is always a breaking point, you just haven't found it yet.

But I digress. My sanity is fiercely defended day and night, preoccupying me, worrying me, and almost mocking me when I realize how easily everyone else manages to get by. Are they on alert? As a whole, it's unlikely. Are they keenly aware of the factors that may cause the fault in their defenses? I would hope not. *Should* they be concerned? Not really, no. Only a select few are tasked with fighting in this war. The few, the proud. The unseen soldiers, the silent guardians... it all seems so dramatic. It's not really, it all just boils down to 24 hours. To day and night. To lying down and thinking happy thoughts, wishing for good dreams. I wait for sleep to come, and try not to think about where it will take me.

I wake up in a cold sweat, once again gasping. As though I'm trying to suck reality back into my body.

Another nightmare.



What's Wrong, Doctor?

Stephanie Martin

Astronaut's Song

Jeff Parent

My heart counts down inside my wheezing chest.
This scorched red world's hot, aggressive, still.
No protection offered by my soiled, shredded suit,
I collapse upon this rusty, sharp, and grimly barren hill.

"Come home," they whisper in my stuttered sleep.
I stir. Aren't I alone beneath these troubled skies?
"Come...home?" I croak, I nearly choke
from effort. Twin suns burn my half-closed eyes.

"Wake up. You'll sleep away the day."
Then: laughter with a hundred legs, it creeps.
Something overhead— no bird— flies by.
Into my swollen eyes, eyes look back black and deep.

Tin voices prick, assault my hapless ears.
Wild, clinging tendrils flail, sting until,
my heart goes cold. They scuttle 'cross my back.
"Good bye." they whisper, as they eat their fill.

Fin

NOT TO BE TAKEN AWAY
CONSULTATION SUR PLACE



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