

DALHOUSIE & KING'S  
CREATIVE WRITING JOURNAL





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*Many thanks to Sue Goyette and Mary Beth MacIsaac for their generosity and guidance throughout the journal's many phases.*

*This journal was published on unceded and unsurrendered Mi'kmaq territory.*

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## NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

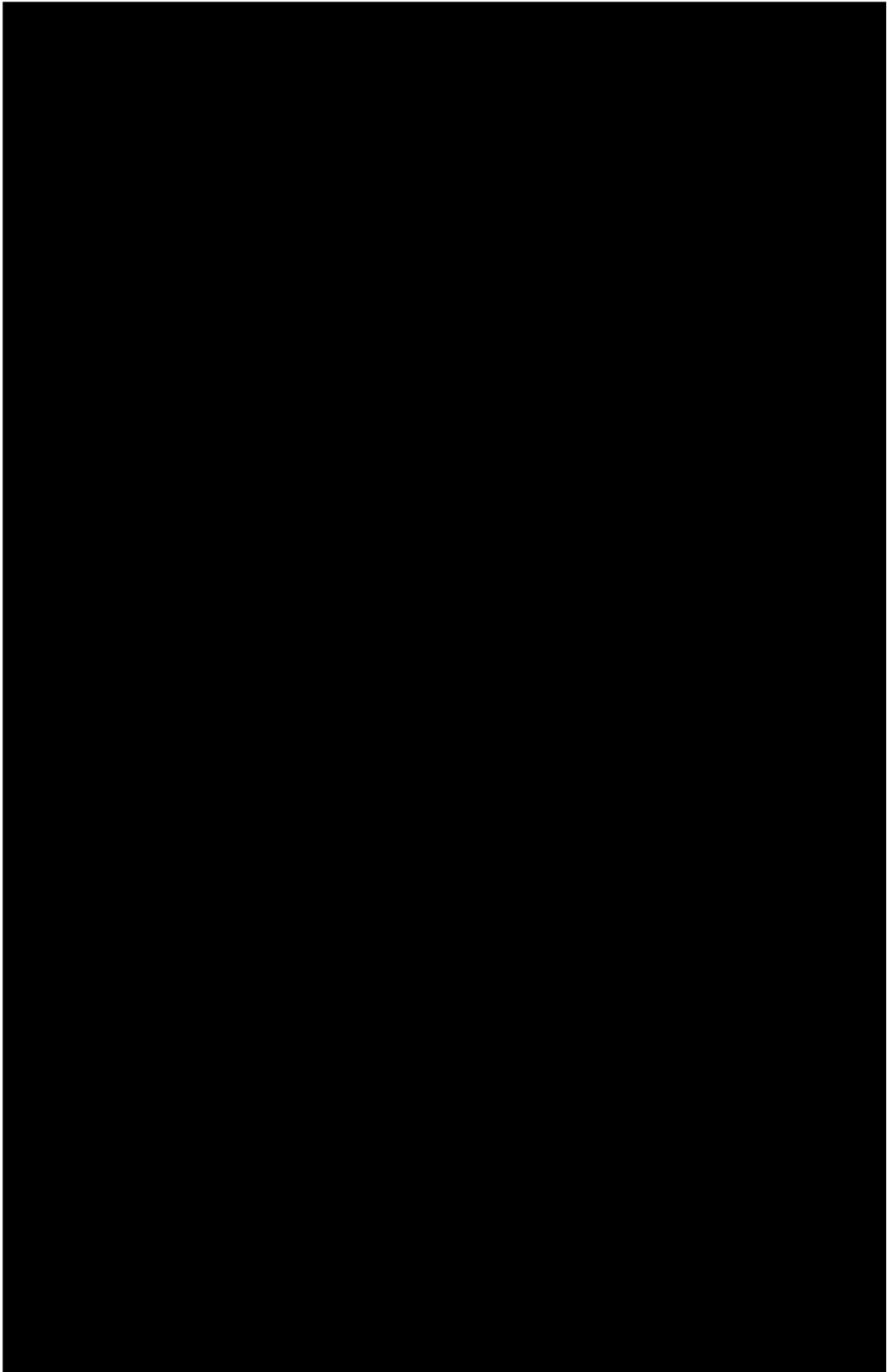
This year we made an active effort to expand the journal's horizons. By that, we mean we wanted to expand the creative writing community at Dal and King's beyond those exclusively in the discipline. Our intent this year was an effective outreach strategy that informed the entirety of both campuses about this opportunity. By focusing on diversifying the voices in this journal, we hope to encapsulate the multiplicity of the human experience (or at least that of Halifax) through an intersectional understanding that neither romanticizes nor diminishes.

We're nothing short of overwhelmed at the number of amazing, accomplished and multifaceted submissions we received this year from a large variety of writers. We encourage those, accepted or otherwise, to continue pursuing their craft and adding to the collective consciousness.

We like to think this subset of CanLit is significantly less of a dumpster fire than the whole right now.

Thank you for reading,

**Trynne Delaney and Drue MacPherson, Co-Editors in Chief.**







CHIARA FERRERO-WONG

BLIP

In the kitchen  
non-invasive yellow light illuminates  
the cabinets, the table, the fridge,  
the forgotten carrot peels,  
collecting on the ground.

I walk into the kitchen,  
my outline bleeding, breaking apart  
into the stiff, stale air:  
A mixture of dark, round coffee,  
rotting vegetables and stale socks.

Padding consciously,  
placing each toe down  
as I feel the spilt coffee grounds implanting  
themselves into my heels;  
they're still wet, but now cold.

After years have passed,  
I make it to the broom.  
Mountain building as I  
collect the debris,  
the lone mushroom.

Tipped into the garbage can, almost  
spilling onto the linoleum.  
I replace the broom, wash  
my hands of the filth,  
and I turn off the tap.

I leave the kitchen then.  
I would close the door, but we  
don't have a kitchen door, only  
an entrance way that the light  
takes advantage of, spilling into the hallway.

**DANIELLE BLAIS**

ODE TO THE HEDGE

Night,  
clouds,  
impenetrable,  
hiding the life light of stars.

Chill  
ice carried in  
between the suicide of leaves;  
ritual shredding of trees.

They sigh as they fall asleep,  
that long goodnight.

“Her blacks crackle and drag”  
comes to me  
in between  
stages of decay.  
I wonder if Plath  
would have come to my back garden  
and taken the stiffen plants,  
the stench of deep  
rotting life;  
Its softening state  
the drying and releasing  
sense of light.

I wonder what she'd say when she leaves.

I WASN'T GOING TO WRITE ANYTHING NEW

I told a friend about the red dresses.

Walking out of your home,  
to walk down that highway,  
the only sound in your wake  
the echo of screams and wails.  
Never seen again.

Once we stood as friends,  
nation to nation.  
Now when ever we meet  
someone is always disrespectful;  
one side in honest regalia,  
the other in casual authority.

I know there are two sides to every story,  
but a look at the land, would truly show who has it,  
(white guns always loaded, but never when needed).

And some say I should stay silent,  
but I hear the whisper of their dresses  
the echo of their cries:  
It is our women,  
our daughters,  
lovers,  
and mothers,  
gone,  
disappeared.  
They don't have markers in our graveyards,  
and there was never an intention to plant one.

And some say I should take a side,  
But my ancestry melds them both  
Beautifully.  
Besides how can there be one,  
When we all have blood on our hands,  
From those we took from,  
Or those we couldn't save.

We are  
all  
in this together.  
There are just as many white patches next to the red,  
we have similar problems.  
We can adapt, show compassion,  
learn from each other,  
aid each other in healing.  
Nations helping Nations.

Keeping your word has two parts,  
Speaking then doing.

FOR RUBY.

You are strong like driftwood.  
A monolithic piece  
dug deep into the side of a rocky beach.  
For almost as long as you have lived,  
you have been a play structure  
for young and those daring enough  
to climb your high,  
Still thick, intact branches,  
Sitting among them during storms and full moon nights.

One day,  
after the sea  
has taken your roots  
and your branches no longer hold even the wind,  
you will be seen,  
preserved.

If God was a colour  
He would be your sheen under moonlight,  
a silver  
luminescent only in sunshine,  
dusty with age and wisdom  
soft like your flesh,  
soul still strong and warm under hand.

Immortal, in every sense of the word.

**EVIE BENNETT**

SOUTHERN GIRL, NORTHERN LIGHTS

we talked all night until the sun  
rose, demanding  
our attention over the rooftops,  
filling our bath-tub sized rooms  
with gold.

look how the morning  
breathes like a living thing, darling,  
look how the seasons  
rip themselves out  
like the pages of a book.  
look at it this way:  
everything is still broken,  
but at least we're not spitting blood anymore,  
not crying behind carnivals,  
or killing the clowns for their money.  
it's been two years and i've  
long since  
given back those dull knives,  
forgotten the way winter buried us alive.

when you said,  
"how old were we when we  
stopped remembering the good days too?"  
and i couldn't tell you because  
there are places i don't remember,  
faces i can't name,  
there are days when i  
miss you and remember i'm not allowed to.

PANDROUS BLOOMING

she holds a peach in her hands  
and tells me it feels tender,  
like the softest of mornings,  
my heart breathes in  
and says  
that's the way i feel about you.

i watch her bite into it,  
pink fingernails, pink tongue,  
pink juice dripping down her chin.

i think about how  
summer will be kind to us,  
give us greens deeper than dreams,  
warm the rivers into baths and turn  
her skin old-locket-gold.

we sit in slow-hot fields for hours,  
tucking pansies between our toes.  
we love in idleness,  
sucking on peach pits until their folded insides  
scrape our cheeks.

she buries hers in the field;  
i swallow mine.

mother told me that  
swallowing seeds  
makes trees grow in your belly;  
when she laughs into the wind,  
her hands cupped like she wants to catch  
the sun and his chariot, i can feel  
the roots stretching their waking limbs  
and beginning to grow.



HISTORIES

i want to swallow  
your heartstrings,  
your music,  
your memories;  
unroll them like  
interstates and  
count the miles.

WHEN I HAD NO ENEMY I OPPOSED MY BODY

for three years there was red.

metal stolen in fistfuls,  
ribs caught in conversations about death  
and how there should be more red.

i started wars for no one and held  
the bullets inside me: mouthful  
of metal, sleeves full of red.

## JANET BRUSH

### STILL THERE

Seen from the beach: old red buildings, empty, abandoned.  
The sign says “Rainbow Haven Children’s Camp”,  
its purpose “to provide safe meaningful experiences  
in the great outdoors.”  
What meaningful experiences awaited the exclusive clientele?

Gourmet food – oatmeal cooked hours before we wake,  
dished out, milk and sugar added  
left to sit – cold gelid mass  
to be eaten with cold hard toast.

First rate health care – a girl sent home with hepatitis A.  
I had it when I was four, but what does a ghetto kid know?  
Nurse flings me over her knee,  
jabs needle in buttocks.

Cultural events – South End college girl camp counsellor  
amazed I could sing, know all the words to Broadway song -  
“anything you can do I can do better.”  
We all sang at the concert our parents couldn’t afford to attend.

Adoration of the locals – neighbourhood boys  
hanging over the fence,  
ogling just ripening thirteen-year-old girls,  
curious – do poor girls look the same? Are they ‘easy’?

Years later – local writes her memories of us:  
condescending, misrepresenting,  
not understanding who we were,  
claiming that was the best fun we ever had.

She was wrong – we didn’t need handouts or pity;  
we had the Public Gardens, Black Rock Beach,  
the woods in Point Pleasant Park, all close by.  
I had the library, just three blocks away.

And a mother who knew how to cook.

## GORDON GILLIS

### ABOUT TIME

The edge I run myself along,  
the words I'm writing and burning,  
are whispers of metal thrown off an anvil  
from a forge I've never seen  
that starts fires in hay spread over stone.

I wish you hadn't told me  
true things, like sharp warm needles  
slipped comfortably in, and now I only notice  
when I remember them, when I move a certain way  
and find steel lies waiting.

I'll drift against the cast and overflow the fill cuts,  
molten and bright, and then we'll both jump in remembrance  
of burns healed to stippling and sharp edges inside.

This - all of this - is so long done and gone and over  
that it must be safe to touch, must be encased inside.  
Here, I'll twist fast and find the sharp end again and you,  
you stoop to the floor and pick up a blood-red spark.

**KATIE CLARKE**

DIDO

My little sister, he would say,  
Is like pure honey  
Too sweet  
All at once  
Too quick  
All together  
Learning quickly  
Fading fast  
She empties jar after jar  
And it does not satisfy her  
To be incomplete  
Fullness  
Found not to be synonymous with wholeness  
She scratches out her eyes and tries to heal them with honey on broken skin  
What soothes and stings  
Colours and bleaches  
This is the bitter cost of her empire

This fame must ensure some kind of refuge  
But she seeks it in temples built for someone else  
Knowing her salvation does not belong to her  
Her fullness will not make her whole  
She is a monarch in a crumbling hive  
And all of the patrons in this museum tap on her glass display  
Each hit shakes the hive  
Each shake breaks an empire

A queen without a hive is a beast or a god  
But neither would so willingly tear themselves apart

So please, no more of these appeals that set us both afire

Do not ask me to stop this dissection of my lost parts  
Do not ask me to pretend that I am whole  
To glue myself together with the fruit of my colony  
Soothe these seams with honey

## RUBY COLES

### GIRLS

My girls are the ones that eat their despair for breakfast  
They brush their teeth with the bones of those who once tried to chew them up  
My girls are the ones that spend their time mending together a suit of armour  
Using the poise they find under their pillow  
And the thickened skin from where they've scarred  
Just to fight off boys with their tongues prisoner behind their teeth  
My girls like to mix their coffee with one-part victim three-parts survivor  
Because it's hard to be whole once you've been torn  
My girls are the ones that spill their nightmares like syrup into a bowl of porridge  
Only to feel the stale taste in their mouth  
Trying to digest their veracity and cough up anguish  
Silencing their brothers' claim that it can't be that bad  
I hope you never become one of my girls.

YOGA WITH MY ENEMY

I lay in Tadasana  
Waiting for her to get bored and wander off  
But her whispers turn into screams  
She has my attention  
Pulling on my limbs, pulling my heartstrings  
I roll onto my stomach with my palms strong under my shoulders  
Baby Cobra.  
Trying to protect the air  
That's left in my lungs  
She takes it.

I force my body to downward dog  
And she rips my feet out from under me,  
Telling me I can't,  
She reminds me that no matter  
How hard I work, I can't push her away.

Chaturanga Dandasna,  
You can't have me  
But she stomps on my stomach  
Forcing every ounce of carbon  
From my diaphragm  
Reminding me that she's the reason  
I haven't eaten today.

I glide to upward dog,  
Because she has me by the wrists  
And ankles chaining me  
To the ground that once kept me safe  
Making me understand that breathing is for the worthy  
And I am not it.

She kicks me to my knees  
Tabletop pose  
But my arms collapse  
Under the pressure  
And my sitting bones collide with my heels  
Child's pose.

Praying to a god that I don't believe in  
Praying to a god that everyone else does  
That she will one day leave me  
And free me of her abuse.

Mantras are important in yoga, so I pick one.

How did no one notice?  
How did no one notice?  
How did no one notice?

My lungs  
Are done accepting air for the day.

You deserved it.  
You deserved it.  
You deserved it.

Laying in child's pose wishing  
I had more time.

Laying in child's pose  
wishing that I had a childhood.

Laying in child's pose  
Pretending  
I wasn't depressed  
At 8 years old.

Laying in child's pose  
Reminding her  
That I made it to 21 years  
And if she hasn't taken me yet  
She not taking me now.

Laying in child's pose  
Being reminded that  
She came close  
And she's getting closer.

Laying in child's pose  
Reminding myself  
That I have survived.

Slowly make your way  
To the top of your mat  
Trembling in my skin, I rise  
One more time.

## MIA MUSIC

### TOGETHER WE'LL DANCE

i've sensed the rainbow  
glowing beneath your secret void  
they say  
we are only the blood of angels  
exhumed in the night by  
lovers  
drinking us across Ouija boards  
whispering enchantments  
that don't grab us too tightly.  
us two, we're just human.  
yet we dance in the night  
shed our velvet skin. the most glorious snake.  
we're just human, us two,  
but we still cast the spell back  
and extend a long claw, pointed  
to the daydream.



WE RISE

arachnids  
baking their golden limbs  
and crisp-cut smiles

slicing away at their victims  
like slabs of meat  
until they're offerings  
on gleaming platters

(the tongue of a witch  
dragging through his apology)

striking deals with the demons  
who christen their blessings  
and take holy photographs;  
happy to follow

(there's spittle  
leaking down his chin)

sucking the victims dry  
the venom, the venom,  
the flashes of fame  
causing famine

from the puddle we'll emerge  
into waves

## JACK SMITH

### CHERRY STREET - WALK HOME

shape of a butterfly  
raised at the centre of her  
puffy pink winter coat.

arms made of string and bone—  
on windy days, small leaves gather  
round her wrists, and in her hood.

she walks head  
down, boots bending by the  
backs of her ankles.  
brown and silver puddles  
show her hair, tree branches,  
and sky:

leukemic white.

crossing a bent wooden bridge  
when it starts snowing by the lake,  
if i had a child i know i'd have to walk  
into the water. lose sensation in my legs.  
take her hand. see her freckles, swearing.

when the stove's turned off i'd have to look  
over the water while every digit of her fingers turns to petals.

LOGGING IN WINTER, BEAUPRÉ

it wasn't a form, it was a body  
moving heavy in snow and twigs  
and slush, along the breathy canal  
between the trees.

the Sunday passed, waiting, bored, and  
moving,  
and tired, slothfully anticipating  
every small rock in the road – and twigs –  
the fire at home.

passing that corner, if it were any more still, he  
might have been scared, without the switch in his hand.  
every time – a squirrel behind the tracks, a blue  
bird in the branches, not  
calling –

the Sun  
was always so  
still – passing that corner, never passing that corner –  
it never moved.

the trees

bristled.

the mitts were green but he loved the sleeves:  
the way they met the sleeves, weighed heavy  
with never-melting snow, and sweat,  
the switch in his hand.

never once had he wished to be the steer.  
only imagined quickly – the body, the form –  
the boy who wasn't a boy: head full and ignoring  
himself, he waited for the lullaby.

the logging  
the falling

every leaf and twig

the rock

the fire

the lullaby.

When he dreamed of  
the pyramids, they  
were covered in gauze,  
and the locusts waited by the shore  
of the canal.  
The Pharaohs were tall and gold  
standing in the woods.

Not facing him  
and not  
like the trees.



Maurice Cullen, *Logging in Winter, Beupré*, 1896, oil on canvas, 64.1 x 79.9 cm, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Ontario.

QI CHEN

MY GRANDMOTHER'S TALE

A sea of conical hats  
rice fields never ending  
Harvest season  
heartbeat of the village  
A way of life  
vanished within sight  
Abyss of skyscrapers made its dwelling  
Displaced



**CLAIRE BENNET**

THE LONLIEST ANIMAL

my fish died last night.  
I don't know how old he was  
(he never told me his birthday)  
but I know he wasn't as lonely as the tortoise.

we buried him in the front yard,  
me with the spade,  
the tortoise with the bucket  
hat.

when she's ninety-two  
the tortoise will dig my grave,  
so that it's done when I'm done  
and she's ninety-four  
and two quarters  
(we've done the math).

then she'll go down the path  
and start the hunt  
for a bowhead whale  
to bury her.

the tortoise is lonely  
because she knows she won't find one  
in time  
because she moves  
in time  
with the hour hand on our large kitchen clock.

(and because she can't swim.)

TOUGH

To the apocalypse:

When you come,

I will gather my tools:

    combat boots

    leather jacket

    blister band-aids

    granola bar

Just so you know,

I went to karate camp when I was five

collected spy gear when I was ten

and then went to a shoe museum

two years ago

and saw how some have backwards soles

to look like they're going the other way

and

just the other day

when a spider stared me down

I didn't even scream.



**MATTHE ROONEY**

VENICE BEACH, CALIFORNIA

i sit out at Venice Beach  
watching the sun cascade over  
my massive sweat-glistened pectorals.  
pompadour riding high.  
my areola emit a pale sizzling  
like the recently recorded scream  
of distant, dying quasars.

bovine somatotropin begot my beefy biceps.  
in their prime, say, after a few reps at the gym  
they were gargantuan  
enough to bear an all-hungry civilization  
that first showed itself  
in tiny papulous huts  
near rivers of perspiration.

i ignored them as they etched  
their epidermal irrigation grooves  
to harvest dietary staples.  
no issues when they mined  
through my muscles,  
stealing bits of my ulna  
for their war-time weapons.

it wasn't until their savant of a shaman  
came up to me—  
tugged out in bits of gold string  
from my Versace cocoon—  
tugged on my beard, and said  
“i can see through your ego.  
behind it lies a void”

i decided they had to go.  
i stopped injecting growth hormones—  
let them fight over whatever space was left.  
within a week they were wiped.  
i inject ketamine now—  
my arms are on the shrink,  
but you'd still date me, right?

THE WORDS TASTED TRUE

in an attempt to absorb  
how the seepings of history  
penetrate the present,  
i would purchase a pack  
of cigarettes  
and shape each one—  
pretzel them each into a letter of the alphabet  
except i—  
and disperse them  
around the sides of walkways  
of roads  
to collect them later.  
perhaps after a shower  
perhaps after a sunbath—  
like curled up little clues littering the curbs—  
and light each one.

i would carefully curate  
their truncated ends  
and arrange them to form words  
to create sentences  
such as:  
“once worked through  
the thought becomes hollowed out  
and can no longer accept  
any substance”  
without the i getting involved.  
regardless of myself—  
without the ego of the author—  
i thought  
the words tasted true  
to the clogging of my throat  
that helped produce them.

**ANNA JEWERS**

TIME

Time has never  
Been on our side  
Like two paths that rarely  
Come to coincide

Say if you were tick  
And I was tock  
We'd make the most  
Off-beat clock

STEPHANIE SHERMAN

IN WHICH KAFKA PREACHES THE LITERAL

kafka sits for tea but he doesn't like my mouth. it reminds him of a letter, he's says, a series of empty rooms & an empty stomach. but it's a mouth, i tell him. but this is my memory, he says & how can you argue with that?

kafka's supposed to be crafting me tales; instead he's spooning himself into his drink, steaming a reverie from between his fingers. there—is kafka. there he is. & he doesn't like my mouth.

2

his fingers laugh along the side, his wrists are knotted—& kafka's angry. fingers do not laugh he cries, his mouth lolling into a pucker. his wrists begin to snap back & forth like fibs.

kafka doesn't believe in metaphors. i tell him the car outside is an elephant & he almost faints. i tell him he's a grand piano in the middle of a staircase in the middle of australia & his face turns into a massacre.

these are lies, you see, so i ask him about the beetle. i say well what about good old mr. samsa? kafka begins to peel his skin like an orange, melt into the chair. his voice is a forest & he's cutting down all the trees.

3

i drag kafka into a supermarket & leave him by the cashiers. when i return his shoes are gone & his veins stand out like branches. i pay for six cans of alphabet soup & pull him back out into the cold, into the fiction that this is.

in the apartment the cans are empty, piled high by the wall & kafka is staring at his reflection in the red. the soup holds his face like a dream he can't comprehend. the soup is a river, his reflection a strand of moon.

& kafka's stabbing his finger into the center of his face, the liquid ripples around the edges—bloody. like he hisses like a river, like the moon. he's attacking me with similes. i guide his spoon into the waves.

4

now kafka's consuming vowels, chewing language, digesting letters like yesterday. my verses are skinning him alive, but he can't protest: he puts another piece into his mouth—an m—he's moved on to the consonants.

you're eating the alphabet! kafka disintegrates, as if i've accused him of murder. he shakes his head but his lips are stained. he can feel the slosh of symbols just below his ribs, against his throat, behind his ear. now what? he's thinking. now where?

5

at his grave kafka touches the dirt with his hands. samsa turns into a beetle, he says, there is no metaphor. he sits cross-legged, leans his back against the headstone, laughs. says again in his ghost-voice:

there is no metaphor. but there is meaning.

then kafka gives me my tale. narrates how the literal has three sets of teeth & yawns, gives birth under your tongue & strangles you. & here—is kafka. here he is. sitting patiently in the corner, growing thinner & thinner, licking salt from his fingertips

& making beetles out of men.

THE FIVE AFTERLIVE OF SYDNEY CARTON

i. syd carton visits & talks about terror  
& earth. all babies are born under a  
guillotine, he whispers, a goblet in  
hand & doomed. you see, syd knows.  
syd peels hearts & wears the skins.

ii. for my birthday syd buys a bottle of  
wine & brings it down on kneecap  
to shatter like revolution. the gift is not the  
red, the gift is the glass he embroiders  
into my hair. this is murder. which is love.

iii. yesterday, i found syd eating a jar of  
peanut butter on the basement steps, tearing  
pages from encyclopedias (the paper was  
his bread). syd says, you can't chew history.  
syd says, you can chew it into nothing.

iv. this is syd, damned & blurry-eyed & everything  
i don't & do. syd tapes faces like song &  
slurps his own blood. he takes the rake to the  
lawn, but he's no gardener. syd's just  
buying time, deposing flower crowns for fun.

v. now syd collects footsteps & echoes &  
distills for spirit & tangible ghost. but he  
won't rethink his martyrdom, he'd do it again.  
knife the law & gut himself for anyone,  
everyone but you. never, syd for you.

**LIZ MCELROY**

DRIVING TO THE BEACHES WITH MY MOTHER

Waves of oil crest  
on paintings,  
holding their breath above  
her desk, her brush extended  
over another.  
I know my mother best in profile.

Carpets of crisp,  
crinkling trail maps  
littering the car floor,  
shuffling in squalls,  
driving from infancy to now.  
I know my mother best in profile.

Soft shingled cottages  
caught in honeyed light  
are captured on the walls of our home;  
souvenirs of roads we travelled.

I know my mother best in profile.

FAMILY REUNION

File you down  
to bitter nubs,  
the way Auntie does  
with each flick against her  
fingernails.  
Chair rocking, news flashing,  
needles nicking.

“Give an ear to your elders.”

You will be sharpened:  
futilely, over the tabletop,  
laid out for dinner,  
and under the glare  
of a camera flash;  
pinned into an album at the elbows.



I LOOKED DOWN AND MY WINGS HAD GROWN

My best friend  
teetered in dirt-stained shorts,  
stuck two hands into the earth,  
and pulled from the dregs a cicada.

Corked by her thumbs,  
the slumbering bug,  
untimely uprooted,  
unspooled in her grasp.

Shaking off ancient soot,  
it loosened a shriek,  
17 years in its throat,  
that pierced the August heat.

17 years underground,  
coiled in my memory,  
left me voiceless  
when plucked too soon.

I longed for the dark earth,  
with half-blind eyes,  
where my childhood rested  
in mud and tree root.

And I saw the way my best friend's hands  
had lengthened,  
how my own voice  
had sharpened,  
and how August  
had passed us over.

Fortunate cicadas do not look at themselves  
in a harsh autumn light  
to see the lines of their wings expanded,  
or the hardening of their shells.

**CARMEL MIKOL**

I WILL NOT GO

I refuse  
to go there  
Back to that house  
that kitchen table  
where you would not talk  
The bathroom  
where I pressed my back to the door  
while you kicked it  
I refuse

I refuse to go there  
Back to that pink room  
where you spent all night  
sucking on ice  
seeing ghosts  
asking for your mother  
your eyes black  
in some other world  
No

I won't go  
To that bed we laid in  
where I found you  
and dragged your body sleeping  
or worse  
boneless  
to the shower  
across the cold tile  
to wake you  
beg you  
to live

I will not return  
To that first broken cup  
stains on the wall where it smashed  
and I never knew you again  
Lost for good  
the idea of Home  
of Warm Skin  
Shared Ribs

I cleaned it up

every time.

NORTHERN MAINE

And all along the high way  
trees

pale birch trees  
bent  
bent to the earth beneath the weight of snow  
like the way that I remember you

I recall you with my body  
and you still hurt.

**CHELSEA CARROLL**

THE KING OF RYDER'S COVE

New England born nomad,  
self-sworn to serve his two  
beautiful baby girls.

He'd routinely remind them between tying  
tiny grey weights to tough, translucent lines:  
"Everything I do, I have YOU  
and you in mind."

His face flushes  
for three beings:  
A broken rod,  
Shania Twain,  
and The One that Got Away:  
my mother, a showstopper.  
Red lipped firecracker  
would rather pass  
on all things natural.

He's mastered the fight  
of the Striped Bass,  
but the elusive Blue Fin  
leaves him empty handed.

The man never gut  
a fish without dishing out  
sizable slices  
of the finest sushi in town  
to the summer hires,  
who've surely conspired  
in knighting him as:  
The Nicest Muthafuckah Around!  
In a craaass South Boston  
aaaccent he shares with the boys  
as they stare blank-faced,  
embracing the charming,  
witty banter of this  
legendary angler.

They wonder as Coach,  
his navy-blue boat,  
sails out to sea:  
what will His Greatness  
bring back to me?

He gifts undue credit  
to his ELDEST  
for the catch.

He thanks his youngest  
for spraying sea salt  
off the mast.

A boy from away admires  
his striped prizes.  
He courtly refuels,  
“How’d ya do out there, Coach?”

His usual response remains,  
a humbled tone bumbles  
from between his peppered shadow,  
“Can’t complain ‘bout catching  
rays and waves on the cove  
with the two little creatures  
I love most in tow.”

LAUREN HAZLEWOOD

YOU'RE STILL MY HOME

But the doors are all locked,  
boarded up with rotting wood and rusty nails, the windows  
too dark to see through. The porch is  
sunken in, its middle bent into itself  
like something decaying slow.  
The railings, the pointy bones left over from the rot,  
cobwebbed and wet with a filmy dew  
that coats the peeling paint of shredded stairs  
that lead us nowhere now.  
The gutters are all clogged up,  
the blood can't pump through  
with all the dead leaves and tangled weeds.  
There's nowhere for the sludge to drain.  
I'm walking through the woods  
and I see the house being eaten,  
consumed and pressed down by layers of  
heavy branches that can't be snapped.  
You made these trunks so thick, I can't even  
see the sky anymore, just the eerie green dim.  
I remember carving our names into the bark of trees  
so that our love might reach heights  
you could never give me on your own.

Look what you've done to us.

My heart cracks for this abandoned house,  
lingering on the edge of town,  
far enough into the woods to be neglected  
but close enough for the streetlights to remember,  
close enough to demand I not forget.  
It's rusty weathervane creaking round and round and round —  
there's no direction in this wind.

**DRUE MACPHERSON**

SHARING CLOTH

she wore it smoking hash  
eyes brimming  
baking near Bathurst  
before cross pollination

left my baby hands  
tying round my waist

busted button downs

claims of drycleaned delicates  
thumbing through

stained Zimbardo textbooks  
marked up  
with lead pencils

catching loose threads

matching yellow bones  
and moles before  
they're sunspots

some subplot in  
my walk-in

lend them out  
friends keep it in the family

she looks better on them

I look like her



SAVORY

*peeling* matchsticks atop old tires  
until the sky is populated with  
*rising* black that rests on the tongue

*stale* hooch from a cabinet  
three towns *over* poured on  
*stodgy* beach grains  
sitting on the rim

*What's summer* supposed to taste like?

scarlet flesh of chubby fingers  
pared *raw* before *wet* salt  
might retaliate

*ashing* on fried meat  
*sliding down* into guts  
like arms through jackets  
*reeking* just *the same*

TRYNNE DELANEY

WISER?

she tells me  
that she and her brother  
tricked me  
when they picked up the phone  
and called their mother  
to demand forbidden  
hallowe'en candy

(I am easy  
to trick  
for treats)

in the fall  
she gets her first  
pimples  
in a cluster  
at her hairline

mine are  
(mostly)  
gone

COMMIT DON'T QUIT

commit  
a mercy killing

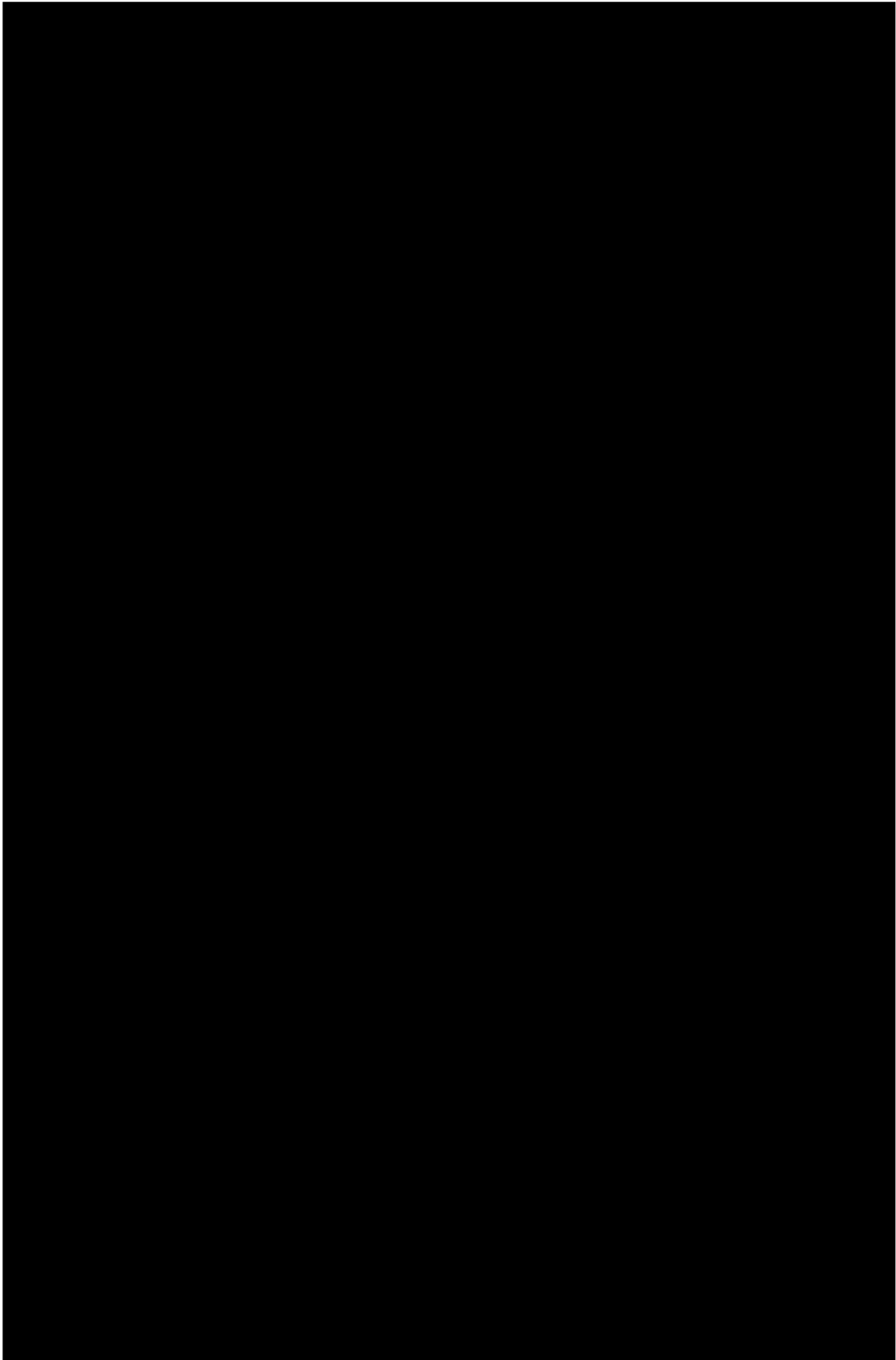
lukewarm tub  
full to brim  
place glue trap  
upside down  
mouse first

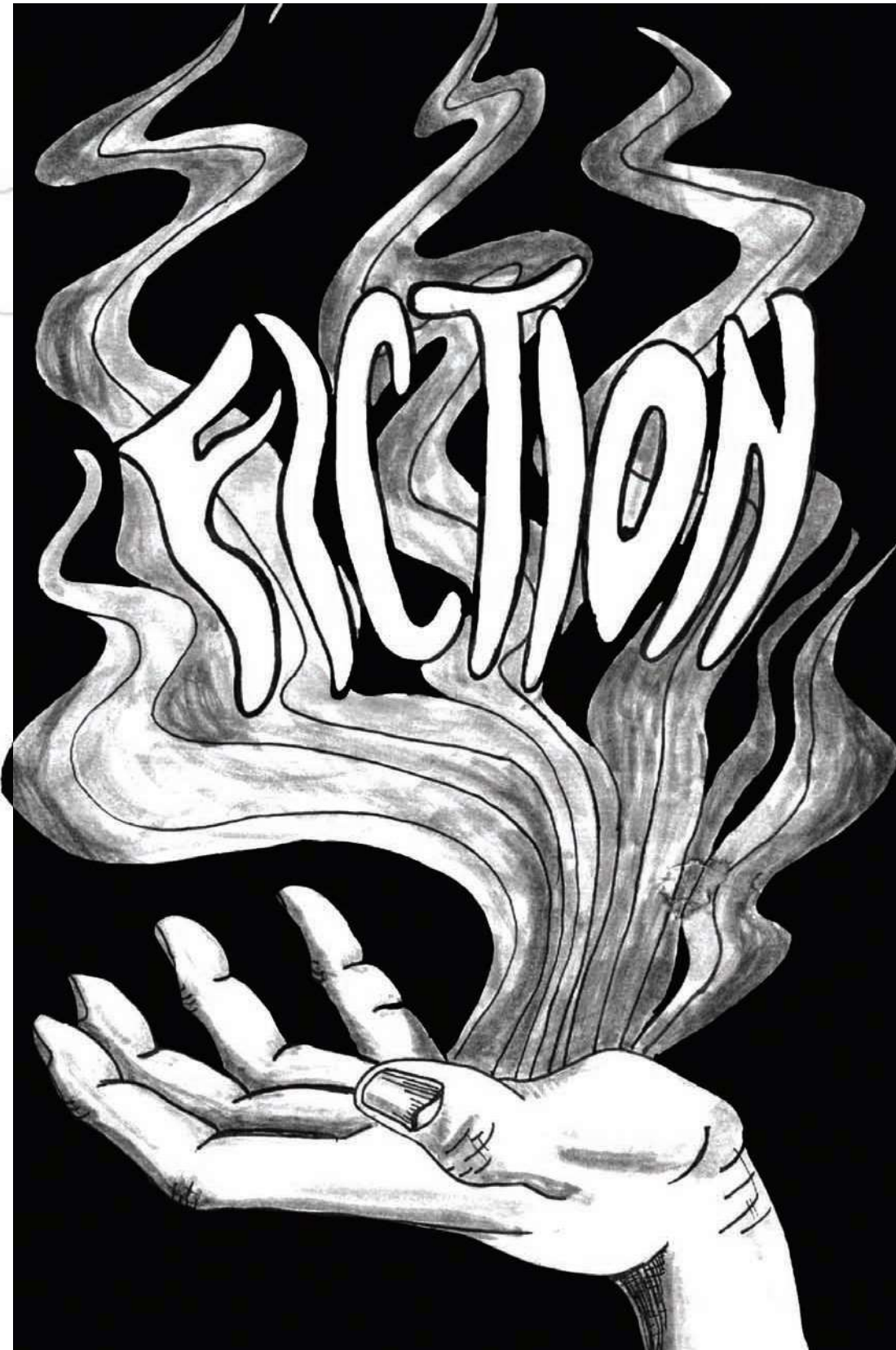
is it mercy  
afterwards?

a corpse  
ziplocked  
left collected  
with the trash

have I committed  
to mercy?

do we crouch  
together  
hands on our knees  
checking our watches  
for endings  
as they come  
s l o w abrupt stragglers  
who rise, fall  
in the sh  
and the sigh





## NICHOLAS JUNG

### CETACEAN

*Emilia; thank you for your constant support and love, I owe you everything. I will always love you.*

Each morning T had had to wake at 4:00 am to make his way downstairs, drain any sea water that had entered the house throughout the night and rebuild what had been broken. He hadn't always been burdened with this responsibility. When he was first born, the house had been distanced far enough away from the sea that his father used to joke they may as well have settled in the desert. After his father's death and the memories of his face, touch and scent faded from the mind of T, the distance between the house and the water shortened until the waves permanently caressed the walls with smooth liquid touches. In the morning a young T had found this calming; the sound of the water quietly sloshing against the hardened mud of the foundation sounded like children eagerly sharing secrets in hushed voices afraid they might be overheard and interrupted by the adults upstairs. At night though the sounds changed. The gentle touches of morning waves became violent molestations in the dark. Mother had been terrified, afraid that the walls would buckle and crack and let in the ocean.

She had forced T to wade out into the murky sea, filled with water that reflected no sky, the next morning and gather bricks, steel mesh, wood and stone to reinforce the walls of the house. He had been terrified of this at first. At the age of 8 the command from Mother to swim out into the depthless water had been an order to charge into the dragon's cave, the lair of the spider queen or any such fantastical monster his mind could conjure up to fill in the emptiness of the unknown. Now wheelchair bound from a disease no doctor could find, she exercised such control over her son that T could forget his fears and swim. After the first journey, he had returned with nothing but a small collection of twigs and barely a handful of stones. Still, he had used what little material he had to build a makeshift dam in the basement of the house. Into the soft mud of the west facing wall he pushed the twigs and stones to form a crude reinforcement. In the morning he had rushed downstairs only to find his creation broken. The stones had slipped free from their settings and were strewn across the floor and the twigs lay broken. He reported his findings to Mother who viewed this destruction as the water's threat to fill her lungs and choke the life from, as she reminded T, the frail remains of her body, once so beautiful you could put it in movies. Mother often told him of how in the past she resembled Bridgette Bardot, and if she had been drinking, that T and his father had stolen her subtle pouting mouth, flowing blonde hair, sharp cheeks and with them had robbed her of a reason to live.

Imbedded with the fear of losing Mother, T would swim out to retrieve more materials and once again build a dam on the west facing wall. As time went on T grew into a skilled architect of such buildings. His designs grew more complex as he learned to interweave metal for strength and assemble wood frames to

find the necessary materials. Yet none of this made any difference. As T's abilities in construction grew, the water seemed to compensate by finding a weakness in the structure or simply by using brute force to break through the wall. The repetitive cycle of rebirth to death, death to rebirth originating from Mother's first order to swim, gather supplies and build continued; each morning T ran down to the basement, witnessed the destruction of his dam, gathered materials from the water and set about rebuilding what had been lost the night before.

One evening T was awoken by a sound from downstairs. He leapt from his bed, adrenaline pumping through his veins. Had the walls of the house finally surrendered their structure? Was the house about to be swept away? T ran to the window and looked out over the water. The sight was violent. Waves crashed into one another spraying sea-foam into the air. Lightning illuminated the sky to show clouds of deep purple and red. T's eyes remained transfixed. He found his sight unable to stray from the violence and power of the outside. All the terrible monsters and creatures from his childhood could not compare to this. His imagination, his conscious mind was frozen by what he saw. The sound downstairs brought him back to reality and he ran to the basement. When he reached downstairs he saw his dam from the day before splintered on the ground. The entire construction had shed all sense of decency in form and lay at his feet in pathetic disrepair. Water was streaming through the foundation rapidly filling the basement. T ran to the wall and placed his hands over the cracks in a miserable attempt to stop the leaks. The water continued flowing, spraying him in the face, causing T to sputter and choke. He turned his head to try and shield his eyes and saw her, Mother was standing at the foot of the stairs and he laughed uncontrollably. With the light behind her, Mother looked almost angelic. The shadows softened her face and her grey translucent hair appeared golden. He removed his hands from the wall. The water continued flowing through the cracks. T's eyes never left Mother's. He turned his back to the wall and fell. His body landing in the mud which was now soft and malleable. The wall accepted T, opening itself to form a cavity into which he could fit. He felt the water on the back of his body try and push him out of the way but the soft mud had dripped over his legs and arms sealing him in place. T turned his head to stare forward and smiled. The mud had made its way up to his neck and he could feel it begin to dry and cement his body in place. The weight was pushing down on his chest and he found it increasingly more difficult to breathe. The light was blocked as Mother, who had made her way down to the basement stepped in front of the single light bulb hanging from the ceiling. She wasn't smiling as she grabbed a clump of mud and covered T's face but she did smile when the next morning she found the basement dry and the wall solid and unbroken.

## KATE POWER

### THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE CANTERBURY BANK ROBBERY

Mr. Clugston, when it came right down to it, was not a very good detective.

It was a cool winter's day when the case of the Canterbury Bank Robbery landed on Clugston's already cluttered desk. The detective had been staring at a baffling administrative report, a cigarette burning in his hand. The file hit his desk with a slap that jolted him from his stupor.

"You'll have fun with this one, Jim," said Nancy McKinley, the office secretary, "Bank robbery, it is."

Clugston groaned. He did not have time to solve a bank robbery. It was his wife's birthday this weekend, and she was already angry with him for spending so much time at work.

"Don't look so grim," said Nancy. Clugston could see red lipstick smeared across her teeth. "It should be an easy solve. One of the tellers fought the culprit. You've got a prime witness right there."

"You're not supposed to read our case files, Nancy," said Clugston.

"Ooh, pardon me," Nancy replied. She turned and waddled back to her desk, where her hair was just visible over stacks of paper.

With another sigh, Clugston opened the case file. His eyes skimmed over the details of the robbery. It had been a well-planned job, Clugston could see. The robber had cut the telephone wires and then had someone call the manager away using the telephone next door. The teller who'd confronted the robber was a man named Alfred William Chittock. He'd been shot in the foot and the hand in his tussle with the robber, the poor bastard. Clugston whistled when he read how much the robber had made off with; £522 was no small sum.

"Nancy!" Clugston called when he had finished reading. Nancy bustled back into his office.

"I need you to get me this Chittock bloke."

"He's in hospital, Jim. He's got a bullet in his foot."

"Damn," said Clugston. "What about the bank manager, then? Morgan, or whatever his name is."



“He’s already here, Jim. He’s waiting downstairs.”

“Right,” said Clugston, rising from his chair. “Let’s get this over with, then.”

...

A week passed with no new developments in the case. Clugston had interviewed the bank teller, Chittock, who was resting at home while he waited for his operation. The poor chap was a bit confused, probably from the drugs they were making him take. He hadn’t been much help to Clugston, said he couldn’t remember many details about the robbery because it happened so fast. Clugston had commended his bravery and left him to rest.

“Jim!” said Nancy, as soon as Clugston entered the office. “I wanted to talk to you. I’ve noticed something a bit strange about that robbery.”

“Have you been reading our case files again, Nancy?” said Clugston, as he sidled into his office and dropped into his chair.

“Of course,” said Nancy briskly, following him into the cramped space.

Clugston sighed. “Very well. What do you want?”

“There’s something not quite right about that teller’s story. For one, I think it’s an awful coincidence that he walked into the bank right after the manager left. For another, he’s the only one who saw this robber, but he can’t seem to remember any details about what the man looks like. Plus, the robbery could only have been done by someone who knew the bank well, and would’ve known they kept money in that drawer.”

Nancy said this all very fast, without drawing breath.

“You think Chittock’s got something to do with all this?” Clugston asked.

“I think it’s possible, yes.”

“Nonsense,” said Clugston. “The man’s a hero. He was shot, for god’s sake.”

“Maybe he shot himself to make it look like there was another person there.”

“You’re talking crazy now, Nancy. I don’t have time to listen to this.”

“All I’m saying is that you should swing by and ask him some more questions, Jim. It’s not that much trouble.”

“Who’s the detective here, you or me?” said Clugston, waving her away from his office.

Nancy rolled her eyes and trumped back to her desk.

“Stop reading my case files!” Clugston called after her. The only response was the sound of a typewriter being used with unnecessary force.

...

Weeks passed and Clugston was no closer to finding the culprit than he had been on the first day. His boss was growing increasingly irate, and his Missus was hardly speaking to him, furious over the long hours he was spending occupied with this case.

Clugston sat glumly in his office, weak sunlight streaming through his dingy window. He was scanning the reports of the robbery yet again, searching for something, anything at all, that might lead him to solving the case. It was hopeless. He’d read these reports a thousand times and still was completely lost.

His reverie was, once again, interrupted by the sound of a large woman crashing into the room.

“I’ve been round to see the Chittocks this weekend,” Nancy announced.

“You did what?” spluttered Clugston, the coffee in his hand spilling into his lap.

“I went to see the Chittocks. Brought over some flowers for Mr. Chittock while he makes his recovery.”

“Why,” said Clugston, as he dabbed at the coffee on his trousers with a handkerchief, “the hell would you do that?”

“Because I know you haven’t bothered to do it yourself.”

Clugston buried his face in his hands.

“What’s more is,” said Nancy, “I found something interesting.”

“What do you mean by interesting?” said Clugston, his voice muffled by his palms.

“Mrs. Chittock has got an awfully shiny big ring on her finger. Real diamond, far as I can tell. When I asked her about it, she told me Mr. Clugston had bought it for her last week, for their wedding anniversary.”

Nancy leaned forward and splayed her hands across Clugston’s desk. Clugston reluctantly met her eye.

“Now tell me,” said Nancy, her voice low, “What kind of bank teller can afford a ring that nice for his Missus?”

Clugston ran a hand back and forth across his moustache for several minutes, while Nancy stared him down. Finally, he sighed and closed the case file in front of him with a snap.

“I’ll go question him again this afternoon.”

...

Nancy McKinley, when it came right down to it, was a very good detective.

She sat on the sofa in her tiny living room, her fat cat curled up beside her and a cup of tea in her hand. The day’s paper sat on her lap, open to the sensational story of Alfred William Chittock, the teller who’d been found guilty of robbing his very own bank. A small smile played across her red-painted lips as she replayed the court case in her mind’s eye, remembering the judge’s declaration of GUILTY! with particular relish.

She was not mentioned in any of the news reports, nor had Clugston deigned to give her so much as a thank you. Nancy didn’t care. If the world wasn’t ready to acknowledge an old secretary for her detective skills, then at least she knew the truth.

With a second satisfied smile, Nancy set aside the newspaper and picked up another case file.

## TARINI FERNANDO

### ONE DAY

The bus ride was always bumpy. The driver would often break quickly, and then press the gas slow. It made Hansi sick. She was getting used to it now though, and the ride felt quite short when she thought about everything.

Hansi remembered the man with the boots who came to the store again today. She couldn't get his voice out of her head. This was the third time he had walked in with a pair of worn winter boots to exchange them for new ones. The old man asked a different person each time, and today he came up to Hansi's register. Hansi told the man exactly what her manager told all the other girls to say: exchanges only within fourteen days with all tags and receipts. The old man started yelling at Hansi and asked to see the manager. "What's wrong with you?" he screamed. "Are you stupid?" Mirna calmed him down, but Hansi heard him say that big stores shouldn't have idiots who can't speak English working cash. Hansi never cried in these situations, even though she wanted to sometimes. She felt bad for the man, but she didn't want to think about him anymore.

After some thought, she finally decided what she would make for dinner. There was leftover chicken in the fridge, so she'd probably just make a dhal curry and sambol for the kids. There was cereal for their breakfast tomorrow. She didn't understand how they could eat that sugary stuff, but she let them. It was cheap, and they liked it. They always wanted to eat store food now. They didn't even want to take rice to school anymore, so Hansi would pack microwave meals and granola bars in their lunch bags. They would always have rice for dinner though. Hansi knew that they still liked her food. Suddenly, she thought she should call home and check on them. But they were probably doing their homework. She called them twenty minutes ago anyways when she was at the mall terminal.

She wondered when Ruwan would come home tonight. Last night she tried to stay awake and wait until he came back, but she was too tired from work. She went to bed without him, and when she woke up in the morning he had already left for work. That was how every day went. It was like she hadn't seen him for the past month. And even when he was home, he wasn't really home. His eyes were always somewhere else, but Hansi couldn't tell exactly where. Maybe they were looking back home. Sometimes she'd dream about it too. She'd close her eyes and imagine that the two of them were back under the mango tree in their garden. They were eating the fruit, and the warm juice was making their fingers sticky.

A group of students got on the bus. Some of them wore big hoodies and were listening to loud music, and other ones just looked down at their phones and ignored it. Hansi always thought the students she saw here looked sad, and she didn't understand why. She wished more than anything that she could go back to school. She knew it wouldn't happen for herself, but her kids would do it. Her eldest loved science and was going to be a doctor one day. The other two weren't as keen about school, but Hansi would make them. She always dreamt of her eldest

daughter of going to a big, important university like York or McMaster. She knew it would happen. If she stuck to her plan, by the time her daughter graduated high school, Hansi would have enough saved to pay for a year of her daughter's tuition. But by then Hansi believed things would get better for Ruwan at his job, and maybe they wouldn't have to worry so much about savings and those kinds of things.

A baby sitting with her grandmother across from Hansi started wailing. Hansi used to take the kids on the bus with her sometimes. The four of them would go to the mall together when Ruwan was at work, and the kids were always so excited. They rarely ever bought anything though. The kids just liked walking around all the big stores. But recently Hansi could see that the three of them didn't want to go out with her that much anymore.

The baby wouldn't stop crying and now the grandmother was getting mad. Hansi remembered how good her kids were when they were on the plane coming here. It was their first time on a plane, and they didn't cry once during the whole ride. They were so young then. Babies were so spoiled here, Hansi thought. She never spoiled her kids. She was better to them than her mother was to her though.

Hansi thought about her mom every day. She couldn't help it. She wished she could see her mother's face one more time. She was starting to forget how it looked like. She wished the kids could've met their grandmother. Her mom would at least be proud of them.

Hansi used to hate how her mother spent so much time at school teaching other kids to read and write. And there was also that little boy across the street that her mom used to teach math to. What was his name? Hansi's mother liked him. He was a nice, athletic boy, but he was never any good at school. Not like Hansi was. She thought she'd be a professor one day. That was a long time ago.

Then the bus was approaching Queens Street, and Hansi rang the bell just as she had done a hundred times before. There was almost no one left sitting around her now. The baby and the grandmother got off two stops before. All the students were gone too. The bus quickly pulled to a stop at Queens before Park Drive, and Hansi stepped off. She started walking towards the tall apartment building that looked so dead and quiet at night. She counted eight floors up and three windows to the right. The light was on. That was good. Maybe Ruwan was home. She'd make a dhal curry and sambol, and maybe everyone could eat together this time. The kids could tell her about their teachers and their school projects, and Hansi could tell them about work, and Ruwan would tell jokes and they would all laugh. Then she would do the dishes and the kids would go to bed. And then she and Ruwan could stay up a little longer and just talk. Then they'd go to bed, but she'd lay awake for a while thinking. Maybe tomorrow would be a little bit better. Soon Ruwan would get a promotion. And then maybe she wouldn't have to work full-time. Maybe she could go to school again. One day, maybe. The kids would all go to university and get good jobs, and everything would be alright. One day.

## CLAIRE BENNET

### DEADLINE

The teacup rattled in its saucer. This was to be expected of course, because of the earthquakes, but it was an annoyance nonetheless. Jean reached out her thin hand to steady the teacup, using her thumb to wipe up a single drop that had splashed onto the table. When she had finished her breakfast, she looked herself over in the front hallway mirror: hair neatly tied back, white button-up blouse, grey slacks. This morning Jean had even put on the purple sweater with the pearl buttons, the one her brother had sent her five birthdays ago, because she wanted to wear it one more time. Grabbing her last umbrella, slipping her feet into her knee-high rubber boots, and tying a paper mask to her face – the government-issued one, because even though it scratched her cheeks Jean trusted it more than the knock-off her neighbour Susan had been trying to sell to her – Jean was ready to go to work.

The buses weren't running anymore, hadn't been for weeks now, so Jean took off down Eve Street towards the intersection. She was about to turn down South when she noticed the flames. Another block gone, she sighed to herself, and turned down End Street instead, careful to step over the bodies. She didn't mind taking a roundabout route to work, preferring to avoid the riots anyways, but she did wrinkle her nose at the rotting smell emanating throughout the street. Lately the clean-up crews hadn't been doing their job. This was no time to get lazy, Jean thought.

When she was about a block away from Zosimos Life Insurance, the rain started. In one practiced motion, Jean lifted her umbrella, hearing the familiar sizzle as the raindrops began to work their way through the fabric, and started to walk a little faster. Soon she arrived at the tall grey building where she worked, and breathed a sigh of relief that it was still standing. Susan's store had been destroyed in an earthquake three weeks ago, the poor dear. No wonder she had resorted to that cheap door-to-door salesperson routine.

Inside, Jean swerved left past the elevator with its "Out of Order" sign and made her way up the stairs. Luckily she only worked on the third floor, so it wasn't too much trouble to walk up. Looking at her watch, and seeing that it was six minutes past nine, Jean moved swiftly to her cubicle. It was the one by the break room, which had never been ideal because Ernie and Mel liked to gossip about the receptionist at the office next door and the extensive plastic surgery she had been getting throughout the past year, but it had been a quiet spot lately.

Flames reflected through the windows, their light dancing along Jean's desk. She unhooked the headset from the right-hand wall, and fit it neatly over her head. Jean had nearly forgotten to remove her mask – it had become such a staple part of her wardrobe lately – but she quickly untied it and adjusted the headset in front of her mouth.

Just then Hal walked in, breathing heavily and wiping sweat off his unshaven face.

"Riots outside the building next door, couldn't get out of my house this

morning. But I'm staying at my sister's tonight, so that shouldn't be a problem tomorrow..." He trailed off, rushing past Jean to his own cubicle by the window.

Jean looked at her watch. Twelve minutes past nine. She was more senior, yes, but she wasn't going to admonish Hal for being late today. She had been a few minutes late herself, and the other cubicles were still empty, so she appreciated his showing up to work. She made a mental note to commend him later.

Jean adjusted her headset once more, then clicked the "on" button on her phone, which immediately began to ring.

"Thank you for calling Zosimos Life Insuran—"

"They destroyed my house!" The voice on the other end of the line shouted. "Threw flaming whatchamacallits through the window on their way to town hall, and everything's absolutely destroyed now!"

Adjusting the volume on her headset, Jean responded calmly, "Good morning, may I please have your account number?"

When there was no response, Jean looked down at her phone. The light indicating the call was active had gone out. Jean slowly took off her headset, and let out a long breath. She sat for a moment longer, unmoving, then stood up and walked down the hallway to find Hal standing at the window that stretched from the carpeted floor to the paneled ceiling, looking out at what was left of the world.

"The phones are dead," Jean told him. Hal nodded mutely. Looking out the window, Jean saw that the rain had stopped falling, and that it had put out the flames on South Street. That was good.

"Did I ever tell you about the time I went to Australia?" Hal said suddenly. Jean looked at him, confused. Although she had worked with Hal for the better part of the last twenty years, she had never had any conversation with him past "good morning," "good evening," and "the printer's broken." She wasn't sure why he thought he might have told her about Australia.

Without waiting for a response, Hal continued, "Went when I was twenty-five, for two weeks. When I was in Sydney, I passed a street vendor, selling tourists t-shirts with sayings like, "I Love Oz." I almost bought one, but I bought a pair of sunglasses instead because I thought they would make me look cool in front of this girl back at the hostel."

Jean didn't know why Hal was telling her this. She had never been out of the country except for a weekend in Maine for her cousin's wedding. She hadn't spoken to her cousin in sixteen years.

"When I arrived back at the hostel, she had already left," Hal continued, "And all I could think about was that t-shirt the street vendor had."

Jean turned to Hal and was surprised to find that he had tears in his eyes. Hal was looking out the window at their city in ruins, at the end of times, the apocalypse, the thing they had all been warned about, with tears in his eyes. Jean paused,

allowing her gaze to wander over the empty cubicles in the office. The desks were empty, picture frames and other personal items having been gathered up and taken home over the past few weeks. The fluorescent lights no longer flickered above them, and the familiar ringing of the phones and the soft hum of the computers that previously filled the room were merely echoes in Jean's ears. The silence was startling. Jean's eyes finally rested on Hal's briefcase, abandoned next to his filing cabinet. Beside her, Hal sniffed.

Her eyes fixed on his briefcase, Jean said to her colleague, "Thank you for coming into work today." Then, straightening her shoulders, she turned her back to the window and the city beyond, and marched back to her cubicle.



## TRYNNE DELANEY

### USNEA

Mum gropes at the peeling bark of softwoods and the rough armour of hardwoods as she walks on. She snaps the branches that stick out into the path. Her fingers encircle them, a bracelet of white knuckles, and the dead limbs are broken from their looming bodies. She trudges forward, still gripping the twigs, silent. I know that at least the trees are listening, so I say: “When you break a branch, like you just did, the other trees know—there’s a whole underground network of tree veins and fungi that connect similarly to the way a brain does in the human body. Or any animal body, really.”

“Are you trying to make me feel guilty for maintaining the path?” Quiet. Not quite menacing.

“No,” I sigh and lengthen my stride, “I just thought it was cool. Like dryads being real or something, do you remember those stories Uncle Eddie—?”

Mum stops abruptly, a finger to her lips, and rummages in her rain jacket. She pulls seeds from her deep pockets and balances them on an outstretched hand. Soft whistling. A chickadee swoops down and latches onto her rough skin, pecks at seeds then flies off. She tosses the remaining seeds off the path. A bird flits between us, too late.

We stall next in front of a yellow birch tree draped with lichen, place our palms on the bark. It’s a childhood of tinsel draped carelessly over evergreen. Old man’s beard, signal of ever-clean air.

Mum clears her throat and turns to me. “It’s a silly name,” she says, “old men hardly ever have beards anymore.”

I rock on the balls of my feet, impatient to continue along the path. “Uncle Eddie did.”

“I think its scientific name is pretty: usnea. Ed never liked to use the proper names for things. Even when we were kids he’d call me by stupid made up pet names,” she replies, brushing her fluffy hair from her face. A glint of silver catches in the sun. “Would you like me to take the backpack from you?”

“No, I’m happy. And you’re supposed to be careful. You shouldn’t risk straining your back again.”

I step in front of Mum, deftly pull a piece of Old Man’s Beard from the tree. Backwoods cotton candy, my uncle called it, a nickname that prompted my cousins to sample the lichen on more than one occasion. I imagine them in their lawyers’ and bankers’ suits now, pulling plants and fungi from the earth, nibbling on pigeon berries, licking dew from their fingers. Chuckling, I inch my stolen fingerful of lichen into the pocket of my jacket hoping that I’ll forget about it. A rediscovery will bring me back to this moment beside the yellow birch, vivid and unexpected.

Behind me, Mum is weaving along the path. Uncle Eddie’s oversized rubber boots are knee-highs on her, clunky. I tell myself that they are not sucking her body inside little by little, those two tall boot-shaped voids that ground her. I wish

that we would stop so I can make her sit down, so I can pull the boots off of her, so I can watch her unmoored bare feet tromp over the mulch, roots, and moss. So I can check to see if her feet are still there at all.

At a sharp incline we clasp hands and I pull her up. The ground is slick with mud from a recent storm, the sort of downpour that left basements too wet and cars in driveways and not enough candles in the candle drawer. Mum's breath is heavy, warm on the cooling fall air, and I know which smells she seeks. She begins: "I can smell—"

"Peat, spruce sap—"

"—salt water, almost. It's masked by the brook around the bend."

Both of us on top of the ridge now, I adjust the straps of my backpack, they've loosened in the muddy struggle. From behind, Mum's hands grapple at the zippers. I shift myself to face her. "It must be getting heavy," she says without taking her eyes off the bag. Her hands are open, asking to carry it.

I step a few paces away, onto higher ground. "Not at all."

A flicker of jealousy or sadness plays on her face, crinkled against the sun's low angle.

"You've grown new wrinkles," I remark.

"So have you," she replies.

We continue our ascent as shadows lengthen across us at intervals. If we were going to turn back, one of us would have suggested it already.

In front of us, the trees begin to thin. I reach the clearing before Mum does. The grass is stiff and yellow here, calf-high. Softer patches of moss and red blueberry leaves sprout in between. The ground is trampled at the edge of the cliff, then there's ocean, then horizon. "When you were a kid," Mum cackles from behind the shadowy tree line, "you used to think that witches lived in these woods because Eddie told you that story about witches' brooms and witches' butter. Do you remember that?"

I smile. The story where witches stored their brooms in trees so naughty kids like me couldn't steal them for joy rides and the witches themselves hid out in the old abandoned hunting lodge where they cooked up lost children and bunnies and chipmunks in a witches' butter gravy. "Yes," I join in. Still laughing, she walks out into the clearing, crusted with leaves and sticks and debris.

I put the backpack down and we crowd together. Mum unzips the bag and we pull Uncle Eddie's urn out from it. We dig a hole with our hands in the rocky dirt. Chipped nails, displaced worms. Careful to pour the ash back in before the dirt.

Afterwards, we dangle our legs over the side of the cliff and breathe with the sea until dark. Mum pulls her boots off and we sleep on the grass beneath the stars telling stories of Eddie in voices like crickets. I imagine each particle of ash is

a seed that will grow a tree on this bald patch above the sea.  
As I fall asleep I think I see the trees reaching for me.  
On the way back home Mum does not break any branches.

## KATHLEEN JONES

### THE THOUGHT THAT COUNTS

Mary wasn't expecting much for her birthday.

After all, she only made \$13.25 an hour at her job selling overpriced furniture. She couldn't even pay rent by herself, which meant she also couldn't afford birthday celebrations.

But Mary was still thankful. Not that she was turning a year older (twenty-five, no thank you), or that she would have to endure another stilted birthday conversation with her mother the next day. Mary was thankful for Matt—her boyfriend, or, in her mother's words, "the reason Mary could pay her rent."

"That's not what it's about," she'd grumbled when sitting in her mother's kitchen six months ago, just after Mary announced Matt would be moving in.

"Uh-huh. This just happens to coincide with you losing your second job?"

Mary had wanted to throw her mom's glass of wine back in her face. But tonight, as she strode into her own apartment, Mary poured herself a glass of her own from the cheap bottle her co-worker had given her and Matt at Christmas the month before. Taking a sip, she felt triumphant.

Screw you, Mom, she thought. We've made it this far.

For Mary, the year they'd been together really was far. At twenty-four, he was her first serious boyfriend. Moving in together was the only real adult thing she'd ever done.

Matt was a grad student in anthropology—the kind of field her aristocratic parents had thought showed promise, until they found out he had no plans to get a PhD and wasn't sure what to do with his upcoming second degree. He had close-cropped brown hair, a wrinkled blue tie he wore for his job as a teaching assistant, and the kind of awkward swagger of someone who once thought they were going to make something of themselves.

He wasn't much, but he paid rent and was all right in bed and told Mary he loved her after a couple of beers. He was something that she'd chosen, and Mary had chosen very little in life. So she kept choosing Matt.

Mary dropped her plastic wine glass into the sink, already full to the brim with dishes. She frowned at the sight, but it wasn't out of the ordinary. The entire apartment

was a mess. Mary and Matt were never home, and when they were, neither had time to clean. Dirty dishes were washed as needed. Their recently rescued calico peed regularly in the coat closet and there was stuff everywhere. Mary told herself she liked the chaos. She also knew her mother could never see it.

She glanced at her phone for the time. Grades were due today and Matt was known for not getting them in on time. She wasn't expecting him home for a few more hours and wasn't even sure he would be home for most of her birthday tomorrow. Birthdays were a lonely affair, always had been. She was an only child and Matt wasn't very talkative even when he was on time. Still, twenty-five felt like a big deal. Not the kind of thing you should be alone for. (Was twenty-five a big deal? If it was, she didn't want to dwell on what that meant.) Her glass empty, she settled herself into bed for a nap.

She woke not with the sound of a door banging open, or a joyous rumble of "Honey, I'm home!" She didn't wake at all, in fact, until Matt poked her in the shoulder, repeatedly. She blinked, struggling to focus on Matt and his wolfish grin, tie hanging loose. And with a can of beer in his hand. She half-expected him to offer it to her. He didn't.

"Mary, did you know?" he sang, off-key. Mary rolled her eyes. She held up a hand, and he pulled her into a sitting position.

"Christmas was a month ago," she said, voice still groggy from sleep.

"Says you."

"When did you get home?" she asked. She fumbled for her phone on her nightstand, surprised when Matt handed it to her. It was after midnight. Officially her birthday.

"I went out for a wee dram at the pub. Got a bit distracted."

"Wee dram," she scoffed. "What are you, Scottish?"

"A quarter, actually." It was this kind of twinkling amusement at his own pompousness that had attracted Mary to him in the first place. It poked unpleasantly at her heart now. He sat next to her on the bed, pulling something from out of his bag. It was a present the size of a book, wrapped in slightly wrinkled paper. (Not used, just crushed under a pile of shoes in the same closet the cat had peed in.)

“I thought we could do presents now,” he said, giving her a hopeful smile. He seemed genuinely pleased with himself.

Mary couldn't help but be a little pleased that he had tried. She tore into the paper without grace, revealing a white box. She discarded the top on the floor. Inside was a box of two-dozen chocolates. The kind you could get at any grocery store, with each flavour repeated twice. She stared at it, and then looked away. She didn't want him to think she wasn't grateful, but—she wasn't.

“There's something else underneath,” Matt said, making no attempt to study her expression. Mary picked the box back up and pulled out a ruled notebook with eighty sheets of paper.

She wanted to cry.

“Not much,” Matt said, “but it's the thought that counts.”

Suddenly Mary felt very stupid. Matt had tried. That was more than her parents were likely to do. She leaned in to kiss him. He kissed her back, firmly, and then lay beside her in bed. Mary stared up at the ceiling fan, whirring and spreading a chill throughout the room. She was cold, but too lazy to turn it off.

She thought about the six month audio-book subscription service she'd planned to give Matt for his birthday next month: it cost 100 bucks. She'd thought that their first birthdays together were when major gifts would be given, ones that mattered. It's the thought that counts, Mary reminded herself. She should be grateful to get something at all. Most of all, she should be grateful Matt was still there, supporting her.

But when she looked at his bare chest, rising gently up and down, she felt like someone had carved out something that had once felt important to her. It didn't hurt, exactly, just felt odd. The problem with her present wasn't that Matt had the wrong thoughts; she just wasn't sure he'd thought at all.

“Babe,” he murmured beside her. She glanced at him.

“Yeah?”

“I checked the fridge tonight,” he said into his pillow, “we're out of milk. Gimme your notebook and I'll write it down.”

Wordlessly, Mary passed him the notebook and a pen from her bedside table.

“Will I have to go get the milk?” she asked when he was done, a hint of anger edging at her voice.

“Nah,” he replied. “It’s your birthday.”

When he closed his eyes, Mary closed hers. She tried to feel grateful, and thought to herself: well, at least he thinks sometimes.







## CARMEL MIKOL

### THE ICE

*When the ice goes, there is a sound.  
A choir of whispers.  
Then suddenly, where there was solid footing,  
just a moving river.  
No one tries to hold the ice back from where it must go in the spring  
because it just goes  
and it must go.*

So, it was incalculable that he kept calling. After that night in the parkade, when I sat in my locked car screaming “Goddammit let me go” over and over again while he stood at the driver’s side door staring in at me, his palms pressed to the window. After he dented the door with his fist when I refused to unlock it. After I drove off, jerking the car around the corner to the street, with that awful picture of him running after me in the rearview mirror and the sickening sound of my heart in my ears.

I spent two nights in a hotel room I could not afford. I called my mother and asked her why he wanted to keep me when I only wanted to be free and she said “I don’t know. That would never happen to me,” so I hung up the phone and stared at the TV Guide channel until I fell asleep under the blue glow.

“Men get angry,” my father would say, later.

“He breaks things.”

“Like kicks a chair?”

“More than that.”

My father is silent, figuring.

“I pushed sometimes. Maybe it’s just me. Whatever, I’ll be fine.”

Stalling. “So you’re ok then?”

“No.”

I see things now because I look hard at them, demanding some answer out of them, a remedy. I study the way light alters a room. I measure the alignment of book spines on a shelf. I notice the desk drawers left ajar a bit, the way a stack of pencils falls against the edge of a cup. These attempts at order defeated in the tiniest of ways. Yet the books stand and the drawers hold their secrets just to prove it can be done. Just to remind me anything can be done.

It’s not time that does it. Time doesn’t heal, you know. It’s the 5K runs. The pasta. The hot baths and drunk nights. Early on, the anticipation of the utter heartbreak is easily drowned in Saturday nights and girlfriends and movies and cigarettes. The real pain takes courage, stamina. Like a long hill. The sarcasm and self-doubt, knowing he knows what your skin looks like in every place and now he’s just out there walking around with strangers and new friends and all that power. The ten pounds that came back while you were happy together and then stayed because you were unhappy together. The fear that he was your last great love, or

your only one. The discipline it takes to drop the call, hang up the phone. Still, you get up, take the run, eat the eggs, sip the coffee, drive to work, make the deadlines, cry to your big sister, eat the donut, curse your thighs, clean the dishes, return the library books, water the plant, the dried out plant. While you're doing all that, time happens to pass. And time gets all the fucking credit.

*The ice s knows  
when t's time to go.  
But I don't.*

CHELSEA CARROLL

EXCERPT FROM ODD DAYS - EDITED JOURNAL

I. 31-10-2017

ANSWERS, IN ALABASTER

*Inspired by: Robert Pinsky's, Samurai Song*

“Detachment is my strategy”  
Even the veins and bones which compose me  
are unnecessary.

“Need is my tactic”; though,  
even I don't need much.

Sustenance is satisfying, but I don't need it.  
Drive is enticing, but, still, I don't need it.  
Life is a blessing, but do I need it?

Probably not—for when my core rots,  
and there remains, nothing but mine—Alabaster,  
stagnant.  
They'll recompose into the roots of a simpler  
state of being: a delicate daisy,  
sin thoughts of need, not a breath wasted on the remorse of want,  
whatever that means...

My spirit released.

no strategy,  
no attachment,  
no need.



