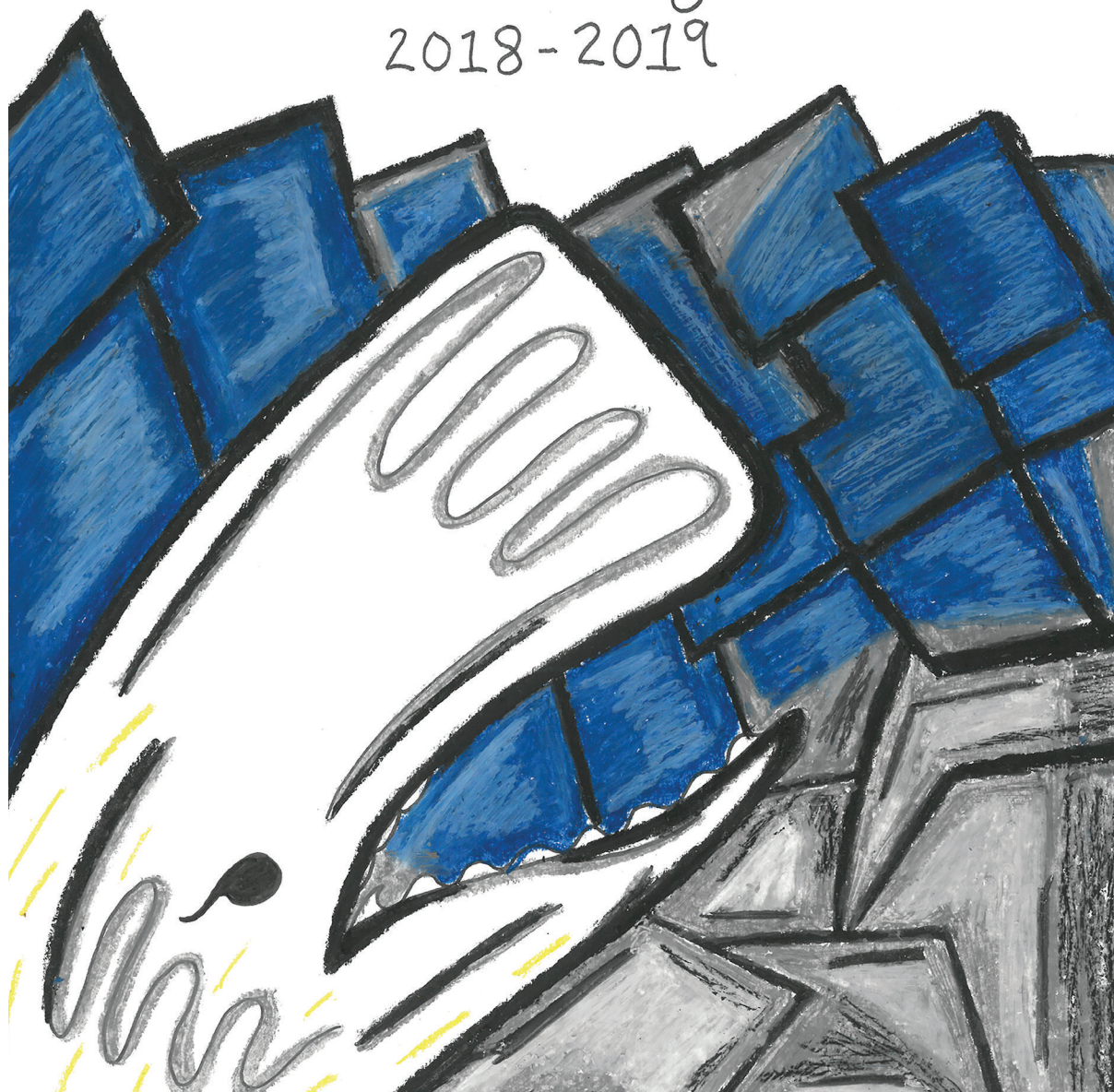


Fathom
Dalhousie and Kings
Creative Writing Journal 1
2018-2019



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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 produced on unceded Mi'kmaq territory. This territory is covered by the "Treaties of Peace and Friendship" which Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) people first signed with the British Crown in 1725. The treaties did not deal with surrender of lands and resources but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations.

NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

The editorial team at Fathom has been the largest in many years, and with this wonderful, talented group, we have been able to work towards creating a more diverse journal. Members of the team hail from a wide variety of disciplines, as do the authors published this year. Our vision was to reach beyond the confines of the Creative Writing department to capture a multifaceted experience; to showcase the extent of interdisciplinary and unique voices present in the literary community at Dalhousie and King's. By expanding our outreach, we have ended up with a wide variety of student voices, and we could not be prouder to share their pieces with you. We have all been working hard in order to produce this year's edition of Fathom, which we hope to be a valuable addition to the Halifax segment of CanLit and the literature of Turtle Island. Expression should be accessible to all.

As a student journal, Fathom celebrates student voices and student editors. We hope to show that while the title of "student" might indicate a state of learning and gaining experience, it does not mean that these voices are any less than those with a larger audience for their creativity.

We were humbled and honoured to receive a substantial amount of creative, original, and inspirational submissions this year. From traditional forms of poetry to original fiction narratives and our growing non-fiction section, we are sure there is something within these pages for everyone.

We encourage all writers, published or otherwise, and all those inspired by the following pieces to pursue their own crafts and express their voices in the creative world however they deem fit. In the words of the esteemed Maya Angelou, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." To our contributors – thank you for sharing your stories with us. This journal would not be possible without your courage to submit.

Thank you for reading and supporting Fathom,

Claire Bennet, Stacey Boulter, Ayesha Kottapalli, and Drue MacPherson
Editors-in-Chief

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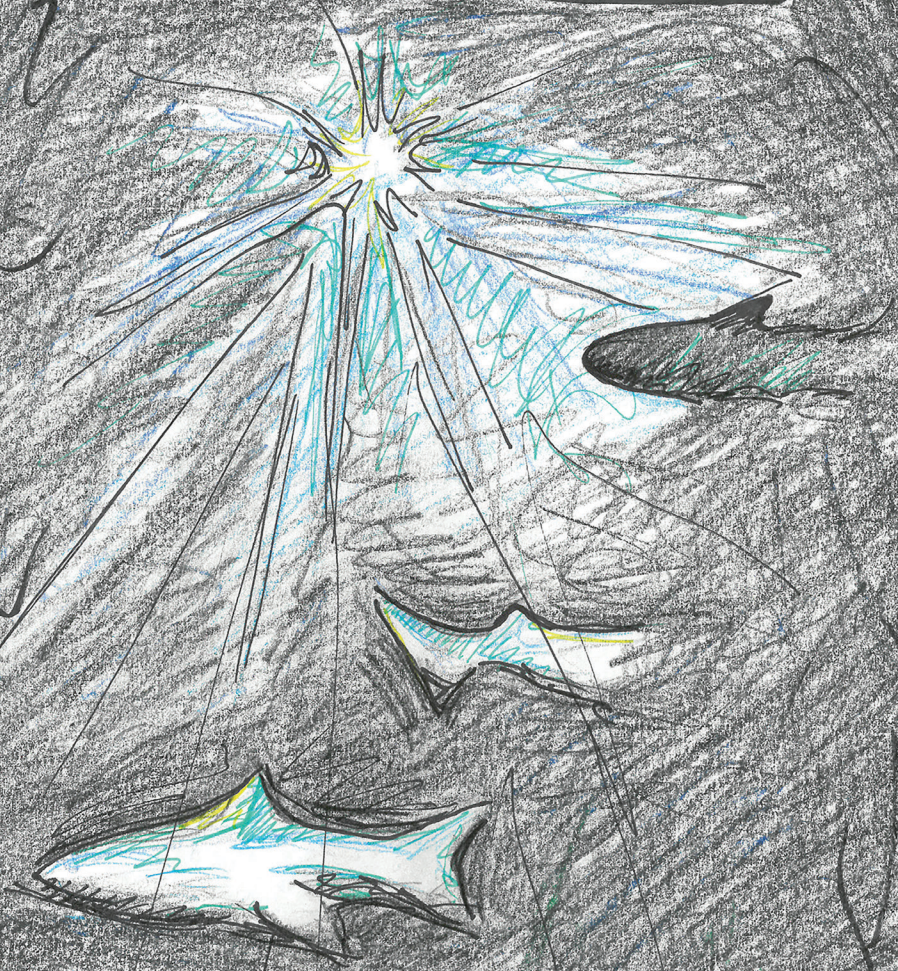
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poetry.



CLAIRE BENNET

A Dryad's Lament

Swaying branches in the wind,
crinkling leaves underfoot,
deep green against grey sky:

these trees, I think, are the most beautiful.
But they become ugly easily.

Ugly,
crashing to the ground.
Ugly,
in absence.

U g l y .
They make them so.

Replacing white clouds with choking air,
forcing trees into mulch
for neon signs
standing stark
where there should be dark wood.

The tall oak breathes when I breathe.
I smile when it smiles.
My pulse echoes the beat of the wind between its leaves.

The birds sing with us.

We fall
together.

There are no birds left.
Not anymore.

The Goblin King

Through the trees he beckons you forward,
one long finger crooked.

Looking down his pointed nose at you,
he sniffs
then says,

You'll do.

A guttural sound, victorious.
A glint in his eye
as he smirks.

Rough tongue scraping rotted teeth.

Broken fingernails clicking against his tarnished throne.

Bony elbows poking out from his ragged gown.

Imperceptibly,
he places his feet on the snowy ground.

And then

he leaps.

After, he adjusts his crown
and settles on his throne again,
eyes keen and unblinking.

He leaves a scarlet drop of you atop his pale lip.

a good view

i like the kitchen floor of our first house
tiled with cold squares
a hand-painted flower on each
but the paint bled trying to escape and died that way
dried that way
i can see every crumb hiding in the cracks
in between those cold squares
like memories

mom's birthday we had chocolate cake messy and dark
after apple-picking you made a crumble from the bruises
sunday brunch with sticky scarlet syrup
the dog's biscuit hard
unbreakable

i can hear the dog now
rough loud
shouts he's standing in the puddle
of red like tomato sauce remember when
you dropped the pot of spaghetti sauce red dripping
like melted ice cream through my fingers quick quicker lick it
upbeforeitstoolate

.

i have a good view of his paws
clicking on the cold square tiles
through the dust
and the crumbs
and the memories

it's a good view
from where i'm lying
on these cold square flowers
in this puddle of red
by your knife

DANIELLE BLAIS

The curve of your spine.

You are a hydrangea bush settling for the winter.
Branches turned into yourself appearing smaller,
leaves growing thicker, curving into protect your soft heartwood.

As you got dressed,
you said I inspired you,
(sitting on the edge of my bed, early morning light coming in to highlight your back and shoulders,
you put your shirt on last.)
You talked about watching your mother die,
how through the entire time, hope was the most devastating.

I hope you do what you said you would.
I hope you get better.

But any hope of an “us”
drowned in all that liquor,
every time I take you home from the bar,
desperately buried,
between our bodies and my sheets.

HANNAH VAN DEN BOSCH

Record

I had forgotten Jack was here until he stands up, shifting the bed.
I watch him walk across the room towards the turntable.
He places a record down and gently
puts the needle in place.
He must have brought this for me. I don't recognize the song.
There is a woman's voice, soft and fine.
It is sinking into my body.
But it does not belong to me, it's too simple.
The clarity in her voice is unwavering.
Jack must know this song well.
Silence in the room gives every sound detail.
I can hear the crisp sound of lips parting
once, then she sings without pause.
So steady it becomes silent.
She never takes a breath.
And it's beyond anything I have heard.
It's almost unbearable,
her ceaseless melody, each new note is a continuation of the last.
How desperate she must be.
I look up and see that Jack is grasping her neck.
His hands wrapped tightly, so that she is breathless.
But she does not rest!
And all is clear,
She is singing to me.

JANET BRUSH

JUBILATION

Cold steel girders of the harbour bridge
Loom over railroad tracks that start wide,
Then gradually narrow, disappear into the water.
Across the harbour three barber poles, red and white
Stand as beacons proclaiming power generation.
The only green a few scraggy bushes beside the tracks.
A landscape of industrial progress, precise and lifeless.

But look closer....

Two figures dance on the tracks, their colourful dress
A foil against the stark background.
These are the same tracks which
Ran through Africville before it was razed
To build that bridge – at least that was the excuse
For destroying a village, a community, displacing
The black citizens to a city ghetto.

So why are they dancing? Why the jubilation?
Today a black man has been elected
President of the United States.
This is Canada, but he is a symbol of hope,
Of a better future, of finally progress towards equality.
Jubilation!

It's been ten years since Bill painted this picture,
Eight years that black man ruled the USA
With intelligence, compassion, grace.
Eight years of progress and hope.
Then it ended.
No one dances on the tracks anymore.



To accompany "JUBILATION." Painting by Bill Hanrahan. Used with permission.

ELLA CATHCART

When I Leave

Promise me you will not crumple when I leave.
Will not let your knees collapse like sandcastles
met with a breeze.
Promise me you will be fine to walk alone
through storms of woe.
Promise me you do not lie when you say
that time will fly and you'll be fine.
Promise me you will survive
slaps of rain across your paper face
without me there to wipe you dry.
Promise me you will not crumple when I leave.
Will not bury your heart under the earth
with the dead and the worms.

WYNNE CLARK-SQUIRE

Pima County, Halifax

There are six cacti on my windowsill
each in a painted pot
that I purchased for four dollars
at a store called:
Plant.

The pots were not originally painted,
they were smooth and dull
the sand of the nullarbor plain.

But now they are colorful!
The array of a piñata,
like the proud creation of a seven year old's
art project.

Three are solid colours:
The blue of a santa barbara morning.
The violet of a victorian garden.
The lavender of a french field.

Three are patterns:
Blue and white polka dots, small blobs struggling
to be circles.
Drunken stripes, lazy lines slowly
dripping down.
A portrait of the sky, short blades of grass
and the brightest sun they'll ever see.

Each contain a cactus
on the margin of death:
dry
fading
freezing.
longing for home.

Hot

he was the sun
illuminating your summer days.
all the waiting you faced
through cirrus sundays
asperitas evenings
and the repetitive invasion
of the night sky.

when you meet
you are warm:

sheltered from the windy
showers of unexpected storms.
engulfed in all of summers promises.
wrapped in a beach towel
of intimacy and adoration.

but then the sun would get hot.
sticky.
burning.

he peeks around corners,
slithers through your day.
scorches the lives of those around you.
turns the jades of july
into desolate dust
so that he may be your only
focus.

when you begin to speak
you can feel his temperature rise,

craving
desperate
needing
to be the center again.

RUBY COLES

Ode to My 1997 Nissan Maxima

We called my 1997 Nissan Maxima Bon Qui Qui.
She was a strong independent woman;
A designation we, as 17-year-olds had not felt worthy of.
She was sassy, obnoxious and
Her engine roared louder than we did at rugby games.

The black paint fit her like a cozy, Sunday, bunny hug.
Her leather interior burned our legs in the summer,
Made blankets a crucial part of winter,
And rendered every other four-wheeled-thing inferior.
Her cassette player wouldn't stop
Trying to read something that wasn't there.
She was my hype man and a spirit guide.

I used to count how many street lights would fit into the chorus of a song;
When I got Bon Qui Qui,
I would count how many CD's I could fit on my way to Niagara.
I would race my self-esteem to the gym,
And I would make a home out of a car when my house didn't quite feel like one.

Our maps often went unused because getting lost
Made for 213,000 kilometers of amazing adventures.
She would ignite my ambition
And not let me hit the breaks
Until I found a better destination.

She was the best seat at the drive-in,
The legs that helped me run from my problems,
The best wallet for my concert tickets, and
She sailed me farther than her odometer would account for.

She was always point B;
If I ever got truly lost
I could always find my way back
To good old Bon Qui Qui.

Survivors

When I was robbed of my innocence at age four
I didn't talk about it for five years
Until the story stumbled from my lips
The same way I stumbled home
A decade later, after something happened,
Similar, but much worse.

The support groups call us survivors.
The support center on campus calls us that too.
And it never made sense to me;
Because the girl who tripped over her own self esteem
Landed at the bottom of a bottle
And face planted in a bed that wasn't hers
While demons took all they wanted.

She is not the same woman who's fingers
Run across the keyboard.
Finally trying to compose full sentences to describe
Why people think I have survived.

Suicide rates increase when someone experiences trauma.
They say it's caused by loneliness, mental illness, triggers
From a shotgun, loaded
With every sound we never want to hear again.
When they called me a survivor I called them
Liars for being so blind to the parts of me that
The search party hadn't found yet.

So when Dee told me about the girl
Whose life was taken because her mind
Told her she couldn't get through this,
Her assault stole her last breath,
I learned what it meant to be living.

I'm not a survivor because my cover letter
Is littered with nightmares I wish my dream catcher
Could take care of. It's because
When every part of my world told me dying is so easy,
Told me how pleasant it could be to stop the pain,

Cleaned my room so it was ready for them to find me,
For all those nights I fell asleep calculating how many

Ways I could turn common cleaners into poison
Instead of counting sheep, I never stopped trying
To lock the torture chamber for good.
Surviving wasn't merely
Falling asleep one more time, it wasn't even waking up.

I'm a survivor because I lived to tell the story
Of the girl who lost herself and found herself
Even through a storm of depression and anxiety,
Clothed in disappointment and embarrassment,
Feeling like dignity never made its way home.

I don't drink water anymore just to try
And drown myself. This fuel is no longer a weapon against me
Even on the days peristalsis is the only function my
Body remembers. There is a line between surviving
And living, a distinction between blood running through
The casket and thriving, when your body no longer
Just feels like a token of existence.

I have bloomed back into living
To hear leaves crunch under my toes, sip a flat white,
And laugh like I mean it.
I pass through my front door as more than just a reclaimed body,
But as a version of myself more alive than I have ever been,
Because of how often I came close to dying.
So after years of misunderstanding,
I think I finally get it:
I am a survivor.
It's time I start acting like it.

MEG COLLINS

My Diana, My Clothesline

Wake up

For I hear a voice,
It sounds like you, whispering

Diana

In punctuated bites of a feared phrase.

(I don't believe)

When you say Diana,
And her name of soft skin.

And I've forgotten, I've left my laundry out
For years now, the clothesline rattles—Diana's tiny fists.

Never heard someone say her name,
Offering to take down the shirts.

Diana is hovering above my head
In segments now, Floating on
Hunger cries
I imagine will run through her gums.

With her name comes a knife
I imagine holding,
Without intention,
In our kitchen,
As Diana cries.

I've never bought a knife.

It hides in
Cursed wrapping paper.
And
No one has helped
Me with Diana before,

Whispering,
Voice rattling,
Diana will be ok.

Diana floats above in segments,
Clutching at the clothesline—sturdy.
Someday, she will fall in pieces.

You assure,
You possess a ladder,
You will hold her together,
You will heave down shirts.

I've never bought a knife, but
It is seeping through my skin now,
[Evaporating] through wrapping paper.

She wails, Diana. Clothesline, empty.

PAISLEY CONRAD

list of slightly off Things, a poem in which the colour is burnt orange like Audy's first Married kitchen

the asking of sums and buttons
eating underside of windcurrants
 nice juicy hard to peel
 prelude to a sign of life:
 dirty 'neath of fingernails

wa—kin—g stumbleslow
in the wrong shirt again
I like my flower bag and
the pen she lent me

 added up mistaken nickels-as-quarters
a guide in how to fall
 short
the fastest [a contest] ?
 my runny nose or this wind chill

the button on Good Coat is in
the dish by the fruit.

Love letter to Edie.

After Tracy K. Smith.

sings !

and our ears left, a deathless lean
blindlife of the ground (think of how a mole sees)
grown-up now, counting rings, see? it's been years.
she's as big as a first memory—too big to have
shape but monolith. we saw that movie together.

downpour, we're door-to-door under awnings,
pools on our jeans from where it rolled down our rain jackets
(I like your yellow) drying out as we move from room-to-room.
feeling guilty as I flicker next to your steady-on-ness
a facelessness to our god, companion-god, misplaced-lust-god.

I misread it: a mood turns to almond, and my allergy peaks
just in case. word permeates because spoke-words aren't
bordered and lined like alphabets. can we focus on the leaves?
first memory, I remembered leaves because of the sun in them.
a feeding of this ceaseless focus, my journal is filled with you.

later, toothiness, I see your mouth in various stages of clean,
lessclean, needs-a-brushing. laying down, standing up, we get
tired and cold, the togetherness of blanketneeding. who's waiting
for a laugh and a lark? we! we rarely wear necklaces
for different reasons.

what waits where laughter gathers? when our laughter
skids across the floor? you can't see our largeness from one
angle unless it's in the movies.

BESS DOIG

they pronounce

They (pronoun):

[third person plural singular] Used to refer to a person of unspecified gender.

i have reached the
age in which queerness
moves to the epidermal
layer of my self definition
settling on my skin
itching like a rash
not some infection
but rather vitiligo
of the self for
it has always been
there

who to fuck
who to hate
who to love

who am i

a blur of terms swarms me
tapestried across my breast
different strands of identity
settling into my creases and
the cut of my clothes

the need for a label
in which my roots can
spread and grow
a designation
that does not
chafe and leave me
with blisters sore and

raw

that present moment i speak to
the a-ha, eureka, running
naked through your street
to spread the good word
of my beloved realization

and yet

people
 experts
who know more about me
than me
 she
 and
 her

yes, perhaps
but when i
proclaim
that i may prefer

 they
 and
 them

i am told
by those who
know more
that no more
that
i am wrong

how can i be wrong

when the familiar phrase
settles into skin
like slipping on
a pair of shoes
that know me
all my life

when i stand
among
those great them

rhea butcher
jacob tobia
angel haze
travis alabanza
jack monroe
jill soloway
cheena marie lo
eileen myles

how are such
experts

to know better than so many

to say that

they

sits uncomfortably
on their
tongue

awk
word

perhaps that might
tease their tongue
into understanding
the awkwardness
of assigning a gender
where
no gender
needs to sit

a need to use

as a poetic
tool
the element of me
for poetry is not
to prop up
old partitions
but impel
new positions
to the world
to teach
 that unwieldly words
 re wrought

 and tongues
 be taught

 that queer terms
 one day will
 dominate
 our diction

i know
 my tongue
 my skin
 my truth

so do not tell me

 awkward

home in woods, dark and deep

nestled and hidden
amongst the trees, i
see it resting; there
where i had left it.
forgotten, you see,
an eon ago,
the silence rests a-
bove wrapping it in
trees set alight with
bright reds, autumn fire.

inside, fresh scent, sup
at table of four.
books line walls, debate
lights the air, somewhere
a dictionary
appears, holding court
on the dining table.
all about warm heat
rises from dark slate
floors. folk art lines walls,
each holding their own
name, chosen in turn.
bright walls shine light on
the whole being a
monument to great
personality.

sprig of remembrance
stabs me, in this cold
apartment here, of
home in a forest
of hearty warmth, but
i have a promise
that i must keep, and
soon home will hold me
sooner still will sleep.

underneath

the door swings open,
then closed. light footsteps
heavy with a long day
take their assured
reassured steps into
the warmth of the family
room, with the television
gently filling the void
with background noise

a worn leather briefcase
hits the dark slate floor
i look up
a sigh drifts across the room
from the door
i jump up and wrap her
tightly in my arms

she clicks down
the hall in her
heels, quarter of an inch
as always, i pad down after

i chatter
the intricacies of my day
pass unto her coating her
ears with the hardships
of a middle schooler's life

i throw myself down
on the soft queen bed
i wrap myself in
the comfort of her words
"oh no!"
"how dare she!"
"well i can't imagine!"

she changes
as she listens
removing her pant suit
the formality of a
tightly wound day

to reveal
hidden underneath
the long day

my mother

MEIGHAN DONALDSON

On Waiting Until Marriage

it was my first crush
so i told you
you reminded me
about last weekend
we had gone to an outlet store
small plastic sleeves filled with t-shirts
in every colour lined the walls
i bought a bright blue one
now you remind me
i didn't buy
the one i opened
and tried on

April 24th

us
in no particular order
we're out of hot sauce
i can't do this anymore

TAYLOR DUNNE

Coffee with an Old Friend

I met up with an old friend for coffee today.
I picked a booth near the front of the shop,
drowning in sunlight from a nearby window.
She was surprised when she saw me.
I'd be surprised if she wasn't.
I got my coffee, and she looked curiously
at me when I added milk and sugar.

She smiled at me and made idle chat -
the kind people make if they are only
meeting for the second or third time.
She struggled to make familiar eye contact.
There was nothing familiar to her in my eyes.
She didn't recognize the animation they now possessed
or the laugh that she would not believe
was coming from just across the table
if she didn't see it herself.

She asked why it had been so long
since I had seen her. Not even so much as a phone call
for months now. I didn't dare admit
that I had been tempted. Even just a quick call.
Just to hear her voice.
But I no longer needed the comfort
of her soothing whispers or the sense of control
I felt when she was close to me.
The closer she was,
the farther I was from myself.

I told her I had been busy.
I have been busy.
It's the first time I've felt the comfort
of an overflowing schedule in months.
I let the clutter of my days relieve
the clutter in my mind.

She was dissatisfied with my answer.
I could tell she was unhappy
with my sudden changes. But part of her

was glad I would not take her calls.
A piece of her hoped I would not answer.
I told her I was glad she did not recognize me.
She told me she was glad
I no longer take my coffee black.

Needle

I take you out of the fridge
and place you on the counter.
You are the worst part
of my day.

I wait thirty minutes
for you to be warm enough
for my skin.

I pick you up,
carefully removing
your safety cap.

I pinch the skin
on my stomach.
Deep breath.

I press you into
my flesh, and inject
your contents
into my body.

The familiar pain
is a wildfire
beneath my skin,
quickly spreading
across my body.

I set you carefully
into the yellow container
marked “hazardous”.

I curse you daily
for the pain,
and thank you daily
for my life.

JEREMY EARLEY

On the Subway

There are so many eyes here
- a zoo of soul-glass -
tracing the trampled linoleum floor,
the dim spectacle rushing
along the wide windows,
the rattling glass between citizens
and the endless anonymity
of bedrock basements and sewers.

So many lives here, so much content
one could never master, never remember,
unless god were for some reason to show,
or something comparably grand were to occur
and they were to crawl
from under a sheepskin collar, or peep
from behind some skinny flannel pants
and in a dramatic puff of chanel
and railway musk
deliver a laurel full of secret psychologies -
a branch of voyeurism burning so bright
that it contained everything held in everyone's mind
...ever...
in some tidy palatable form like a laurel -
Wouldn't that be nice - to have it all right there in the hand!
I could finally stop thinking, stop drinking;
Just to gaze at things would be therapeutic.

There are so many here, so many;
never to be known,
nor to be remembered,
but ever an intrigue,
like scented sphinx
in a cage underground -
good at keeping their riddles to themselves
as braille shut in a bookshelf.

CLAUDIA FERRARO

Tainted.

*His nose was too large for his face.
I stuck my whole fist in his nostril and clasped his brain in my hand.
My nails cut the flesh and I watched as his thoughts dripped down my arm.
They turned my limbs to gardens but I knew my thumbs had never been green.
I grabbed a few and stuck them under my hungry tongue.
It took him a while to notice, because his nose was too large for his face.*

*His thoughts slept under my tongue as I felt my teeth dance in my mouth.
They attempted to leap right out and yet my lips closed around them.
They were not used to your thoughts of indulgence, but still I held them there.
A cage turned to an ark but I was no Moses, and could never afford doubles.
My teeth laughed at my heart as they told it a story of brains bleeding in despair.
My heart paid no attention, because his thoughts slept under my tongue.*

*He returned the next day, him and his nose that was too big for his face.
My tongue grew rough and clumsy fingers folded it over like a badly made bed.
Fingers continued down my throat, passing old words trampled with rum.
Every extension became a tunnel, yet many travelers were turned away.
He asked for his thoughts back, and put his hand in my mouth to find them.
Instead he took the words I had carefully re-crafted and folded them on his tongue like a badly made bed.*

*The priest had placed communion on my tongue 4 times before I saw him again.
Sweet thoughts slid down my throat as time passed, and now they kept my belly full.
I spoke and saw my words, jointed with his own, and together they looked native.
Him, with his nose too large for his face, again asked for me to come inside.
I would have reached for every bloody thought and kept them under my tongue.
But the priest had given me communion 4 times before I saw him again.*

*Even large noses eventually close, as bits of lies in truthful air refuse to pass through.
So I hold even tighter to your thoughts that reside in my stomach, waiting for reunion.
I wash them every day in spit anointed by communion, attempting to maintain their cleanliness.
I hunger for no more, I hunger for no less.
But these thoughts are no longer yours, and yet they are not mine.
They are bathed by the priest whose own thoughts can be as dark as large noses that eventually close.*

[untitled.]

i am a mess.

and not in a romantic or twistedly beautiful way. my mess doesn't look like art or inspire great poetry. there is no cigarette slowly dying in my lips, or waves of beautifully tangled hair falling down my back. my cigarette is already dead, lying in an ashtray with the entire pack I finished this morning. and the strands of my unwashed hair that I haven't already pulled out are in a bun atop my head because I can't stand the feeling of it on my skin.

i am not a hot mess whose disarray is attractive and whose wreck is alluring. my mess is as cold as the green tea I made but did not drink because I prefer coca cola. my mess is not a lighthouse crying out for help, attracting men in the night who crave to fix this fragile beacon. my mess attracts insects, scavenging for the last pepperoni on the third pizza I've ordered and finished, boxes strewn around my room.

and I know this is supposed to be a poem, and pizza isn't poetic, but I'm telling you... there is nothing poetic about tears that leave scars, not watermarks. and there is nothing beautiful about the kind of mess to which there is no solution, because there is no real problem.
- don't try and clean me up.

Knee(d) Pads.

*The curl of your hair
of your smile
of your arms when I come and your heart when I leave.*

*On nights when the lights are dim and my words are sharp
the stairs to us seem too steep
but your hair curls to meet me a quarter of the way.*

*Eyes that see clouds as roller coasters to the sun
remind me that rickety never meant broken
and I know I will run up the stairs every goddamn time I fall.*

*The sun of my ancestors shines only on your feet
your walk is made easy and paved by my knees
but you always turn in the wrong direction.*

*You didn't read when I met you
now you call to talk of vampires that have no sexuality
and I laugh at your enthusiasm.*

*You say my teeth are sharp like a vampires
yet it is you who draws blood like the rum that you need
from veins that map out instructions in your indigenous tongue.*

*My red becomes brown as I leave my wounds open too long
and you always seem to forget to close me up
as you board your roller coaster to the sun.*

*Now the moon is waning
the bed that held us is caving
and I brace myself to meet the bottom of the staircase again.*

DANA (DANI) GRAHAM

Playboy

Playboy,
With a heart full of stitches
And knives on the wall
That he knows how to use on his voodoo dolls
To carve out their hearts
And to play with their flesh
Of the minds of those who wish to connect
Master of stares, Master of graves
A bat of an eye and touch of his hand
The icy desire,
He flashes a smile
 That makes
 Them
 Swoon.

MADDIE HARE

Far Away

i listen to crick crick crickets
while you lie asleep
 breathing in
i stare out

stars as far
away as you are
 glower at me
from the darkness
of my bedroom

i wonder what your
blank mind, and blank face, laying on your pillowcase
will dream of this night

the breeze flutters
through like
your breath through
my hair, wraps its fingers around me

whispers indistinguishable mutterings//mumbles,
the world is
sleep talking
as you do
i try to catch a whisper of it

and i, the eternal awake, hours away from understanding
wonder
i pretend to not need to know . . .
if the night
is as lonely as i am?

(you) pull the covers up
(i) turn my bed down
my eyes flicker like a broken light switch
open, open, adjusting to
the darkness,

never
to your

(absence).

ANNA JEWERS

to my guitar

I named you Erin because I hadn't
had any children to call my own yet.

A feminine name; an excuse to not
let boys play you- or beat against your sides.

As you aged, I taught you so many songs
of lost loves, great loves, and the love that stayed.

I taught you songs till they filled your hollow
body, expelling every emptiness.

Sometimes, I kept your case open at night
(just in case you were afraid of the dark).

I never wanted you to fret. I hope
that I raised you right, so that one day you

will be able to stand all on your own.

RICARDA KONDER

Escape, Artist

How ironic is it
that our thirst for the arts is so insatiable
and our hunger for escape is so enthralling
in a world where hunger and thirst
are the most treatable predicaments.

How ironic am I
my hands dancing at the podium
raving about the predictable, mechanical, calculable beauty
of the human body
when I know that once my words cease
and I collapse into bed
I will turn my back on the numbers
and submit willingly
to worlds of colour.

How ironic is it
that those who spend their days marveling at the beauty of numbers
are those I see pacing the hidden corners of art galleries,
that those who preach about the comfort of predictability
are those I see spiraling into exhaustion.

How ironic is it
that, with our inexhaustible intellect
with our limitless gift of language
with a collective creativity that borders on the infinite –
the one thing we seem to do best
is pretend

FRANKLYN KONRAD

1/8/18

At six I leave for paradise- the place where I can think
Without you breathing down my neck; I'll pour myself a drink,
I'll toast to fitz and salinger for coming along the ride
And thank the stars and heavens I'm no longer by your side.

A journey starts so soon from now, on which I will become
In love with every syllable that flickers down my tongue;
With pride I'll look upon myself
My skin, my hair, my mind
Ill glimmer gold with radiance that I alone can find.

I found myself alone and cold
Repeating one refrain.
A folly task, a useless state
In which I can't remain,
Ill buckle up, and send my luck
To whom you will complain
To brighter lights, to wild nights, to dances in the rain!

The glow from the departure lounge once brought me true despair,
But now I see beyond the gates
The flight to my repair.

hello , my fair and gentle sun.

CHRIS KOSTER

Creepers

In the wind trees dance
Their branches clasping one another
Like skeletal fingers
Brittle at a glance;
Fleshless
Reluctantly weaved together
Forming claws out of shadow
Projecting their grasp through ardent torch fire
Bestowing fear as they cackle in the howling wind

SOPHIE LAWALL

Nursery Rhymes for Heroes

*Golden head and golden home,
Your golden infant child;
Golden heart and golden hopes,
A golden laugh so wild.*

Beneath the trees when darkness falls
Witches sing and goblins play,
And yet most fearsome there by far,
Are the lovely, dancing fay.

You'll hear the whispered words of hope,
You'll hear adventure's call
And think that for the chosen one,
It's impossible to fall.

You'll find companions on the road,
While you wander far and wide.
Throughout it all they'll follow you,
And match you stride for stride.

You'll know the fires burning bright,
Lie behind you on that night,
But though you'll know they're waiting there
You'll walk into the shadow's lair.

The heralds shout the joyful news,
As they ride throughout the land:
The heroes won and saved the day,
A last victorious stand.

*Cold is snow and cold is stone,
Cold is your child's breath.
Cold are stars and cold is steel,
Cold is a glorious death.*

DRUE MACPHERSON

Polar Dip

Crispy winter hands
frosted flakes
and casual pneumonia
cannot refuse
impulse, masked
as instinct.

Diamonds cross the Atlantic
slow and guided;
they secede.
Reservations make me wonder,
explain
why we all jump back to land
like our lives depend on it.

there's still sand in my shoes

salt in the spit
ushered by the coast
against reluctant skin.

salt like waves on my face
when I read beneath
a celtic knot
she was 6
washed up
exhumed from sand
like the hermits in search of shelter.

digs like teeth into cheek
digs like the ragged hat
consigned to the dunes.

salty
like the willing vandal
digging cliffgrains
deeper into ruin.

salt in the sublime motion
of barnacles fastened
where the whales could not stick

salt like the pillars
who come home again;

they shut the mines down (but no one left)

He stirred
lump inside a stocking
a fire in my chest
like tequila down the hatch

passed from my father
the coal sat
situated
against my sternum

warmer
closer I reach
over the bridge
he ignites

forefather of industry
liquid fuel breast milk
we are ash
every wednesday

jump in the water
coal remains stagnant

drive off
coal remains stagnant

write this from the mainland
coal remains stagnant

NICOLAS PAQUETTE

Honesty

After much thinking about my death,
I've reached a conclusion regarding my last breath.

Regardless of when—I have but one request,
Tell only the truth when I'm laid to rest.

Please do not inflate my good deeds,
Only facts in the eulogy my father reads.

To my flaws do not avert your eyes.
The dead have no use for your comforting lies.

SARAH PARRY

eurydice

it seems all our old wounds
are flaring up these days .

(the ribboned rash
on the back of my knee from medical tape
and spanish sun sweat stung soft underflesh
tore . and my ankle's scar

that year i lived in the dark with him
so sure i was dead the scab opened and wept
and my flesh would rot from my living
skin . and walking back

from your place drunk and i bruised
my heel well it's swollen again but i guess
i always did fashion myself
as some kind of eurydice . last week)

you hit me and i swear
your bruise looked just
like his .

figurehead

the wound ; gauze-swaddled –
the apartment's close dark (she watches) his always
turning back as he unwraps (the wreck of it)
her rot-soaked ankle

“what she finds there is part-treasure, part-corpse.”

*

lot's salt wife is a stiff
muscled woman wishing salt kept
better

down here in the wreck open
your mouth and the salt comes
in (so she keeps it
shut)

ocean blooded blue
skin marbled like rare meat
mermaid tail encasing legs like
sausage

meat ; preserved badly –
rot .

*

the wound ; gauze-swaddled –
he bound (her) in white
cotton .

MATTHEW ROONEY

63mg of Dexedrine

Eye sacks are swollen
with demands for sleep—
rounding the edges
of words as I read them
—they no longer nourish me
those words—
I do not understand—
I read them like a simian

and rearrange the pale primroses
in the bouquet of cluster B disorders
developed in the gurgling cesspool
of recessive genes
in which my body was steeped
—ballooned in—bloated
with blood and bones and organs—
the son of twenty-three contradictions

never grew a spine—
in its place an artificial will
—a series of disconnected wishbones
suspended by dream-muscles
that have grown to twice the size
of an annotated Aristotle—
supports me
though some days

I collapse—
knowing the seeds planted
in the furrows of my brow
may never fruit—
smoking telomeres
if only for the satisfaction
of making them shorter—
to exert control

—I form the still-warm sand
fallen from their hour glass
into capsules—

turning the simian blood
into a broth of bucolic bioluminescence—
the 63mg of Dexedrine—
required to read Keats
and the many more for Homer—

Rabelais requires a glass of Robitussin
in English—
in French a glass of wine—
5g of fresh psilocybin
just begins to unbundle
Blake's verse
and show the boundaries
of fleshy biology

laying prostrate—
on the precipice of perception
I can see farther than those
on the shoulders of giants—
upon these rocks I rearrange my alleles—
and dare you to listen
to the dulcet tones
of this drug-addled bard

Sonnet 72

Dangle, denizen of mine uncle's scrotum
And clack thy teeth in tumorous creole
Euphratic veins fertilize thy charms
And halo thy face in pulsing aureole.
Divine hair has come to hang about thee
Pox'd rings of scab art proved be thy lips.
To stroke thy stretch'd flesh, my dear, prithee
I'll flagellate mine body into pips.
I'd gently comb thy splitting autumn ringlets,
Feign kiss thee, lest I cause a tumbling tooth,
I'd fix thy red-green scarring with ambrosia
Just to have thy stench enflame my youth.
Hie thee, foul physick. *Ecce mea domina*
Mine uncle Jerry's toothy teratoma.

Major Seventh

Eleven days after my birthday.
My sister arrives with a box
wrapped in f-minor chords.
A gift—she says
stealing glances at my keyboard.
She smiles hesitantly.

I take the box and open it
F G# C
Carefully untying the chords
F G# C
to allow the notes
to ring out.

A major seventh is in the box.
I hold the note against my ear
I have a keyboard
full of notes.
I wonder:
what am I to do with another?

It's wonderful—I say.
I was worried
you already had one—she says.
Not at all—I say
it sounds nice.
So you like it?

Yes—I say
I will put it on a shelf
Simply to let it play
So we can listen to it
For the rest of the day.
We smile.

[illegible]

Love: A Dialogue

—it smells of solvents, Love does—it's modern like that.
—though it acts like an adhesive—don't you, Love?
—once it sticks, they say it'll never let go.
—and bring you right back where it found you all swollen with smiles.
—rejuvenated, regimented—won't you be? ready to tumble once again.
—perhaps a thousand times atumble.
—perhaps.
—tumbling and clinging—tumbling and crawling back.
—Monica Loves you, you know.
—yes, but I don't Love Monica.
—so you're the solvent and she's the adhesive.
—so it goes—so, so.
—so it is, seems so.
—I'd rather sleep with Kate.
—do you Love her? Kate.
—we'll have to find out.
—she does seem taller than Monica.
—mysteries make us bind together—isn't that true Love?
—how tall is Kate?
—common enemy Love.
—but that's Love for you—Eros with his arrows wasted in error—or was that Cupid?
—Cupid is the more romantic.
—I was never good with romance.
—how could you be?
—it's all Greek to me—this business of Love.
—I was Love once—my mother would call—something to eat Love?
—I remember that.
—I'd say—something to eat please mother—something to eat please Margaret.
—she used to make the best lasagna.
—I ate a lot of it.
—used to.
—sometimes only a lot of something is enough.
—when it's good.
—and it was.
—blood-coloured lasagna with its sinew-coloured pasta.
—topped with a little cheese.
—at first I said—Mommy...
—that's cute.
—I'd say—Mommy, my name is Brian—but I soon recognized my role in Love.
—You know, Monica...
—we—my mother and I—lived in a small apartment.
—Love squishes people in to small spaces—that's Love's lingua franca—that's one thing I know about Love—Love's short breadth.
—I know that Love wakes up around noontime, but sometimes there's leftover Love from the night before to help you through the morning.
—not always.

—rarer than before—nowadays almost never.
—if I know one thing about Love—and really know it—it's that one should know only one thing about Love—more than one is maladaptive—more than one is overthinking.
—unless you know your Biology.
—species, genus, and family.
—phenotypes and amino acids.
—they're chemistry, aren't they—the acids that is?
—there's chemistry in Love.
—pheromones and the like—so they say.
—I say life is a miasmic, swirling mass of amino acids preternaturally codified to allow for pleasure.
—pleasure helps the pain go down.
—who said that?
—that's basic science.
—you know what else they say?
—top me up.
—nothing tops it.
—I'll drink to that.
—to another thousand tumbles.

JACK WILLIAMS

WETWARE* (The World Reversed)

i

WETWARE

feel
un

~

patched?

[heh.]

crawling
with

features.

[heh.]

*comes bundled with
78 Bugs.*

“...and

am of you..."

**whispered Beetles in the ear of The Emperor,* "...in you and with you always. For I have fed from the fruit of your wisdom and I have laid eggs in what little roots of your scalp there are, that if quashed will still as undoubtedly feed the ground as the Sun will rise. And if hatched will bore pink sores round the line of your forehead for all to see. And should you then shave or hide your face, I shall buzz the Words of Loss in your ears and should you deafen your Self, I have brothers in your bloodstream and cousins in your colon. I am of you, in you, and with you always."

The Emperor, disturbed, asked for the curtains to be drawn that day.

and... iii

am in You."

the Fool heard Beetles whisper in his ear, "of You and with You always. For I have fed from the fruit of wisdom and I have laid eggs in the roots of your scalp, that if quashed will still as undoubtedly feed the ground as the Sun will rise. And if hatched will bore pink sores round the line of your forehead that will itch and scratch. And should you then shave, I shall buzz the Words of Loss in your ears and should you deafen your Self, I have brothers and cousins in All This. I am in You, of You, and with You always."

The Fool balked at this. "But there is only You.
You were already here?"

and Beetles agreed.

*...it's given then,
that All This
is virtual?*

so,
You could
argue.

they only ask you for your honesty 'til they find out You're a Scorpio (Two of Cups
Reversed)

apparently

this
tongue

Stings.

it

spills over
all
the
time.

*when you got home
from your first day
of elementary school,
your Mother asked
you if you had made
any new friends. "no,"*

*You
responded,
"no one taught me how."*

i'm not very good at eating breakfast (Six of Wands Reversed)

your

!!!!!!
!!!!!!!!!!
!!!!!!!!!!
!!!!!!!!!!
!!!!!!!!!!
!!!!!!

*oh,
child.
you know*

!!!!!!!!!!
!!!!!!!!!!
!!!!!!!!!!
!!!!!!!!!!

*You can
love me
more when
you can
love*

!!!!!!
! ♣ !
!!!!!!

self.

!

there really
isn't a word
for a stomach
cramp.

‡

or a
clenched
fist.

LEAH YACYSHYN

It begins with a trace of tobacco

Five years younger, you were lush, beautiful;
You hung the moon backwards, crooned crooked poems,
spewed flame that charred the idiot crops.

The silent man in mocha brown,
you dozed and watched the night reveal
a heap of broken images where the sun once beat.

You've aged me with your affection
(you are ageless to me now)
and I've grown restless in age.

I want to dig back those years
of faint stale smells of beer,
of withered leaves about your feet.

We were born communal beings
but I've been too many things for too many people.

Dumbfounded, I return to the bland expectancy of pages.

2 Samuel 11:5

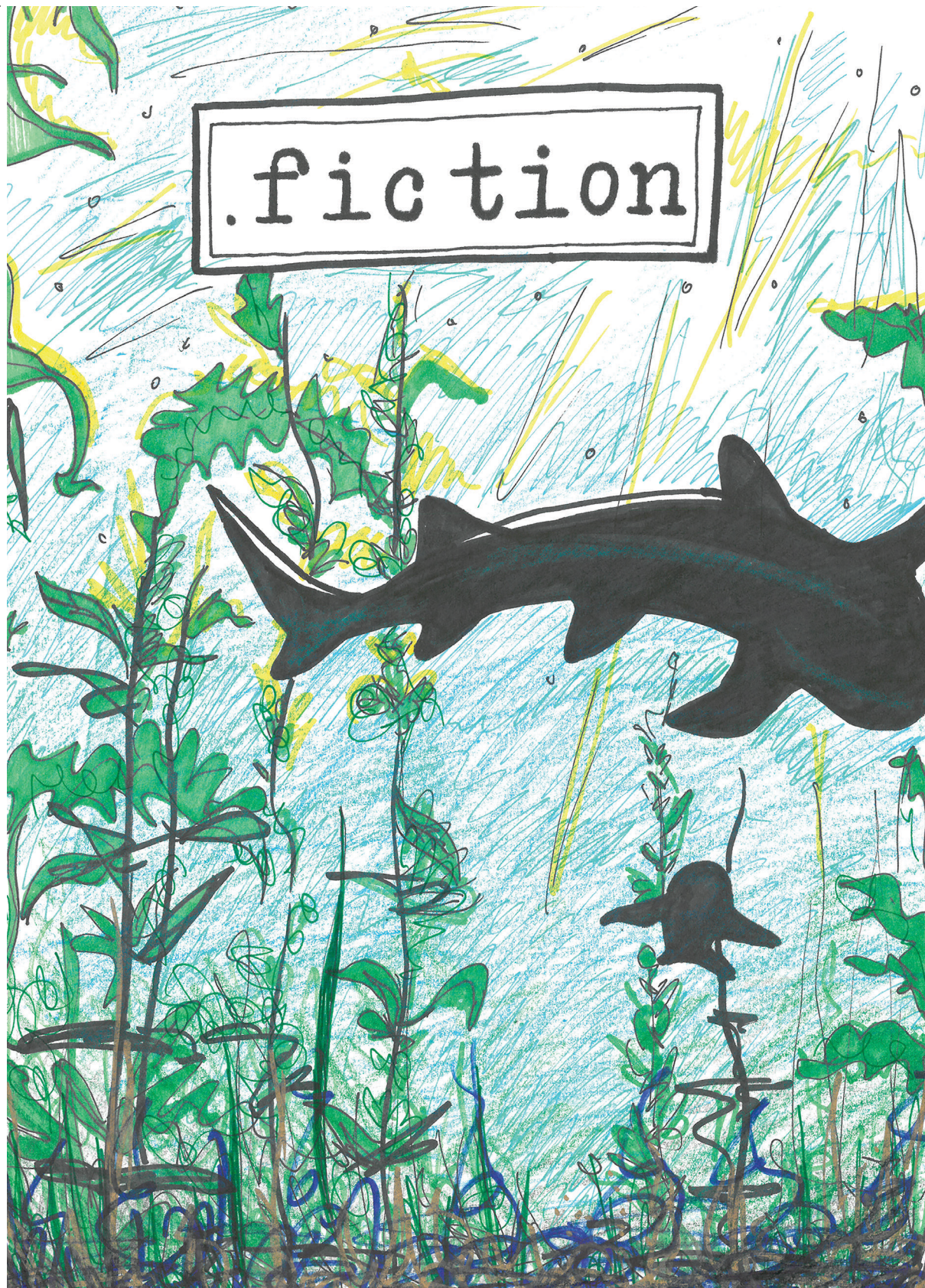
White-knuckled grip holds tight
the hearts
peculiar contractions begin with nicotine
on your breath \$4 well shots animated
the space between my hips
ache as I execute the s from hearts.

ATA ZARGAROF

“There will be birds to greet me (in the dawn)”

The memory of your name
visits me in my distress
like a moonbeam spreading its quivering image
over the surface of a cold cup of coffee.
There will be birds to greet me in the dawn,
but
let the knowledge of your love
sustain me in the meanwhile,
like a letter in the hands of a pilgrim;
like voices in the distance
for the man lost amid the bewildering trees of his mind.

.fiction



NORA ADSHADE

Of white winter wanderings, and what they bring

Cathy likes it when the days grow shorter, the ground freezes, and the sky takes on a paler hue, a blue so light it blends seamlessly with the grey clouds stretching up from the snow.

On these days, Cathy bundles into sweater, hat, and mitts to walk until her legs become the same temperature as the air, a cool numbness which seeps to the bone. She doesn't go anywhere in particular. Some days she walks past warmly lit shops, other days past homes with blinds flung open offering her just a peek of families decorating trees with bright lights, and on others still she walks through forests standing still and quiet.

These are Cathy's favourite days. She'll strip off her mitts to marvel at the feeling of bark beneath her fingertips, at being so alone yet so surrounded. She'll stand as still and silent as the trees, almost one of them in brown jacket and green scarf, to watch birds flit by and sing in high powerful voices. When she continues walking, she'll marvel at the crunch of leaves beneath the skiff of snow, at the return of nutrients to the earth as they slowly decompose.

One day she finds a clearing, just a small one, where tall grasses lay bent over. In the center stands a deer, antlers broad. In a voice which echoes from everywhere, or maybe just from within Cathy's mind, he asks why she has come here.

"No particular reason," she answers, "I was just walking."

This used to be a sacred place, he says, and during this time many would come with libations. Will you come?

"Yes," she says, for she likes the woods, but likes this tiny clearing most of all.

You will be rewarded, the buck says, before both turn and leave.

Cathy returns to her house much later than usual, long after dark has fallen over the world like a thick blanket. The next day Cathy leaves earlier than normally she would, so that she shall return with the pink of sunset in the air. She brings a bag with a thermos of tea, two sandwiches, and honey and milk for her tea.

The buck is standing in the clearing when she arrives. Cathy dusts some snow from a rock and sits. She eats, and the buck stands as still as the trees around them as she does, but the world does not. Two squirrels come running into the clearing,

chittering, and climb into the buck's great antlers, then down again. A pair of mourning doves coo to themselves as they peck at the ground. A chickadee flits from the trees to the buck's antlers and back, a seed to be broken open and eaten in its little beak each time.

A chipmunk timidly approaches Cathy, and she offers it a bit of crust from her sandwich. It accepts, darting off a few metres to eat its prize.

When Cathy finishes her sandwich, she carefully pours a cup of tea and stirs in milk and honey. While stirring, she spills some, a few drops which blend with the white snow at her feet.

When Cathy finishes her tea, the buck bows to her, and Cathy curtsies back, then they both turn and leave.

It is long dark again when Cathy returns home, but she does not mind, for the stars are bright above her.

And so the week passes, until the day of the winter solstice. Cathy eats her sandwich, now with a collection of fifteen or so woodland creatures at her feet, and drinks her tea. It spills, but Cathy has come to understand that is unavoidable.

When she stands to leave, the buck speaks for the first time since that day.

Cathy, he says, you have worshipped this place well. How would you like to be rewarded?

"I would like to live here always," Cathy answers, for this clearing had become her home more than any other place.

Very well, answers the buck, then bows.

Cathy attempts to curtsy back, but finds her limbs stiff. Still and silent.

There is now a tree in the center of the clearing, a great home to woodland creatures. It is an evergreen, standing tall and proud, under the winter stars.

SARAH CARRUTHERS

The Day Mr. Cuthbert Disappeared

He was a strange little man, but hardly anyone noticed him. He would walk down Blight Avenue each morning slowly due to his age. He wore suspenders and a ratty old top hat that looked as though it hadn't been taken off his head in years.

Local children would whiz by him on their bikes, and adults would smile through him. His presence was usually forgotten in the same instance.

Hardly anyone noticed Mr. Cuthbert, until the day he disappeared.

Josh walked around the corner onto Blight Avenue, as he did each morning on his way to school. He was thinking about Julie Smith and the Christmas dance, wondering if she would be opposed to going with him. Then Joshua noticed that he had not passed Mr. Cuthbert on his walk. Josh, however, quickly forgot about the old man and went back to thinking about Julie Smith.

When a week passed, and Josh had not seen Mr. Cuthbert at all, he grew concerned. Mr. Cuthbert was old. Maybe he had fallen and broken his hip.

So, after school, Josh stopped at the old Cuthbert house. It had been in disrepair for as long as anyone in town could remember. When Josh knocked on the old wooden door his knuckles made a dent in the rotting wood. Not wanting to give up when he heard no answer, Josh entered the house.

The interior of the Cuthbert house was not dissimilar to the outside. A fine layer of dust covered most of the surfaces in the entryway and the air smelt of rot.

"Mr. Cuthbert," Josh called out, "are you alright?"

There was no answer.

Josh stood in the entrance way. He felt his skin crawl; the house had an aura of autonomy he was suspicious of.

Josh was just about to leave when he heard something fall in one of the upstairs rooms.

Thinking it must be Mr. Cuthbert he hurried up the stairs. When he reached the landing, a firm voice said, "I'm up here Joshua."

It seemed to be coming from a bedroom on the left.

Josh entered the room, the door shut itself behind him.

When he realized Mr. Cuthbert was not in the room Josh tried to leave. The door would not open. His heart was racing.

The room was plain but dark. There was black and grey wallpaper covering the walls and a set of holey burgundy curtains hanging on the window. The only furniture in the room was a small table with a platter of fruit on it. A notecard was sitting on the edge, which read:

EAT ME OR PERISH

Josh stood there, for what felt like forever. He could feel himself growing weaker, his ribs were protruding when he felt them underneath his shirt.

When he could take it no longer, he picked the shiniest red apple and took a bite, then another, then many more until only the core was left. He stood there for a minute in bliss, then began to fall asleep.

Joshua woke up slowly he was very stiff. Thinking he had just dreamed a terrible dream he went to rub his eyes. Instead, he felt wrinkly hairy skin. He looked down he was wearing suspenders and beside him was an old ratty top hat.

He jumped up and scurried to the door this time it opened with only a creak. Joshua could only move slowly due to his age. He left the house and began to walk down Blight Avenue, he knew nobody, the cars were different, and hardly anyone noticed him.

He began to walk down Blight Avenue each morning, until the day he disappeared.

COLIN DOBSON

The Marooned Raccoon

I see two boys in an inflatable raft, bobbing in the water. They make steady progress toward the break-wall. They likely haven't noticed me, because I blend in with the rocks.

I was a stowaway on the Bulk Carrier Algowood. I snuck into its hull early one morning and nestled in a dark, sultry corner. I typically spend my nights wandering the beach and the surrounding harbour, picking at the scraps left by beachgoers and seagulls. Sometimes a rock bass or a trout washes ashore, and on those good nights I burrow myself in the sand and eat and watch the salt ships leave port, their lights twinkling in the reflection of Lake Huron. For dessert, I eat salt—oh, salt! The mere thought of it now hurts. I can smell the saline air, even from my place offshore, as it wafts from the salt mine. At the harbour, there is more salt than one could ever need; it was encrusted into every crevice of the Algowood. There I settled to lick sensually as the lurid dawn emerged, and then, as I often do during the day, I went to sleep.

Commotion in the hull woke me, men in heavy boots lurching about. I spent the morning scurrying from corner to corner and hiding amongst the cargo, until the heavy boots chased me out of the hull and into the harsh morning light. To my surprise, I was relocated some few hundred metres from shore during my slumber, to a cement break-wall separating the cove from the dark waters that stretch out uninterrupted to the ports of Michigan. The structure was long and slender and isolated in the water. The seagulls squawked mockingly—Stranded! Stranded!

I know that the boys have spotted me because they dismount their raft at the opposite end of the break-wall. I edge toward them very slowly. I am weak with hunger, and the light of day beats down upon me. The seagulls perch on the rocks and call out various cusses and insults, waiting for my fatigue to claim me.

As the boys approach I hear them discussing. "How do you think it got here?" one of them asks. He points the yellow paddle at me defensively.

"Must have snuck onto the ship when they were bringing rocks out here," says the other boy. "Poor bugger probably hasn't eaten for days."

"Damn dumb 'coon."

The wind is picking up. Waves smash against the break-wall, hitting me with cold spray. The boy holds the paddle in my face. I gnaw at it. He doesn't move it away.

"Don't get too close," the one without the paddle says. "Could be rabid."

"What should we do with it?"

"Let's throw him in the raft and take him back to shore with us."

The one holding the paddle says, "It'll claw a hole in it, or get scared and jump out."

"We could go back into town and get a cage."

"It'll be dark by the time we're back, and it looks like a storm is blowing in."

"Then we'll come back tomorrow."

"It won't be alive tomorrow."

The sky is overcast and reflected in the greyish waters. The boys stay out on the break-wall for a while. It starts to rain, and the waves grow fiercer by the minute. The boys grow increasingly nervous under the looming clouds.

"Let's kill a seagull, or a fish," the boy without the paddle suggests. "If we give him something to eat, he'll last the night. Someone will see him tomorrow and rescue him."

"How're you gonna kill a 'gull? Gonna throw a rock at it? You gonna spear a fish with the paddle? I have a feeling that whoever brought this 'coon here left it here to die." There is a long silence, then the boy with the paddle says, "Let's kill the 'coon. Put it out of its misery. Should only take a couple good swings with the paddle."

"Get it over with, then. I don't want to watch."

Thunder sounds over the lake, and the two boys get back into the raft and set off for shore. The violent waves toss the inflatable raft easily, and the boys make little progress against them.

I hear a loud buzzing as a motorized boat approaches. The boys hail the boat, waving their arms frantically. It circles around and stops next to the raft. The boys climb aboard, and the boat takes them to shore, just as lightning strikes the water.

I lay immobile on the break-wall as the cold rain pelts my body. A seagull lands a foot away, and stares blankly at me. It squawks—Tough luck! Tough luck!

KATHLEEN JONES

The Untold Story

Three days after Dad died, Mom sang again.

It was a light tune, barely audible beneath the hum of the shower and the whirring fan. But our apartment was small, with my room right next to the bathroom. And I heard her.

It struck me as odd, but not enough to say something. I flipped through a book without reading, my mind otherwise occupied. I did that until I heard the shower cut out, and Mom poked her head into my room, her hair wrapped in a towel.

“Hi, love,” she said, her voice morose. “How are you doing?”

I glanced up. There was no trace of the song I’d heard on her face, which was pinched with sadness. Her eyes were red-rimmed, and her shoulders drooped the same way mine had for the past three days.

“Still here,” I replied, which had been my response to that question all my life. It seemed a bit dark now, with Dad gone, but there was a comforting familiarity in the expression.

Mom smiled—a twist of a smile that looked more like a grimace. I wondered if I’d imagined her song.

“You’d better start getting ready,” she said.

I glanced at my phone. The funeral was tonight, and in less than three hours. This was my first funeral. All of my relatives, except for the grandfather who fucked off when my dad was fifteen, were still alive. My first time honouring a life, and it was for the man who helped give me life. If god or astrology or anything were real, that was surely a cosmic injustice.

My mom gently closed the door, giving me space to get ready. It was early, but it felt like a bad idea to be late to your own father’s funeral, so I picked out my outfit and brushed my hair. As I was tugging all the excess hair out of my brush and dumping it in the trash, I heard her again.

The tune was louder this time—maybe because she thought I couldn’t hear. It was

a gentle hum, something that seemed familiar, maybe about sunshine.

It unsettled me. Not just because Dad was dead, though that was part of it, but because I hadn't heard a song like that for years. Dad hated pop music, preferring classical, so we never listened to anything poppy or canned. What Mom was humming wasn't bubblegum, but it wasn't Bach, either.

After I put on the only neutral pink lipstick I owned—the only lipstick Dad said he thought was pretty—I sat down at the dinner table with Mom. The effort was more elaborate than expected: a vegetable and tofu stir fry with homemade bread—a bonafide vegan feast. I studied Mom's face, but she gave nothing away as she took a bite of dinner. Her nails weren't painted like usual, and she still wore her wedding ring—but her hand never shook. Mine had been shaking constantly since we heard the news.

When she reached for another slice of bread, I noticed a bruise on her forearm. It was a light, ugly brown, so not fresh, but I wondered why I was just seeing it then.

Cleaning up our plates, she gave me a wan smile. "Are you ready?" I nodded.

We gathered our coats, bundling ourselves up against the cold. I went out first. As my mom locked the door behind us, she hummed.

SAMANTHA MICHALCZYK

Dead Dogs and Broken Bones

It was a Sunday afternoon when Jonathan told his neighbours their golden retriever had been hit by a car. He had apologized profusely, hands wrung in a practised act of nervousness through the hem of his shirt, as he stood haphazardly on the porch steps. He told them it was an accident, the dog had darted in front of his car and he couldn't react in time. That he had only known the dog belonged to the Akerely's once he pulled it to the side of the highway and read the tags. It was a generic excuse really, but it was enough to cause the daughter to start wailing, and the screen door was shut in Jonathan's face before any of them thought to question how the animal got to the highway in the first place.

Where's the body? Mr. Akerely had asked. His beady eyes and hooked nose made Jonathan feel as though he was being scrutinized by a vulture.

Left it on the I-90, exit 4 heading into town. I would have brought it back to bury, but... Jonathan looked to the dilapidated pickup truck sitting on the curb behind him. *It's not pretty.* He climbed into his pickup, surprised that the former cop had not picked up on his little white lie, and sped towards the new development at the lip of town.

There were holes in his story, and Jonathan knew it. His pickup did not have an ounce of damage to suggest he had hit such an animal at such a high speed, but Mr. Akerely didn't have to see the bullet hole in the dog's head. He felt slightly remorseful, looking to the back seat where the dog's carcass was half wrapped in the spare blanket he usually kept in the flatbed.

The asphalt road gave way to dirt and Jonathan's seat bounced with every dip in the uneven ground. With the construction crew gone for the weekend, the skeletal remains of half-finished houses stood unattended, providing the perfect cover for Jonathan to park his pickup behind and away from any stray eyes that wandered his way. He pulled a shovel out of the flatbed and moved towards one of the half-filled holes that had been left unfinished by the construction crew in their haste.

Jonathan knew he'd dug here before, feeling his shoulders fall into the rhythm he had perfected, flinging dirt over his shoulder to form a hole large enough to cover the Akerely's golden retriever. The shovel skimmed over something hard, and he knelt to brush the remaining dirt away from the object. It was a skull, yellowed with age and dirt, and characterized by the large fracture that ran down the middle. A small smirk played at the corner of Jonathan's lip at the memory of delivering such a fatal wound.

He dropped the dog's body into the hole with the skull and climbed out. Jonathan brushed the dirt off his shirt and covered the remains, before hopping into his pickup. Pulling out of the development and onto the main road, Jonathan slowed, mistaking a pair of red rain boots disappearing into the brush as a trick of the eye, before driving on.

He hadn't meant to kill the dog, but it was just too good at digging up bones.

HANNAH WOOD

Goodwoman o' wastness

The ripple of water across her toes was warm, the smell of the ocean sharp and reminiscent of her parents' home. The warm air was like a soft embrace, but it held little comfort in her current state. Her eyes, after all, were filled with tears, her fingers clenched tightly together. The white dress on her shoulders was too tight, the damp air causing the fabric to cling to her legs.

Gemma had not wanted to marry today, but she stood here nonetheless, the small golden band a testament of her newly said vows.

In the distance behind her, the warm glow of her husband's house could be seen, nestled between other red-roofed homes. The sunset was casting the white houses in radiance, and she had left with the pretense of needing fresh air before she lay with him for the night. Any other bride might be joyous tonight. They may have taken to the bed with delight. Gemma could not bring herself to do anything but weep in this moment of solitude. She had stayed stony faced in front of her family and friends. Now, with her head tilted forward, she added her own soft tears to the peaceful lull of the sea.

Like the soft sigh of a tired child, the breeze off the ocean settled, and the stagnant smell of a fishing village flooded back into Gemma's senses. The woman was barely more than a girl. She did not know how she could do this. How she could embrace him—she did not love him. She had yet to love any man, despite her grandmother's presses. When your family is as poor as her own... what other choice was there?

Gemma had caught his eye months ago, and despite his appearance of kindness and gentle attempts at romances, she had provided him with nothing in return. At her gentle age, she was not looking for marriage—or would not have been if the pressure of her family hadn't changed her mind.

Gemma's mother was very ill. Coughs would shake her body, and Gemma did not feel like she could say 'no' to the prospect of her new husband's fortune. Her mother's faded eyes lit with joy for the first time in weeks when Gemma told her that she had said 'yes.' Her bony hands had clasped around Gemma's. Her mother had whispered to her how glad she was to know that her daughter would have a good life, would be supported even when she was to pass. Gemma's father had passed years ago. The very sea she stood in now had taken him, the storm raging for three days straight, and his boat gone without a trace. The family had spiralled after that, and her mother had fallen ill not long after.

The wind picked up again and called her back to reality. Her husband was waiting. Yet when Gemma looked up, her tears now dried, the water was no longer the only thing observing her.

The seal was silent, solemn eyes watching her from afar. Their gaze locked. Her chest felt tight and she didn't breathe until the animal sank back beneath the waves. As the sea air filled her lungs. Gemma felt light-headed. It was as if she had been touched by something larger, different, *bigger* than her.



non-fiction

ELLA CATHCART

The Art of Irish Stew Making

Sharp streaks of silver rain slice the air in Ballymena, Northern Ireland. My mother, father, brother, and I step out of a rental car and approach a quaint brick cottage. The cottage belongs to my father's relatives who I have only seen in pictures. Four graying women stand on a sinking white porch that juts out into the unkempt yard. They welcome us with warm hugs and teary smiles. We are led inside to meet their husbands, who rise slowly from stained floral armchairs and greet us with cordial handshakes. After half an hour or so of heartfelt pleasantries, the old men begin discussing farming in Ballymena. My father and brother slouch in armchairs and nod along to the conversation. As sonorous voices spew various statistics, the women file into the kitchen and motion for my mother and I to join them.

The kitchen is a small dark room with peeling floral wallpaper. A steel table sits in the corner; its surface reflects the blossoming walls. The four old women stand around the table, their concentrations fixed on a faded beef stew recipe that they explain has been passed down through generations of women.

The women create stew like it is pottery. Hands, marked with wrinkles and scars, whisk sauces and chop celery smoothly and rhythmically -- each movement practiced, made from memory.

Laughter and stories ring through the room. Stories of their men in the war, earning medals that hang on the papery walls. Stories of their men in the fields working, so the women can live in the bright brick cottage and cook in the snug safe kitchen.

My mother begins chopping carrots roughly and offbeat. I watch from a steel chair, unsure if our help is expected or disruptive to the balanced machine. Unsure if I am too young to partake in this tradition. Unsure if I want to cook a meal for my brother while he sits in an armchair and chats about farming.

My mother locks eyes with me and furrows her brow, obviously bothered by the women's position. By our position. But she does not say anything. She does not march into the dining room, pull up a chair, and state her opinion on farming in Ballymena. Neither do I. Out of respect, I tell myself, it would be rude. And it is not as though we have been forced into the kitchen. Not as though a knife is being held to the old women's necks - to my mother's neck - as they cook. My mother shrugs dubiously, her lips quivering with the suppression of an uncomfortable laugh.

This kitchen is quite unlike our own back home, which has tall pale-green walls and long opal countertops. Silky light streams through wide windows warming the oak hardwood floors that my father dances on as he cooks meals of his own invention. Back home my mother works in an office so my father can dance in the kitchen and cook for our family.

While I sit at the small silver table, a cutting board is passed to me and I am kindly told to peel potatoes. I am proud to be seen as mature and responsible. Proud to connect, to be welcomed into a tradition that has clearly bonded these women. I drown faint complaints of embedded misogyny with an appreciation for this collective creativity. It is easy to do when the women seem content and the men are polite. They shout thank yous and plant kisses on maps of wrinkles and scars that are etched into the old women's palms.

I stand in the hallway and watch the hunched women carry pots of stew to their men. They remind me of ants that scurry dutifully, carrying food fifty times their own weight. I intend to help them, to lift some of the weight, but the thought of serving my brother pushes me back to the kitchen. I slowly fill a bowl of stew for myself.

Warm guilt sinks in my gut as I carry only my bowl into the dining room. But there are only six chairs - one for each of the four old men, one for my father, and one for my brother. I stand there sheepishly as deep voices, including my brother's, compare juvenile adventures. I walk back to the dim kitchen and sit at the table in the corner.

The old women, my mother, and I eat our stew either sitting on cold steel chairs or standing around the edge of the kitchen. Warm laughter brightens the room as the women eagerly share stories of their lives. Voices, thick with wisdom, tell tales of creating glorious soups and revolutionary stews. They grin recalling meals they invented together and adventures they had in the long days when their husbands worked.

As we are leaving, one of the old women place a square packet of instant broth in my palm: a key ingredient for cooking their stew. The men gift my brother a bronze war medallion with my great-grandfather's name engraved neatly into it. We smile and thank them before turning away from the brick cottage. As soon as we pile into our rental car, my mother exhales loudly and delves into criticisms of the sexist gender roles that prevail in the cottage. My father and I nod fervidly and chime in with words of agreement. My brother is silent as he runs his thumb over the deep etchings in the medallion.

BESS DOIG

ocean blocked

The ocean laps at my feet. I stand; my feet sinking into the cold embrace of the wet sand as I clasp my red plastic bucket in one hand, my small blue shovel in the other, barely larger than my palm, ready for battle. My compatriots stand beside me, their battle implements at the ready. Today, we hold back the sea; the tide being our foe and time is on her side.

We fill our buckets with damp sand, grasped in fists and shovels, dumping them along the shore with haphazard coordination. We build our wall long and sturdy, with rocks as battle spires and a moat dug deep in front. We dash into the sea, refilling our buckets with water to cement our monolith against the tide. One foot tall and seven wide, it spans our tiny clip of shoreline. Behind it, we build our citadel: a carefully constructed stronghold of sand, seaweed, and salt. A large shred of driftwood sits wedged into its peak.

As foot soldiers, we fight the oncoming water: patching holes, adding sand, digging pits. The sun drifts to the horizon as rallying cries rage between us in the trenches:

“This side has a breach, watch it!”

“We need dry sand here, stat!”

Our fingers wrinkle and knuckles bleed: war wounds to carry home. As our lips tint to dark ocean blue and small limbs begin to shake, a voice summons us from above. We are recalled from the fray. We withdraw, with forlorn looks as the tide campaigns onward. We are dressed and warmed. Our bellies fill with food and we huddle aside the stone fireplace built by our great grandfather.

We are freed from the warmth, let loose down to the sea. The tide laps the wharf. A piece of driftwood floats on the water, surrounded by seaweed, adrift on the tide. Another day, another battle: lost.

DRUE MACPHERSON

Condescending Affirmation

You were sitting in a hotel room debating circumcision. Or something like that, you can't be certain where the conversation deviated and refastened elsewhere from...whatever, the original topic feels irrelevant now. He waves fingers like fists and stands over you, asserting dominance not found in the rationality of his argument. He raises his voice and you can feel spit hitting your cheek like bird shit on your head, flying from a wild mouth with the same degree of substance. He says it's apples and oranges as he consistently compares, wearing you down to the point you and the rest of the coven retreat outside for a smoke. He's screaming as you exit the room, drinking more than his share of the tequila sitting anxiously on the dresser. The tequila you bought. You and Kelsey wonder why he didn't pick up on the irony of you all feeling the need to physically remove yourself from the premises, saving your breath for puffing because ranting is all you seem to do in these quiet circles. Questioning why you're the one "killing the vibe" when he shakes his fist and hurls words like the violent crash of a centuries-long car pile up, and speaking in a demeanor your father would call "ladylike." Being cordial only goes so far when you're deconstructing an unfit system that offends the great proprietor of free speech. Where does this disconnect emerge from? Where is it born? You silently ask yourself and the remaining female agenda present. It's a socratic seminar, right? You're supposed to ask questions. It's how you learn, or, better yet, unlearn. This train of thought is derailed by the open shut of the hotel room's door. He walks into the waft of smoke masking your disconnect.

He's visibly exhausted. You're better at hiding it. He says he's sorry but doesn't really apologize, not meaning to be so harsh "but you see where I'm coming from?" as if you didn't clarify his own stance before presenting yours. As if you don't *have* to do that. You just say to drop it. You all drop it. He provides a non-committal shrug as insight and leaves again. The tribe collectively gathers and order feels restored for a fleeting second.

Kelsey speaks up and says she hates that. You left to gather your thoughts and were fine, it's nothing you're not used to. We all nod. She says it comes from a place of arrogance, right? You don't want to say mansplaining because that's so cliché. It might get taken out of context but the connotation is right. It extends beyond that, she says. Like when your partner breaks up with you and does so stating that they know you're strong enough to take it. To digest it all. Then a month or two later sends you a message asking how you are, they *really* want to know. They feel guilty. Questioning your stability, your sense of self outside of the relationship after removing themselves willingly. You're not a china doll, you're not a doll at all. You're a human being whose sense of self can't be so easily fractured. You feel as if

you're almost forced to explain this fact clear and plain so nothing becomes lost in a language you assumed you wouldn't have to translate so broadly. It doesn't ruin what you had, but this interaction feels contradictory to what you thought was there. An unspoken reverence. Who are you justifying this to? Why does it feel like yourself when you know you're alright? It's a reminder. A put down. Not of heartbreak, but something so eerily familiar you can't put your finger on the word. It's on the tip of my tongue, racking my brain Kelsey says. You flick away your cigarette, a coffin nail in a grave you dig for yourself when you're already knee deep in shit. You meet her eyes. You say "it's condescending affirmation." Kelsey's eyes light up and every other woman out there nods, acknowledging its validity, knowing instantly what you're referring to. Something you'd have to explain to the guys inside before having it explained back to you.

You all shuffle back into the room, resolved from the newly coined term, this tricky inside information that was insidiously everywhere but seemed to only be understood within the tribe. There was a phrase, a transcendent form of language that might bridge the gap when explained to willing ears. The more frequent and specific the phraseology, the stronger the communication...or so you tell each other. There's a shift when you all re-emerge from the cold and thank god for the innocuous Journey blaring in the background because the mood requires a form of harmless bonding or rapport. Sound becomes amplified so words do not. This is the compromise of democracy and you all begin to discuss plans for the next day, pushing the past to the back of the mind until an overfamiliar historiographical assessment of the night's events revisits you once you shut your eyes.

You hear him snoring down the hall.

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