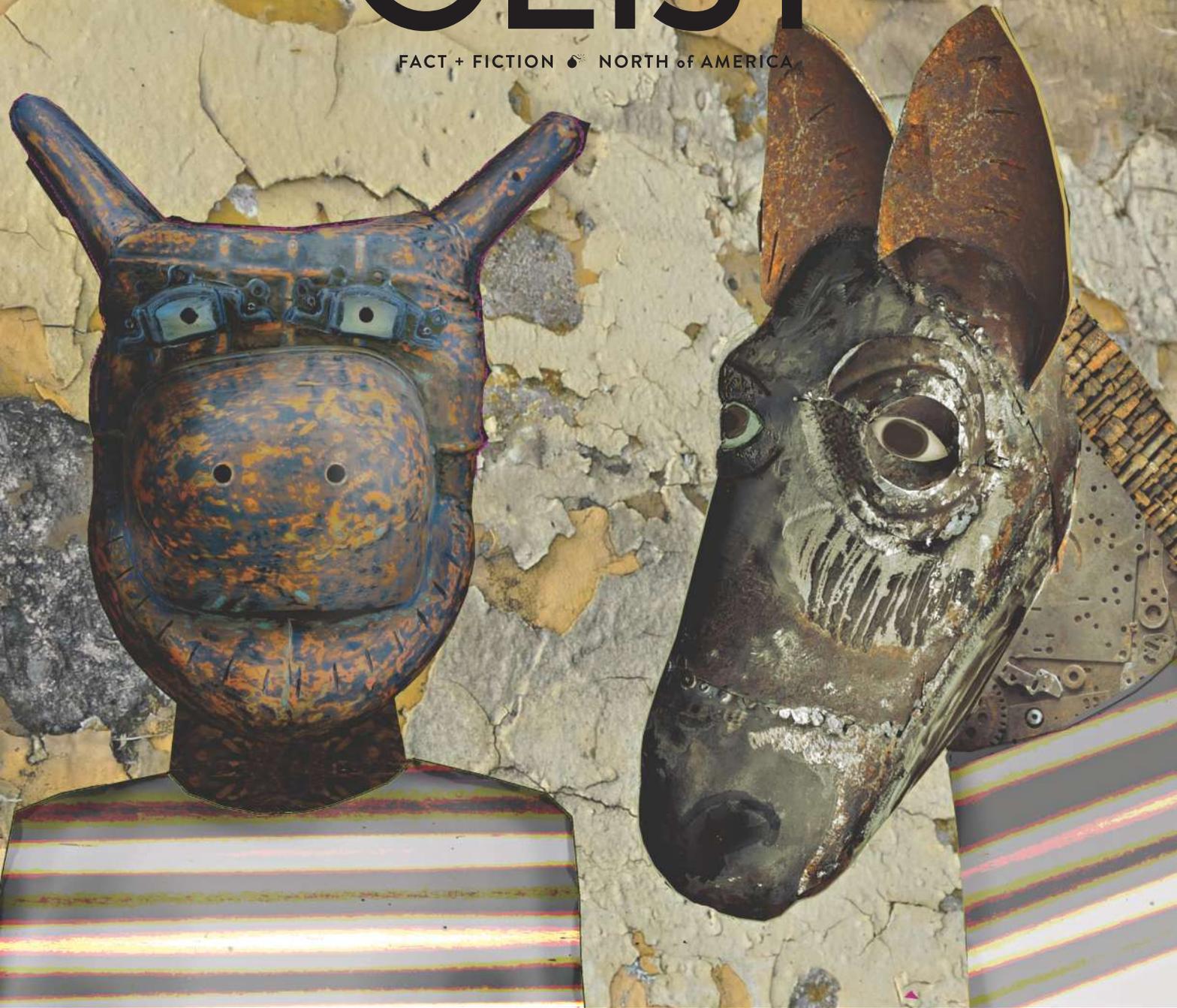


# GEIST

NUMBER 129

\$16.25

FACT + FICTION • NORTH of AMERICA



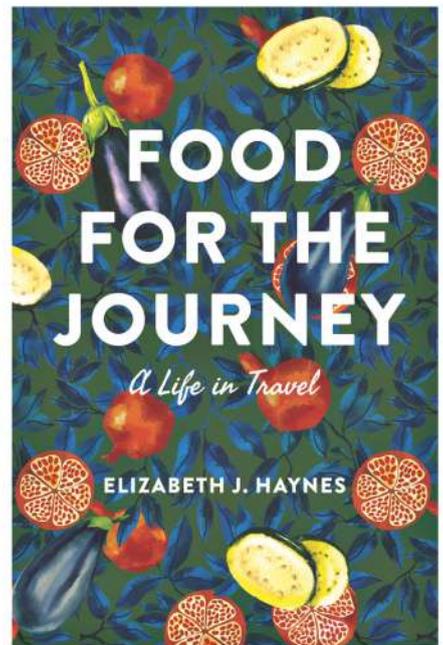
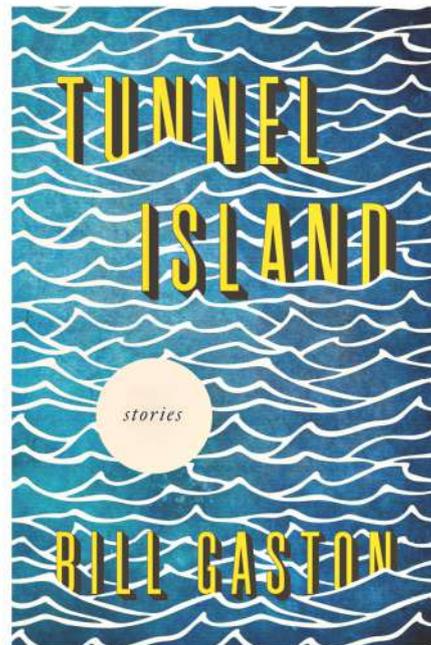
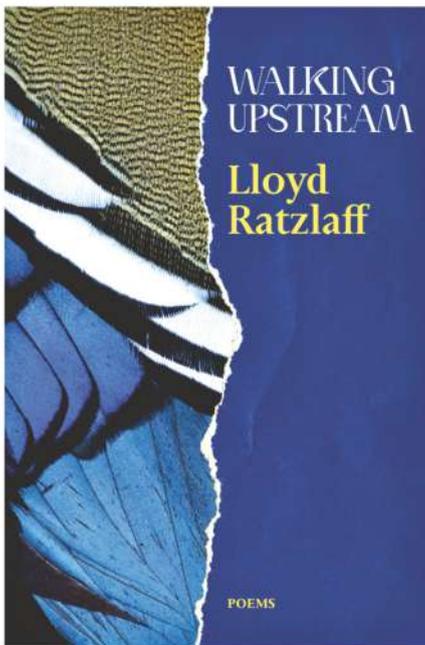
## SOUNDS OF REBELLION

THINGS DISCOVERED ☞ REJOICE IN HIS NAME ☞ MAROONED

PANOPTICON OF MINUSCULE LIFE ☞ REVENANT ☞ SOMEONE ELSE'S LAVISH CAKE

NOT JUST A FIVE-LETTER WORD ☞ WHOLE MAN REMOVAL SERVICES

# Thistledown Press



SPRING 2025  
POETRY  
FICTION  
NONFICTION

Est. 1975 \*  
**50** \*  
years



# BRICK, A LITERARY JOURNAL

DEBORAH LEVY  
ANNE CARSON  
TEJU COLE  
OCEAN VUONG  
MICHAEL ONDAATJE  
FANNY HOWE  
LOUISE ERDRICH  
MARGARET ATWOOD  
AMITAVA KUMAR  
JENNY ERPENBECK  
CHRISTINA SHARPE  
MADELEINE THIEN  
SHEILA HETI  
DIONNE BRAND

*"Each issue is as purposely  
crafted as a good novel."*  
—John Irving

BRICKMAG.COM  
@BRICKLITERARY

# GEIST

geist.com/subscribe  
1-888-GEIST-EH



# KEEP

# IT

# WEIRD



FACT + FICTION • NORTH of AMERICA

# GEIST

Volume 33 • Number 129 • Spring 2025

---

## FEATURES

---

### SOMEONE ELSE'S LAVISH CAKE

Misha Solomon

*When I am ready to depart, the crossbreed could erupt*

31

### SILVER & BLUE

Soraya Roberts

*The fraternity of anonymous humanity  
crashed into it all*

34

### REJOICE IN HIS NAME

Finnian Burnett

*He's never known me as Sarah,  
never had to stumble over the S*

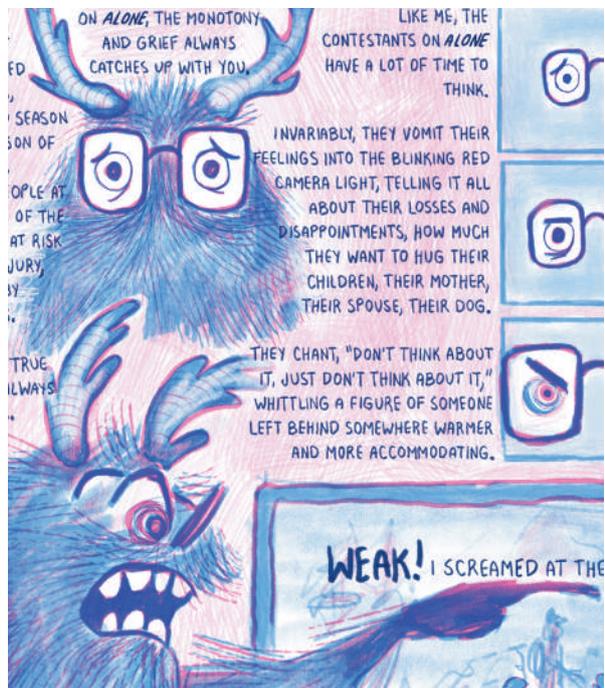
42

### COVID CRYPTID

CM Wain

*Can I last longer than you?*

46



# GEIST

*Fact + Fiction, North of America*

---

## NOTES & DISPATCHES

---

Helen Humphreys

*Botany*

7

Guy Elston

*Marooned*

9

Ginger Ngo

*Strathcona*

10

Courtney Buder

*Revenant*

12

Jennifer Gossoo

*Things Discovered and Un-*

14

## FINDINGS

---

16

Sounds of Rebellion

Panopticon of Minuscule Life

Observations from a Visit to  
the Museum of Saint Barbara



How to Find Your Most  
Beautiful Parking Lot

Not Just a Five-Letter Word

Imagining a Boundless God in the  
Bounds of the Dunya

Whole Man Removal Services

and more...

## DEPARTMENTS

---

MISCELLANY

4

ARTISTS IN THIS ISSUE

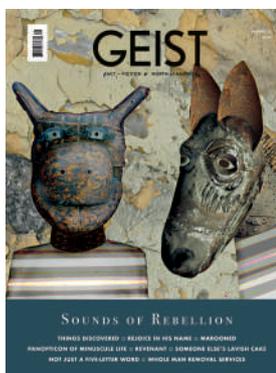
6

ENDNOTES

50

PUZZLE

60



COVER: *Family Photo*, October 2024, mixed media by Jeff Mann. A note from Jeff, March 2025: "This piece started with two masks of mine made primarily from car parts. They wanted to be together; the rest of the image was assembled from my images, photos and sculptures. I work by response, so these masks started out with my interest in particular car parts and developed from there. Reasons for using car parts: I think there are far too many cars in the world; by using car parts, I'm making something benign from something malignant; because we junk so many cars each year, lots of car parts are available."

# GEIST

PUBLISHED BY  
The Geist Foundation

MANAGING DIRECTOR  
Oluwatoke Adejoye

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
Dayna Mahannah

MANAGING EDITOR  
Michelle Ha

LAYOUT & DESIGN  
Michał Kozłowski

DISTRIBUTION  
Magazines Canada

PROOFREADER  
Helen Godolphin

BRAIN TRUST  
Stephen Osborne, Mary Schendlinger  
*Co-founders, Consulting Publishers*

FIRST SUBSCRIBER  
Jane Springer

MOST VALUABLE PUZZLERS  
Jim Lowe & Brian Goth

BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
Roni Simunovic, Dylan Marando,  
Mindy Abramowitz, Anson Ching,  
Debby Reis, Kelsea O'Connor,  
Michael Hayward, Patty Osborne,  
Rebecca Blissett, Vera Unurmunkh  
Erdenebileg, Jennesia Pedri

READING COLLECTIVE  
Alison Braid-Fernandez, Dawson Ford,  
Maryanna Gabriel, Jared Hawkey,  
Kendra Heinz, Cornelia Mars,  
Chimedum Ohaegbu, J.R. Patterson,  
Loghan Paylor, Emma Russell-Trione,  
Thalia Stopa, Natasha Tar

SUPPORT THE GEIST FOUNDATION:  
[GEIST.COM/DONATE](http://GEIST.COM/DONATE)  
[WWW.GEIST.COM](http://WWW.GEIST.COM)

## M I S C E L L A N Y

### SAD-FOR-US ENDINGS

*Geist* says farewell (sad for us!) to our Managing Editor, Sylvia Tran, as she pursues her dream of literary writing (happy for her!). Sylvia started at *Geist* in 2020 and maintained a creative, organized ethos through an era of tumult. Working with Sylvia, one sensed that “all will be okay.” Her contributions to *Geist* are unquantifiable, but you can read her essay “To Belong” in *Geist* 122, about Gu Xiong’s photography of Chinese Canadian burial grounds. “Poutine Pilgrimage”—her review of “Robson Fries” in Tokyo—is necessary fry content. *Geist* wishes Sylvia a fulfilling journey of literary greatness! The in-office, once-ongoing, now-defunct list entitled “Sh\*t Sylvia Says” will have to substitute for the in-person humour she delighted the staff with each week.

### LETTER FROM THE BOARD

Dear Readers,

*Geist* magazine was launched in 1990 by our founders, Stephen Osborne and Mary Schendlinger. In the mid-1990s, Brad Cran was a contributor and volunteer at the magazine, and he played an important role in *Geist*’s formative years. Mr. Cran became a long-time supporter of the magazine and we continued to publish Mr. Cran’s work in the magazine into the 2010s.

In 2021, Mr. Cran’s work was removed from the *Geist* website. The removal stemmed from a misunderstanding related to a request he had made. However, Mr. Cran perceived the removal of his content from our website as a form of blacklisting, which was not the case. We want to emphasize that *Geist* does not support blacklisting or silencing individuals.

### GEIST IN PESARO

*Geist* 126 lounging seaside. Sent to us by J W Goossen, along with this note: “Here I am at the off-season beach in Pesaro, Italy. I am outside the machine, the only Canada Goose near me is a poem, and everyone, not just the girls, has cake for breakfast.”



The removal of his work was purely an editorial decision, and we regret that it was perceived differently.

This misunderstanding led to an allegation of a breach of contract. We have recently reached a settlement that addressed Mr. Cran’s concerns. As part of the resolution, we are developing a complaint policy to prevent such misunderstandings from happening in the future, and we have republished Mr. Cran’s work on the *Geist* website.

Editorial choice is important to *Geist*. We curate a Canadian essence, a certain spirit that we are very proud of publishing. Mr. Cran’s work in *Geist* was part of that, and we value our past editorial decisions to print his work. We are glad for you to read it again at [geist.com/authors/brad-cran](http://geist.com/authors/brad-cran).

—Board of Directors,  
*Geist Foundation*

## OVERHEARD



*Overheard in Trinity Bellwoods Park in Toronto, ON, by an anonymous reader. Comic by Michelle Ha. See her Overheard comic in Geist 122 and find more of Michelle's work at @justjiaart on cara.app.*

### THE RESTART OF SOMETHING GOOD

Big welcome to *Geist*'s past intern and new Managing Editor, Michelle Ha! In 2023, Michelle began an internship, overseeing digital projects. She rejuvenated our social media and led a major website transition. With a background in project coordination and program management, Michelle is also a writer, editor and self-taught artist—find her

on cara.app at @justjiaart. Or see her Overheard comic in No. 122, and in this issue (above)! We are constantly admiring Michelle for various reasons, such as the collaborative animation projects she facilitates in her own time, and the fact that she wakes up at 5 a.m. to read or make art. *Geist* is thrilled to have Michelle back on the team, and we look forward to saying hello every week, again and again.

### WRITE TO GEIST

✉ Thoughts, opinions, comments and queries are welcome and encouraged, and should be sent to:

The Editor, *Geist*  
letters@geist.com  
*Snailmail:*  
#210 – 111 West Hastings St.  
Vancouver BC V6B 1H4

Letters may be edited for clarity, brevity and decorum.

*Geist* is published three times a year.

Contents copyright © 2025 The Geist Foundation. All rights reserved.

*Subscriptions:* in Canada: \$35 (1 year); international: \$50. Visa and MasterCard accepted.

Correspondence and inquiries:  
subs@geist.com, advertising@geist.com,  
letters@geist.com, editor@geist.com.

Include SASE with Canadian postage or IRC with all submissions and queries.  
#210 – 111 West Hastings St.  
Vancouver BC Canada V6B 1H4

Submission guidelines are available at  
geist.com.

ISSN 1181-6554.

*Geist* swaps its subscriber list with other cultural magazines for one-time mailings. Please contact us if you prefer not to receive these mailings.

Publications Mail Agreement 40069678

Registration No. 07582

Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:  
Circulation Department,  
#210 – 111 West Hastings St.  
Vancouver BC Canada V6B 1H4  
Email: geist@geist.com  
Tel: (604) 681-9161, 1-888-GEIST-EH;  
Web: geist.com

*Geist* is a member of Magazines Canada and the Magazine Association of BC. Indexed in the *Canadian Literary Periodicals Index* and available on ProQuest.

The Geist Foundation receives assistance from private donors, the Canada Council, the BC Arts Council, the City of Vancouver and the Province of British Columbia.

Funded by the  
Government  
of Canada

Canada



THE CANADA COUNCIL  
1000 1100 AVENUE  
OTTAWA K1P 6L8  
SINCE 1917



BRITISH COLUMBIA  
ARTS COUNCIL  
Funded by the Government of British Columbia



BRITISH  
COLUMBIA

accessCOPYRIGHT  
FOUNDATION

CITY OF  
VANCOUVER | Arts, Culture  
& Tourism

**Jasper Berehulke** (he/him) is a two-spirit, transgender artist from the Syilx Okanagan territory, whose creative practice and advocacy focus on identity, cultural reclamation and community building. You can find him on Instagram @shrimp.jpegs or jasperberhulke.com.

**Wade Comer** is a Vancouver-born and -aged photographic artist and a maker of things. His core belief is that there is beauty everywhere, and that photography has the power to make the ordinary extraordinary. Through photography and visual arts, Wade investigates two main concepts: how we see; and what we leave behind. You can find him at wadecomer.ca or @wadecomerphoto.

**Adishi Gupta** (she/her) is a writer and educator based in Vancouver, BC. Recently, she has been exploring her love for words and pictures through collaging, blackout poetry and mini zines. She loves found art for its ability to discover and weave new meanings, reimagining the ordinary into something unexpected. Follow her journey @foundartbyadishi.

Jia 何家嘉 (Michelle Ha) is a second-generation Chinese Canadian artist and editor living on the unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh, and salilwətəł Nations. She's a part-time artist and full-time raccoon (her grubby little hands will go for anything that's

purple). Jia is self-taught and mainly works in digital. She has publications under the name "Michelle" in *The Flesh* magazine and *Existere*. You can find her art @justjiaart on Cara.

**James LaBounty** is a photographer who's worked for *Saturday Night* magazine, the *New York Times Magazine*, *British Vogue*, *Vanity Fair* and others, usually photographing people. He has taught at Emily Carr Institute of Art & Design and Langara College. He is currently working on fine art photography, immersed in nature. You can find his work at kipandjim.ca.

**Jeff Mann** lives in Canada across the river from Buffalo, NY. After twenty-eight years living in Maine as a potter/sculptor, Jeff has been moving west: first, Upstate New York, then Kingston, Ontario and now to the Niagara River. Along the way, he discovered car parts and it's been all downhill from there. Influences: Hundertwasser, this amazing planet.

As an artist, educator and administrator, **Mickey (Arthur) Meads** has worked and exhibited across Canada and the US. His current focus is on creating dioramas and photo-based work that questions our perspectives, both physical and cultural, carried in intimate and shared memories of place, time and culture in depicted images of what was. The work is an ongoing exercise in basing his art practice on

his own version of what he calls critical nostalgia. Mickey lives and works in Penticton, BC. Find him at meads.ca.

**Joanna Rogers** is a textile artist who dabbles with photography and embraces the surreal. She lives on Pender Island, BC, part of the traditional lands of the Tsawout First Nation. Her work can be found at joannarogers.ca or @joanna\_rogers\_art.

**Bronwyn Schuster** (she/they) is a visual artist living in the Comox Valley, BC. They gather their inspiration through local environment and folklore, creating illustrations that seek the magic in the mundane, and the ordinary in the fantastic. Their mediums of choice include oil, gouache and pencil crayon. Find them on Bluesky @nywn.art, on Instagram @nywnart and at nywn.art.

**CM Wain** is a comic artist, writer and printmaker living in Toronto, ON. They publish a weekly webcomic about growing up in, and then leaving, extreme evangelicalism. Read their comic essay "COVID Cryptid" on page 46. You can find them online at charismania.substack.com.

**Duncan Wildwood** is a creative generalist based in Victoria, BC. Find more of Duncan's work on Instagram @duncanwildwood.

## Botany

HELEN HUMPHREYS

*I want to see what it means, on a deep level, to stay put*



**D**uring lockdown I spent a lot of time looking at three particular trees on Google Earth. One was a Scots pine at the bottom of the garden in my English childhood home on Dalmore Avenue in Claygate, Surrey. Another was a red maple in back of the Toronto home my family moved to after we immigrated to Canada. The third was a monkey puzzle tree that

grew in the garden behind my aunt's house, but was entirely visible from her house. She liked to look at it while she did the washing up in the evenings. The monkey puzzle tree, like the Scots pine, was in the south of England.

I was not even two when we left Southampton in the fall of 1962 on SS *Homeric*, bound for Canada, but I do have, while not quite complete

memories, certainly strong sensations of my early life on Dalmore Avenue. I was aware of the birds singing outside my bedroom window, the soft rain that fell on me when I was in the garden, the intermittent sun peeping out from the clouds and the loom of the pine as I lurched in and out of its shadow all day long on my stumpy child legs.

The red maple my father planted behind our Toronto house was to celebrate my brother's birth. The silver maple put in the ground a few years earlier for me would later be cut down. Its roots snaked into the basement and heaved up through the concrete, twining around the water pipes. My sister's tree, an ash, was killed by an infestation of emerald ash borer beetles. While his tree lives on, my brother is the only one among the three of us who is dead.

What was fascinating about the monkey puzzle tree was that it hosted a flock of parakeets in its spiky branches. The parakeets had bred out from an escaped pair years before and they drifted freely through my aunt's leafy suburb. The birds and the tree originated from the same part of South America and had found one another again in Surrey. It was one of the most joyful sights to see the colourful parakeets swirling around the tree.

My aunt's house was the place we came back to when we returned, collectively and individually, to Britain. I knew that house as well as I knew our home in Toronto—the little blue kitchen, the soft board in the hall floor, the deep bell of the grandfather clock, its melodious footfalls shifting the darkened hours.

What was I doing when I was looking at those three trees, night after night? I was looking into the past,

I suppose, or more specifically, I was trying to see how the past was doing without me.

My parents moved to Canada for several reasons. My father had lost his job and couldn't easily find another one. My mother was annoyed that her parents were interfering in her married life. My father's own father had a plan to immigrate to Canada and start a fruit farm, but he was killed during WWII when my father was still a boy. Continuing on with the family plan made a certain kind of sense to my father, and my mother, being in her early twenties, was up for the adventure.

They would both say, if asked, that they believed there was more opportunity in Canada for their children at the time.

I have an ongoing conversation with a friend who also immigrated to Canada with her family when she was a young child. What we talk about is whether, if we had had any choice in the matter, it would have been better for us to stay where we were born. My friend thinks that leaving has given her a happier life. I'm not so sure. Aside from missing my extended family, as I get older, I realize that I crave the landscape of Britain and its growing season. I dream of being able to garden all year long, and of a spring that begins in February.

Plants seem to hold the key for me in how this essential question of my life could be answered. I want to see what it means, on a deep level, to stay put, so I decide to go and visit the oldest flowers in Britain, a seam of wildflowers in the Upper Teesdale valley that have been growing there since the last ice age. They are arctic, alpine and southern European species and survive in what are some of the last natural wildflower meadows in Britain. They have literally remained in place for thousands of years.

The group of botanists whom I join in Teesdale for a week are a mix of amateur and professional, all of them

older than I am. After the first couple of days, it strikes me as odd that no one talks about their children, or about the jobs and careers they once had. It is not as though they have no children—they do, or that they have had boring and inconsequential jobs—they haven't. One of them was a doctor who spent years working in Africa. One was an engineer in the Antarctic. But they have left that part of their lives behind. They no longer dwell there. They are interested in botanical time now, which is not a linear affair, but grows, glacially, outward.

On the first night, over a hearty dinner in the pub where we are to be housed for the week, the trip leader informs us that lunches are not included in our expedition, but that a bagged lunch can be purchased from the pub each morning. I and a couple others decide to go for this option. We are to be tromping around outside all day, and I know I will be hungry. A few of the other dozen participants head up to the Tesco to buy supplies to make their own lunches, but at least half of the people decide to go without. Dinner is plentiful, and breakfast promises to be the same, and the gulf between the two meals can be bridged by the abundance of food provided at each.

It rains part or all of every day. Even though it is June, the Upper Teesdale valley is freezing. We spend almost all of our time in our raingear, all views obscured by fog.

Before I committed to going on this trip, I had puzzled over wording in the written information which specified that we would be moving at a "botanizing pace" through the week. What exactly did that mean?

The alpine flowers are tiny, microscopic in some cases. They are so small that unless you bend down with a magnifying glass, you will miss them altogether. A botanizing pace is extremely slow, and sometimes isn't a

pace at all, but is a crouch, or a lying down in the wet heather. One day we spend an entire eight hours inching around a one-acre meadow.

I find the fact of the flowers' persistence more interesting than the flowers themselves. It is moving to see a tiny patch of wood anemones on a bare hillside, still holding onto their little piece of ground even though the forest they once belonged to is thousands of years gone at this point. The singular patch of wood anemones has become a memorial to all the trees that once surrounded it.

In the evenings, after dinner, everyone reads out their finds of the day and the leader writes them down on a master list that will be added to all week, and then distributed to everyone after the expedition is over. I am not a wildflower expert or even a passionate amateur, and the roll call of Latin names washes over me, leaving no trace. On the third night, I spend this time after dinner having a drink in the bar, but I can still hear the quavering voices of the elderly botanists calling out their finds through the wall—*Carex capillaris*, *Equisetum pratense*, *Polygala amarella*, *Saxifraga hirculus*.

The wildflower we had all been hoping to see, myself included, was the spring gentian (*Gentiana verna*), a piercing blue gentian that is part of the Teesdale Assemblage, a specific combination of flowers that do not grow alongside each other anywhere else in Britain. The botanist Dr. Margaret Bradshaw began studying the Assemblage in the 1950s. At the current age of ninety-nine she still rides her pony out to the Teesdale valley every spring to check on the plants.

The spring gentian has historically flowered in mid- to late spring and should have still been in bloom when we were in the valley in early June. But climate change has shifted the flower's season earlier, and there were no blue



gentians dotting the hillsides and the meadows during our week in Teesdale. It was a disappointment to many in our group who had come specifically to see that one tiny flower. Blue is not a colour often seen in nature, and the striking blue of the spring gentian is not a blue often seen in flowers.

On the fourth day, after we had crouched under a bridge in the pouring rain to eat lunch—those of us who had lunch, mind you—a thick bank of fog rolled across the open moor above the Cow Green Reservoir. Even though most people wore brightly coloured raingear, it was still hard to see anyone who was more than a few feet ahead on the path. By the time we got back to the parking lot where the minibus waited to shuttle us back to the pub, it was clear that we were missing several members of our group. We waited, and then waited some more. No one loomed out of the mist towards us. We got into the minibus and continued to wait. Eventually, since the dinner hour was approaching, and those of us who hadn't eaten lunch were frantic with hunger, the bulk of our group was driven back to the pub, while the trip leader and his assistant stayed behind to search for the missing botanizers.

It was hours later that they returned, having stumbled around in the fog for much of the afternoon and early evening. There was no cell signal up at the reservoir, and they had stepped off the one path through the moor and then couldn't find their way back to it. When they finally arrived at the pub, they were wet and exhausted, scarfing down the dinner the kitchen had kindly kept warm for them.

"I'm sorry for all the fuss," said one of the women, when I asked her about the ordeal. "We were just a bit confused."

On the last day, in the midst of yet another rain shower, we were to climb down a rock face from the reservoir to a path below, in what the trip leader called "a slight scramble." It was an almost completely sheer cliff, slick

# Marooned

GUY ELSTON

Two of us were left behind: Moe, the surly fire-swallow, and me. We shared no tongue.

I fetched the wood, he roasted the scallops.  
We sat alone, saying nothing, sharing no thing

but the heat and the stars, everywhere.  
Years later, a TV crew wanted to know our secret.

This brought out quite another side in Moe.  
He was getting emotional, they had him in a close-up

and at the end of a long, stuttering sentence  
the translator gasped and looked at me, mouth open.

I came through the whole experience wiser.  
But yes, for a long time, my throat burned like crazy.

---

*Guy Elston's debut poetry collection, The Character Actor Convention, will be published by the Porcupine's Quill in fall 2025. His poems have appeared in the Malahat Review, Event, the Literary Review of Canada, the Ex-Puritan and elsewhere. Originally from the UK, he lives in Toronto. He is a member of the Meet the Presses collective.*

---

with rain, and with little vegetation to hang onto on the way down. I didn't think I could do it without plunging to my death, and so I refused and said that I would just retrace my steps back the way we had come. Several others decided to retreat with me, and we had a very pleasant, stress-free meander back to the trailhead.

That night, two of the more frail members of our group had cuts on their faces and hands from having fallen down the cliff.

"It was just a little tumble," said one of them, when I asked him about his injuries. "No need to worry. There wasn't that much blood."

**M**y question about staying or leaving is a difficult one to answer in any kind of conclusive way.

But, strangely, after that conversation, I did find some resolution in the Upper Teesdale valley. Just not where I expected to find it.

The thing about the alpine flowers is that they have survived for thousands of years by learning to make themselves smaller over time, to avoid being eaten by sheep, or ravaged by weather.

The adaptation of staying put has been to make less of themselves.

---

*Helen Humphreys is an award-winning author of fiction, creative non-fiction and poetry. Her work has been published internationally and optioned for film, television, theatre and opera. Her latest book is the novel Followed by the Lark, about American writer and naturalist, Henry David Thoreau, published by HarperCollins. She lives and writes in Kingston, Ontario.*

# Strathcona

GINGER NGO

*That is how one shows true love*



**M**y husband had Strathcona in his blood. That small neighbourhood just east of downtown Vancouver, where the smell of ginseng once mixed with the sound of clattering mah-jong tiles. A place inhabited by Canadian immigrants and the past lives they brought with them. We moved into a one-bedroom apartment near Chinatown, which overlapped with Strathcona. He was eager to talk about his old neighbourhood. Having grown up where the lampposts were painted red, my husband knew where everything was and where almost anything used to be. Every street corner came with a story from the time he was a kid. I enjoyed hearing them all.

He'd point out where he and his dad used to look for clams in Crab Park on our afternoon walks. There was a building nearby that once exclusively showed Chinese films. Watching movies there was one of the few things he and his father used to do together,

apart from work. As they got older, all they did together was work.

Walking deeper into the residential areas, amongst the beautiful heritage homes and gardens, my husband recalled specific houses. One had belonged to an old high school teacher whose son was in the same grade as him. After school, they'd hang out—not to smoke or play video games—but to drink tea, listen to jazz and read comic books. My in-laws lived minutes away from our apartment, and directly behind their co-op was the Chinese school my husband attended as a child.

Once in a while, he and I would go into Benny's Market on Union Street. The lady at the front recognized him, but neither knew the other's name. Still, the exchange rarely deviated: my husband would hold up two sandwiches (no mayo, but extra hot mustard) while I went around the aisle to grab two cans of soda. Sometimes, my husband asked for a lottery ticket and a handful

of arugula. There was always a big bag of it at the till. A generous handful of the curly leaves in a small plastic bag lasted long enough in our fridge. (We could never finish those big boxes sold at grocery stores.) When Benny passed away in 2019, I think it broke my husband's heart a little bit—Benny had known his name.

By contrast, the place of my husband's childhood marked my own adulthood. The longer I lived as a Canadian, the more difficult my background became to explain. Unsurprisingly, I was not from Vancouver. I would tell people that I was a third-generation Filipino Chinese, first-generation Canadian citizen. I didn't take my citizenship exam until 2017. While I did look undeniably Chinese, I'd never lived in China. My affinity to the people of the Middle Kingdom extended only to second-hand traditions from my grandparents who immigrated to the Philippines around the 1940s, diluted further by my parents' interpretations of their homeland as they struggled to establish their own origin stories. There was no specific checklist by which to determine one's identity. Trying to hold all these disparate parts together was exhausting. I was never sure when it was appropriate to feel offended or humiliated, so I ended up feeling both all the time.

The test I failed immediately and often was language. Long before the pandemic lockdowns, I decided to cut my own hair in the privacy of my bathroom—not for reasons the provincial health officer would eventually explain, but to avoid the Chinese purity test that happened whenever I sat in front of a mirror with a plastic sheet over my chest. Small talk always ensued *after* I'd been strapped in and the hairdresser had already worked through a quarter of my head.

"No, no, I'm not half-Filipino," I'd say. "I'm not half-anything. I don't have Filipino blood in my veins. The blood is all Chinese."

The lectures almost always ended with the same conclusion: “You really should learn how to speak Chinese. It is part of who you are.” Usually this was accompanied by a tap of the comb or the scissors or the laser hair removal wand. “You are Chinese. You should be proud to be Chinese!”

I worked my way through most of the salons on Main Street, looking for one that would not come with an extra service of cultural shame. The closest I came was Shiva Beauty Salon, where I got my eyebrows threaded. The owner was not Chinese. But still—hands poised above my upturned face, that long white thread pinched between her teeth and lips—the owner paused, then mumbled, “Oh wow, you are from the Philippines? But you know, you have so much hair on your face, it is like you are Persian.”

Years living this existential sitcom flew by. The shame formed a dull ache, and the flare-ups became more manageable over the nearly ten years I lived in Strathcona. I treated this otherness and un-belonging like one would treat sciatica. You just live with it and do your best—and avoid lifting heavy objects. My husband was the salve that helped me hold it together.

Soon, the ever-changing neighbourhood went through another shift, and the already culturally dubious foundations I had tried to bootstrap together began to buckle. Places we frequented for groceries closed down, replaced by services I did not quite need in my everyday life. I did not require longboards or collectible sneakers in shrink-wrapped plastic. I really wanted to support local businesses and help the community, but I could not find the motivation to join the MMA boxing gym on Pender. I watched Angelo Tosi on TV a few times, news segment after news segment about how his family had started the little Italian store on Main

Street over a hundred years ago. On the weekends, I’d look up at the giant green FOR SALE sign above his building announcing its \$5 million value. Angelo didn’t know my name, but he always shaved off a tiny portion of sheep milk cheese for me to try whenever I’d come in for some pancetta and olives.

“This part was all swamp land when I was a kid,” my husband would say whenever we passed the area near the Georgia Viaduct, just west of Strathcona Park. The new site of St. Paul’s Hospital had recently broken ground, ready to move from its iconic Burrard Street location downtown. Cement trucks came barrelling up and down the quiet road, past the soccer field and the train station, signalling a then-indecribable change.

The pandemic brought more upheaval into the world than anything I could imagine. The same familiar city blocks with red lamp posts featured regularly on the news, becoming the backdrop to sad and violent stories that emptied my resolve. I’ve yet to meet someone who hasn’t had some kind of divine epiphany or breakdown in the last five years.

I witnessed my husband’s childhood dissipate before his eyes, and I felt broken by the bits left behind.

It felt like a failed marriage between me and Strathcona, and our one-bedroom apartment couldn’t hold the magnitude of my sadness. The following spring, we found a new home in the West End, minutes away from Stanley Park.

There, afternoons with my husband were suddenly led by equal parts discovery and curiosity. He no longer had the home-court advantage when we walked along the streets dotted with izakaya bars and falafel shops. My own fractured childhood and third-culture memories felt relevant,

existing without the anxieties of representing a country or culture I had never known. Here, the sidewalks were painted like rainbows and the sunset waters reflected pink, blue and gold. It was a place that asked me who

I wanted to become and did not tell me who I should be. This community took me back to a forgotten time, and I found myself telling my husband stories that I hadn’t thought about in almost twenty years. The weight lifted invisibly, immediately, unexpectedly. I had other things to offer besides blank looks and a nervous laugh.

One afternoon, on my way out, I passed our building caretaker wiping down the front windows of the lobby. “Good afternoon, po,” I greeted, adding the last word to express formality toward the older gentleman. We had met months earlier and were delighted to discover that we both came from the Philippines. He seemed curious about the Chinese-looking woman speaking his language, but soon came to understand that it was her language too. Kabayan. Of the same land.

“Ah, and where are you off to today?” he asked me in Tagalog, without pausing to test how much I could understand.

I told him I was meeting my husband after his work at the top of the hill, so that he wouldn’t have to walk home alone. The caretaker pointed his index finger at me and tapped the air in front of him. “Ganyan ang magpakita ng tunay na pagmamahal.”

*That is how one shows true love.* It was a full sentence, structured in a way that indicated deep roots. The words he chose were old, respectable, without trappings of sprinkled English or affected accents. He spoke the Tagalog of my youth. For all the times my broken Chinese made me sound so stupid, this exchange reminded me of how beautiful my own language was. It reminded me of sweet jasmine



garlands, humid summer breezes, of grand staircases made of rosewood.

During a walk through Stanley Park, I heard the now-familiar zip-zipping sound behind some trees. I pointed out a hummingbird to my husband as one darted up and out of the bushes. “Forty years living in Vancouver, and I’ve never seen a hummingbird,” he admitted. I thought about the sentimental nature of Strathcona for him. I wondered if it actually was how he remembered it.

After living in the West End for almost a year, we were still in the honeymoon phase. Everything seemed promising, with each quiet side street holding delightful revelations. Perhaps after another decade we would look back and recall the less lovely parts of this neighbourhood but regard the entire experience as a gift. Our time in Strathcona may have ended, but our combined memories and conflicting emotions shaped a reality that nostalgia could never blur.

I asked my husband about his childhood again the other evening. He had made plans with his father to go to Costco—the only thing they now do together since the elder’s retirement. I asked about Crab Park, and if they ever actually caught clams in those waters. Without hesitation he said, “It was crabs. My dad and I were looking for crabs. I stopped going when a cop came up to me, called me a chink, then kicked me out for trespassing.”

---

*Ginger Ngo is an illustrator based in Vancouver, BC. Adventures in Desolation Sound (Harbour Publishing, 2024), written by CBC broadcaster Grant Lawrence and illustrated by Ginger, came out to rave reviews from kids who like birds. Her solo project "Emerson the Elephant Seal" will be released in 2025. Find more at [gingerngo.com](http://gingerngo.com).*

## Revenant

COURTNEY BUDER

*It might be time to find a new cemetery*



There’s power in a name. Yours is common, an easy bet in any graveyard. Sometimes there are more options than I care to consider: lavish monuments with butter soft carvings of cloth and angels, shabby rectangular stones shot through with cracks, polished plaques on brick walls, eroded lumps of rock with the faintest impression of letters that won’t

likely last another century. There’s a cemetery in Toronto named after the same saint that you were, which led me to the discovery of endless other such cemeteries across the country. Your name is grieved everywhere. By many accounts this means that *you* are grieved everywhere. In Fredericton and Charlottetown and New Glasgow and Pembroke, in every

hospital and house of worship—certainly everywhere that I go.

The oldest cemeteries I've been to are some of the worst kept. Patches of dirt branded with bike tracks scab the weedy grass. Broken chunks of stone and rotting garbage rest in place of flowers on the graves of families who began to die off over two hundred years ago. Standing before half a headstone, the names long smashed into dust, I feel as though I should be able to turn to somebody to express my gut feeling that this is wrong—but there's never anybody there with me.

I give different speeches depending on the day. Depending on whether you're dead or you're still out there somewhere, depending on whether you've been trying to get back to me or you've left me behind, depending on how tender my heart feels when I wake up in the morning and how I slept the night before. Sometimes I'll be there long enough to watch the shadows creep from gate to gate and sometimes I won't even stop walking.

Monday: *It's lovely out today. The sun is warm, but the leaves are orange and I'm left shivering when the wind blows. Sunsets are showing up early with gifts of hot chocolate and blankets to pull over our laps. The world is nice to live in. Later there will be roast chicken and sweet beer and hours of laughter. The extra seat at the dining table is yours if you want it. I'll leave the front door unlocked.*

On Tuesday you get a moment's glance. I don't even step off the path.

Wednesday: *I've forgotten the lines of your face and I'm afraid I won't recognize you if I pass you on the street. You've been a ghost far longer than you were a living, breathing part of my life. The people I spend my days with have never met you, have never even seen a photo. They look at me strangely when I*

*mention coming here. I am beginning to feel crazy.*

On Thursday I busy myself in the world of the living. A long day spent selling cupcakes to immaculately groomed people on Bloor West blurs into catching up with old friends under a sunset in Riverdale Park. On Friday the family of the stranger who shares your name is visiting the grave I've been borrowing, so I circle the grounds slowly and decide it might be time to find a new cemetery. A year will pass before I find you again, this time in a different province.

There's also power in knowing. When hope crawled out of Pandora's box it screamed and screamed with perverted delight, jonesing to taste exactly the note of discord that rings in my throat when I say you are dead, because it's simpler than saying you're missing, or just gone. That rancid aftertaste is because I am afraid that I am lying. I don't know what else to call that fear but a vestige of hope.

People can understand death. They can just as easily understand a man walking away. It's harder to settle on any finite reaction to somebody disappearing because there is no finality. There isn't the luxury of putting anything at all to rest or of moving on when that ghost could walk back into your life at any moment, when the shock of

a body turning up—warm or cold—is an active threat. Not knowing leaves you indefinitely trapped in the jaws of tragedy with nothing to do but wait for a snap that may never come. Not knowing has me kneeling before graves of people I've never met.

You had been gone for years already when I tried to reach out with a Ouija board. Fatherless little

girls tend to be granted their eccentricities, and a fascination with ghosts was one of mine. We played in a park beside a graveyard in the middle of a summer night, me and a ragtag group of middle-schoolers. When the planchette failed to respond after we tried three different questions, the others were ready to move on to more gratifying forms of trouble.

But I made everybody say goodbye first, and slid the planchette to the bottom of the board myself when the spirits we all agreed were bullshit failed to do it on their own. Just in case, I said, telling myself the others were laughing with me. I was not aware that nobody else present believed that gone things, gone people, could really return. I had suggested we play in the park ostensibly because the streetlights were closer and the game relies on being able to read what the spirits spell out on the board. Truthfully, I was too afraid to play in the graveyard because I thought something or someone inside those gates might really hear us, might really come back. I didn't know it yet, but hope was there, tearing up and down on the swings across the park, screaming and screaming.

Someday I'm going to take a walk through a graveyard and the jaws will snap. Your body will be in the ground. Or maybe you'll finally stand up from where you've been crouching behind the headstones, giggling at my delivery of "Goodbye: version two hundred and sixty-four" to a dead stranger who shares your name.

---

*Courtney Buder lives on the East Coast of Canada. Their work appears or is forthcoming in Room magazine, the Queen's Quarterly and elsewhere. Find them on Instagram @courtneybuder.*



# Things Discovered and Un-

JENNIFER GOSSOO

*To prove my wolfishness, I shucked my skate shoes and went barefoot on the pine needles*



In the empty lot across the street from my house, which was a mobile like the other homes on Turner Avenue, Bailey took off her training bra and flung it in a birch tree.

The lot didn't look empty, which is why it hadn't been conquered by any kids yet. I walked our black lab after school some days (back then, Lower Nicola felt as safe as my backyard), 'round the cul-de-sac on Carrington, then back home past the little woodland between Dora Lee's and the

Joes'. My dog was the real discoverer; she'd gone tearing into the trees between the two mobiles (*do not let her pee in people's yards, missy!*), which is where I—we—stumbled on the thrilling evidence of *terra nullius*: deer pellets, Dubble Bubble wrappers, saskatoon bushes, Lucky cans and a copper carpet of birch leaves mouldering underfoot. I left my initials in the mud in lieu of a flag.

Everything brown and grey, and not even winter. It was October,

I think, because there were cider-skinned gourds in Mom's garden, and we were all in our big coats except for Bailey's little brother (but I knew he owned one because I'd seen his mom trying to wrangle him into it when I passed their house on Tuesday, which would have embarrassed him because I was Older and A Girl).

Most days, my brother Caleb and I had passed their driveway, crossed Aberdeen Road and cut through the pasture to the Nicola-Canford schoolyard (they called us Nicola-*Can't Afford*) before we saw Bailey and Cole running up Turner after the first bell. But sometimes the four of us met at the mouth of their driveway and walked together. Bailey and Cole were from *the United States of America*, which lent them an air of foreign glamour among us BC kids. Bailey should have been in grade 4 (*we say fourth grade in Utah*), but something about her birthday being in November had confused the adults, so she was the only nine-year-old in grade 3. I would have hated being older than the other kids in my grade, so I let Bailey hate me a little. When she and Cole were up on time, I let her walk a half-step in front of me to school and back. In our backyards on Saturdays, I submitted to serfdom under Queen Bailey's rule. And on the day I discovered the New Land across the street, I showed it to Bailey even before I showed Caleb. I wanted her to know that I had got there first, *but only by accident*.

Other than Bailey, I didn't know any girls who wore bras. The only specimens I'd seen in person were on the ladies in the Sears catalogue and hanging up in our laundry room: cream and white and black, and one the same shade of purple as the Pelican Nebula in my night skies book. Bailey's bra wasn't like my mom's or the Sears ladies'. The strip of material she fished out of her sleeve was the colour of an old tea towel, and I couldn't tell it was a bra straightaway

because it didn't have the bowl-shaped parts where boobs go.

"It itches." Bailey tossed the complaint over her shoulder with her bra like she moulted in birch groves all the time. Our brothers didn't look up; Caleb and Cole were too young for *female things*—especially female things their moms wore—to distract from the *male* business of moat-building. I continued to carve our kingdom's borders in the mud, seeing only the end of my stick and not the older girl's regal, reddening face or the pale shape in the tree. Bailey's bra seemed to me like a killed thing, a still-warm animal strung up in the cold air. I wanted to tear it down from the tree and bury it. I wanted Bailey to hide it back inside her sweater, secret and safe. While it hung there, it was my future flapping from the end of the branch, aggressively real and close.

I wouldn't need a bra until I was thirteen. Then the fat on my chest grew in dense—more like sinew than flesh. I would roll my breasts between my hands and flinch. Ever tender, ever growing cob-sized nodes that swelled and shrank, came and went, as did a tirelessly renewing fear, because a lump is a lump is *cystic tissue is a breast exam every three years, then every two after thirty, then every year after forty, because mammograms miss 50 percent of cancers in women with your degree of density*. I've considered a mastectomy. Over and Done With. Kids can't predict the decisions they'll grow to weigh, can't know about the genetic anomalies taking shape under our skins, because we're focussed on how to arrange our winter coats like buffalo hides over our teepee of bent birches (none of us could get permission to use an axe).

One of our games was Hunters and Wolves. Bailey and I sparred over who would play the hunted animal; the boys were happy

to kill either of us. I felt I made a better wolf than Bailey, with her bra and her American accent. To prove my wolfishness, I shucked my skate shoes and went barefoot on the pine needles. I'd got it into my head around age six that I would go barefoot as often as my mom would allow, which wasn't often enough to produce soles so calloused that not even hot asphalt or a gravel drive could daunt me. I would be a real *wild girl*. I was carrying the gene that day, but I made it to twenty-nine before my antibodies went feral and attacked the joints in my feet. My search history swung from *causes of pain ball of foot to sudden fatigue why? to anti-inflammatory supplements OTC*. I never got my callouses as thick as I wanted them anyway; my mom kept making me put my shoes back on.

What wolf lauds the hunter for sparing her life? What kid feels grateful for being born without defects? Was a functioning body not the exception, but the rule? It wouldn't have occurred in my herniated, eight-year-old brain to celebrate that I was born with the gene for rheumatoid arthritis and not myocarditis; with cystic breasts but not fibrosis; with a brain whose parts were intact, just not in all the right places. Adults were the unlucky species that got the Bad Stuff: black glasses and white canes, chunky hearing aids the colour of Juicy Fruit, crutches and knee braces and artificial hips and compression socks and pills in orange bottles. I ate a Flintstones vitamin every morning. It would be years before I heard the words Valium and Methotrexate and Chiari malformation.

Luckily, we weren't adults. We weren't even four Lower Nic' kids getting our good shoes dirty. We were First Peoples harvesting berries in imaginary handfuls to get us through the harsh Canadian winter—no, we

were toy soldiers come to life, like in that one movie—actually, this was Terabithia and I'm pretty sure I could hear the trolls coming. Which one of us would fall off the rope swing and die? We'd have to build a rope swing first.

Bailey and Cole must have had Bad Stuff waiting dormant in their bodies or futures, but I didn't see them again after grade 6 when I started going to middle school in town. I wonder what Bailey got? Everybody gets something. Ectopic pregnancy? Alcohol poisoning? An old baseball sprain that turned into tennis elbow? BPD? Something worse? The kid in the grade below me got cancer in her lymph nodes. The diabetic girl from camp didn't wake up from her coma. The boy I danced with at the grade 9 Snowball is paralyzed from the neck down. Maybe we hoped to stall Time by ditching our training bras and grow-into-it coats in the lot across the street. If we played hard enough and didn't come home for supper, maybe Life would stop making us *get used to things*. Maybe it would let us be wolves instead.

I adjusted my blue ski coat to make a respectable teepee wall, like my great-great-grandmother might have done with a skin. There's a photo of her in my auntie's album, young and grand-looking in an eagle-feather headdress, with beads dripping down her cheeks like tears. I wanted to be like her. I bet her feet were calloused as hell. She could probably run over broken glass and feel nothing. She probably didn't even feel fear.

---

*Jennifer Gossoo is a fourth-generation Métis hand-embroideress and writer from Merritt, BC, whose work has appeared in the Malahat Review and Freefall Magazine. In 2020, her fiction was selected by the Métis Elders Michif Language Revitalization Project Committee to teach Michif in Canadian elementary schools. She holds a BFA in Creative Writing from the University of Victoria.*



# FINDINGS

---



*Herring Moon, 2021, digital illustration, and Troll Queen, 2024, oil on wood, by Bronwyn Schuster. Herring Moon is the digital drawing of a two-story mural painted on Denman Island, BC, in 2021. The herring spawn is an important part of the local ecology, and the figure represents a hope for a protective and proactive relationship between humans and the environment. Troll Queen is part of a collection of paintings inspired by the Norwegian fairy tale East of the Sun and West of the Moon.*

---

## Imagining a Boundless God in the Bounds of the Dunya

SARAH O'NEAL

*From “The Oldest Language I Know” by Sarah O’Neal, part of El Ghourabaa: A Queer and Trans Collection of Oddities, edited by Samia Marsby and Eli Tareq El Bechelany-Lynch. Published by Metonymy Press in 2024. Sarah O’Neal is a writer and artist from the Bay Area, CA. Her writing has been published by the Institute for Palestine Studies, the Nation and Teen Vogue. When she is not writing, you can find her scheming about the end of empire, swimming laps or at [sarahadbiboneal.com](http://sarahadbiboneal.com).*

I don’t talk about this period of my life because I hate the inevitable questions. The surprise expressed

every time I share that wearing the hijab had always been my choice. That yes, a child can have that kind of agency. That it was not forced on me by conservative parents the questioner immediately imagines. That my mother resisted my decision to wear it in the beginning because she believed I was too young. Maybe there was wisdom in her pushback, but I am still grateful for my childhood courage. Even now, I turn to my younger self when I need a reminder of the bravery I am capable of.

As I was navigating the realities of Islamophobia while wearing the hijab, I was also dealing with the very real pressure to be a “good” Muslim girl. In high school, I was active in various groups for young politically minded Muslims. I organized interfaith spaces and tried to start dialogue about anti-Black racism within the community. I liked being part of spaces that got people to talk about what mattered. I liked being involved in pushing our community to be better. But this visibility came



---

with attention, attention I didn't want to receive. When I was sixteen, a family friend expressed interest in marrying me. He was in college at the time. I realized I couldn't keep pretending that I wasn't aware of the path I was being pushed on. I knew that I didn't want to get married, and I knew I was expected to. Maybe it was because I was raised by a single mother who constantly reminded me of the pitfalls of depending on a man, or maybe it was because I was slowly coming into my queerness, but I had no interest in marriage. The idea of committing myself to someone for life, when I didn't feel like I even knew who I was, felt like surrendering my freedom—my ability to create and choose a life for myself.

While all of this was unfolding, I was trying to make sense of my sexuality. The fact of my queerness started feeling unavoidable. I had crushes I could no longer ignore. There was a particular one that prompted me to come out to my brother, around the same time as the "proposal." My

brother and I attended different high schools but sometimes met up after school to go to the gym together. Coincidentally, the person that worked the front desks and scanned our IDs in the evening also went to my brother's high school. I would feel giddy about going to the gym because I knew there was a chance I would run into them. They were the coolest person in our suburban town. They rocked an undercut, wore vintage band tees, and their nail polish was always a little chipped from playing guitar. They were also Black and mixed and allegedly dating a girl at my brother's school. I was never confident enough to start up a real conversation, but I always made it a point to wish them a good night. One night, when we were walking home, I told my brother about my kind of, sort of, crush: "I think I might be queer." My brother took his time before responding. His pause seemed to last a whole block. "That makes sense," he said. Short, simple, and affirming. I've always been grateful for how graciously

he held that space for me. He didn't challenge me, or dismiss it as a phase, the way others later did. Instead, he seamlessly expanded his perception of me and we spent the rest of our walk home talking about my crush.

It's the rigidity of colonial structures, religious patriarchies, and white supremacy that requires us to contort ourselves into boxes that do not accommodate actual human lives. When I started asking about queerness in Islam, it became clear that people's perspectives were steeped in bigotry. When I asked my Sunday school teachers (always asking on behalf of an invented gay friend of course), I was told that the "lifestyle" would never be acceptable for a Muslim. But I needed evidence. So I asked various leaders and scholars if there was any clear evidence that queerness was indeed sinful in Islam. I remember being told by an imam I had looked up to throughout my adolescence that, at best, being queer could

be tolerated if kept extremely private and never "acted" upon. I remember walking away from that conversation feeling surprisingly let down and ashamed. I knew there was so much I didn't know, but I also knew these interpretations were myopic. I had to make a choice: to expand my heart to make room for what I felt, or keep it closed. The way I felt couldn't be nearly as haram as everyone made it out to be, because the desires I was grappling with felt freeing. They expanded my consciousness and made me feel like more was possible than what I had been raised to believe. Finally, I felt like there was a possibility of understanding myself that wasn't rooted in something being "wrong" with me. And I couldn't live with the regret of not taking the time and space to discover who I might be.

We are forced and pressured to shut off parts of ourselves. We cut off our desires, suppress our curiosity, deaden our connection to the erotic (Audre Lorde's definition), to make ourselves legible within these systems, to make our lives tolerable within these communities. But contending with queerness forces you to say *fuck that, I am choosing myself*. I am choosing this heart, this body, and this spirit over whatever idea of normalcy I have been taught. My queerness saved me. Being queer helped me see that either way, I was going to be judged, so my life might as well be on my terms.

While I love living my queerness outwardly, I also miss being identifiably Muslim. I thought if I stopped wearing the hijab, I would be free of expectation. I thought maybe the hijab was why I felt so pressured to perform a certain kind of womanhood. I didn't realize that pressure would morph and disguise itself everywhere I went. The hijab was never the problem; power structures that flourish on the subjugation of women are. The truth is, I felt honored to wear the hijab and represent Islam. Sure, I stood out. Sometimes I was even targeted. But I was never interested in assimilation. I was the daughter of a mixed Black American and an Amazigh Moroccan. I knew I didn't fit into the dominant white culture, and I had zero interest in contorting my spirit to try to. I liked being able to show people that Islam could be practiced in many different ways, and my approach was just one version of what it could look like.

Sometimes I imagine what it would feel like to wear the hijab again. I miss feeling like I am part of a collective experience. That I belong

## SOUNDS OF REBELLION

*A list of alternative and punk bands from Rebel Girl: My Life as a Feminist Punk by Kathleen Hanna (Ecco/HarperCollins). Compiled by Patty Osborne.*

Babes in Toyland  
Bikini Kill  
Circle Jerks  
D.O.A.  
The Exploited  
Fitz of Depression  
Frightwig  
The Go-Betweens  
Go Team  
Halo of Flies  
Jane's Addiction  
Matrimony  
Mecca Normal  
The Miracle Workers  
The Pandoras  
The Raincoats  
Screaming Trees  
The Slits  
Some Velvet Sidewalk  
Team Dresch  
The Troublemakers  
Viva Knievel  
Zodiac Mind Warp

somewhere. I hate that not wearing the hijab leads non-Muslims to think I resent Islam. I hate how easily people equate hijab with a lack of choice. I hate that people assume violence against queer people is innate to Islam, somehow overlooking all the anti-trans and queerphobic violence that American culture is steeped in. I also hate that when I've shared these sentiments with some Muslims, they assume I want to return to how things were. That I have finally come to my senses and outgrown this "phase." Herein lies the myth. When I wore hijab and visibly represented my Muslim beliefs, I was consistently made to feel like I was being manipulated and controlled. When I stopped wearing hijab, I was made to feel the same way, just for different reasons, and by different people. Either way, whatever I decide, people are eager to make me feel like my beliefs are not my own, and that I am being oppressed.

So much of my relationship to queerness has delicate roots in Islamic theology. Particularly, the pursuit of truth through curiosity. I once had a teacher at Sunday school tell me that Allah SWT\* is as merciful as you imagine them. So if you imagined a punitive, punishing god, that was your god. But if you imagined a merciful creator, boundless in their mercy and understanding, that was your god. It was a choice, the ultimate exercise in creative imagination. Since then, I have made it a practice to imagine Allah SWT to be as merciful and understanding as I need them to be. Because Allah SWT could fill you with fear and compliance or with courage and hope. And if Allah's mercy is so boundless, then why should I be subject to the limited imaginations of others?

It was always made clear to me that Allah SWT was beyond gender, beyond race, beyond any social constructions humans use to control and subjugate one another. So in order to truly believe, one must be able to stretch their imagination beyond what feels possible. This act of imagining may have very well been my initiation into thinking beyond binaries, to the infinite possibilities that exist outside of their restrictions. My experience of Islam has also been about accepting the fleeting nature of this world, this dunya, a lesson I try to integrate into my life; nothing is permanent. This idea eases my anxieties about earthly concerns by grounding me in the fact that all of this is in constant flux. Similarly, my queerness has taught me about compassion and accepting the limitless

possibilities of our experience. Wherever there is a wall, a border, a binary, you will find queer folks, especially Black queer folks, imagining a universe beyond it. This is how I have come to understand salvation in this lifetime. In so many ways, Islamic theology is what prepared me to live authentically, by sparking a desire within me to seek the truth and try my best to embody it in my daily life—contradictions and all. True freedom is being able to accept the limitations of this dunya we find ourselves in, not to consign ourselves to inaction but, rather, as a tool to sharpen our imaginations and build realms beyond this one.

A few days ago, I saw a man wearing a gorgeous cream-colored Senegalese thawb. Something about him, so radiant in line waiting for his morning coffee, brought me to tears. When I saw him, I remembered that it was Jummah. A Muslim holy day. A prayer I haven't participated in for years. I was struck by how homesick I felt. Not for my birthplace, but for the community that raised me, that loved me in all of the complicated and messy ways they knew how. I wanted to thank this man, with his immaculate thawb, because even though I was sitting at least five meters away from him, I knew he smelled of musk, and that he dressed himself with a gentle care and attention reserved for Jummah. And in a few hours, he would make his way to a prayer hall, surrounded by people wrapped in their culture's celebration of the holy day. Islam has taught me that at its best, reverence for the creator can help you practice loving and caring for yourself and your community—Allah's creation. I wanted this man to know that his celebration of Jummah brought me back to myself. To Allah. To the sweetest parts of what I was raised to believe. That Allah's mercy is limitless. And that our one true duty is to struggle for justice and pursue the truth.

When I left the community that raised me, I was convinced I had to leave Islam too. It took years before I gave myself permission to return to the oldest language I know.

\*Abbreviation for "Subhanabu wa ta'ala" or "the most glorified, the most high."



# Panopticon of Minuscule Life

CLARA DUPUIS-MORENCY

*From Sadie X by Clara Dupuis-Morency, translated by Aimee Wall. Published by Book\*bug Press in 2023. Clara Dupuis-Morency is the author of Mère d'invention. She also works as a translator and is the mother of twin girls. Aimee Wall's translation of Sadie X was a finalist for the Governor General's Literary Award for Translation. She lives in Montréal.*

Régnier was a physician working on research in France. During his semester on a fellowship at the Université francophone de la Montagne, he was appointed head of his first laboratory in Marseille. Régnier studied viruses.

## X

He began the first class by presenting, without any preamble, an inventory of everything viruses lack and everything that therefore disqualifies them from the category of living thing. His voice sounded rusty, as if he didn't use it often, his hands lifted from the table in jagged gestures, Sadie remembers it perfectly. A virus cannot be divided. A virus has no ribosomes, the little machines that read genetic code. A virus cannot translate its own code into activity. A virus does not reproduce by itself. A virus is not a cell. Régnier's nervous tics sent waves of unease through the classroom. Then, his litany of negations created a cadence. He persisted, holding that dissonant note. Régnier was not a handsome or particularly elegant man, but he had a distinctly erratic way of projecting himself into space, and the inventory of missing qualities he recited in a jittery, syncopated rhythm unsettled something in the composition of the air. There was an electricity in his words that disrupted the consistency of the present.

From one class to the next, Régnier's negative taxonomy became a poetic scansion that subtracted more and more with each utterance. He excluded more and more qualities of the living from the virus, creating for the students a continually diminishing figure. They began to expect that by the end of the semester they would arrive at a pure and essential core, from which nothing further could be stripped away. Some students grew impatient, rejecting this stratagem, denouncing

his pedagogical methods. In order to follow his thinking, Régnier's students had to agree from the start to step out onto precarious foundations and submit to a certain conceptual vertigo. During the last class, partially vindicating his detractors with a final middle finger, he came to the conclusion that a conclusion was impossible. What they were looking for was elsewhere. From one class to the next, over the course of this journey of privation, the students' very idea of absence, of lack, was reversed, overturned. And it was then that Régnier shared his precious idea, the final nail in the coffin.

*The virus is not the viral particle,  
that little box we use to describe our idea  
of what a virus is.*

*A virus is what happens when it leaves the box and  
enters the cell. A virus is a relationship.*

It was all there already—the major original idea of his work, the initial intuition that would keep the kaleidoscope of thought turning, remixing and reassembling the same elements that were all already there.

This was how Sadie came to Science. Against the grain. She first encountered the structures and foundations of the discipline through their destabilization. A whole world of theory opened up to her in a state of seismic disequilibrium. But she'd accepted it; it was clear that she had already accepted all of it. She had no frame of reference by which to evaluate Régnier's method, but she was struck by the way his thinking was contaminated by its subject: he thought infectiously. She had never seen anything like it, the way he let his observations seep into the core of the very notions he needed to draw on to make sense of what he saw. A tightrope walker of the intellect.

In that grim classroom, where a few narrow windows—mere slits, really—looked out onto the interior courtyard of a rather carceral panopticon, Régnier created an opening to a dimension Sadie had never imagined, a minuscule world that evades our gaze and yet is swarming everywhere among us. In that rumble of the living, Sadie discovered a mode of thinking in which the concepts themselves came alive.

She wrote down everything she could manage to catch as he lectured, she took notes ardently, her

notebooks becoming the archive of frequently incomplete sentences she'd spend the next decades meditating on, decoding. She wrote furiously, wanting to get it all down. But her notes, hasty and rushed, could never quite capture everything. Her notebooks—top quality, always impeccable, governed by a clear and efficient transcription system in which meticulous, irreproachable handwriting was carefully aligned and proportioned—gradually filled with barely recognizable letters, disfigured by the avidity of her mind. The fear of letting words slip by unrecorded intensified. She'd had this obsession since childhood, a preoccupation that had led to the development of her efficient transcription technique. But in Régnier's classroom, her system was of no help. This was something else, and it had to be contained. A new world of knowledge required a new language of gestures. As she wrote, she could glimpse in her peripheral vision the way

her scribbles were sullyng the beautiful pages of her notebook, but she didn't have time to linger over her uneven, and before long disgraceful, handwriting. Over the course of the semester, her movements intensified as she adapted to the unpredictable rhythm of Régnier's speech. Her hand grew less concerned with properly closing a letter's loops, it gained confidence, and she soon took a certain pleasure in the chaos of her poor handwriting.

Many of her classmates could not keep up. They sat silently in their seats, out of their depth. So it fell to her—she could keep up, she wouldn't give up—to record the high-wire act of ideas. Sadie had the growing impression that Régnier was speaking to her and her alone.



---

## Not Just a Five-Letter Word

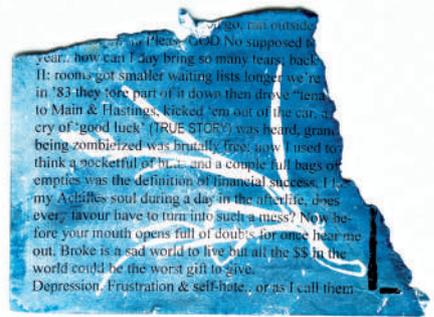
FERRON FOISY

*From "IT'S ABOUT TIME OR WHEN IS ENOUGH ENOUGH" by Ferron Foisy. Posted on Facebook on December 12, 2024. Ferron Foisy is a trailblazing lesbian folk singer-songwriter. Born of Cree, Ojibwa and French Canadian ancestry, Ferron taught herself guitar and began writing songs in her teens. Her work has a strong feminist perspective and speaks to the concerns of the women's movement.*

I took off my watch. The one that measures pulse and pressure and steps. And time. I shoved my weight scale to the back closet and pulled down the wall calendar. I disabled all other clocks in my house and said, finally, I am fucking done. I am done with driving and striving and craving and holding. I have spent my whole life in these modes, thinking that everyone was guided by the longing to be better, the longing to be useful, to be creative and kind. Why, minutes before I'd go onstage, I would say to the invisible energies around me, *Please USE me for the best of outcomes*, and I would walk onstage with faith and trust.

Then the orange baboon came to power. But not by his own self. And my world turned upside

down and, in a way, I no longer wanted to be part of the human race. It had been a stretch anyway considering where I'd come from . . . childhood of violent abuse to a country of violent abuse. And there I was in Florida with cacti and sand fleas and home possession, defined by flood zones and eight-year-olds from the housing projects running amok with drugs and false bravado. And later a lateral move to Tucson, Arizona, where the car steering wheel could blister my hands if I ventured out after 10:00 a.m. And then right in the middle of Trump and COVID-19 and the wasteland of the dust and grime, I'd hear the sounds of dogs fighting in the long hot nights while men bet their fates on those dog races, for a promise of maybe settling in the lush green prospects of San Diego. Right in the middle of far away sirens and the blue light of cop cars busting the neighbour next door, in the middle of desert windstorms blowing plastic up against chain link fences, right in the middle of masks and COVID-19 lines and showers outside, my best friend died! I mean dead. Dead and gone and for six weeks I lay on a couch, a coffin of my own making and, as soon as I could, I got in my car, drove the three thousand miles to come home to Canada—specifically the west coast of British Columbia, precisely Saturna Island. Then I more or less slept, drank and was ill for about a year.



It is possible that people, en masse, can break a heart. The seasons changed, the leaves turned, the rains came and I went to a pig roast, a prawn fest, another pig roast, watching all the people on the island, some known to me and some not, curious as to how they became my family, my reservation, my village of choice. On Canada Day, almost a year after coming home, I went to the famous Saturna Island lamb barbecue to serve ice cream cones at the ice cream stand. And while everyone stood and sang the national anthem, some with hands over their hearts, I broke down

weeping, sobbing really. After all my years of living in the USA, to hear the song of my home broke me down and how I wanted to believe that kindness did exist and sorry was not just a five-letter word. And while the grasses grew slick and golden in the hot July sun, I began to sew bags and quilts and placemats and napkins in passionate earnest, giving everything away almost as soon as I'd snipped the last thread. And then one afternoon a heaviness came back into the middle of my day and, right in the middle of sewing a bag together, I stood up, turned off the machine and



PTSD has all but calmed down. No more jumping at every noise, of sensing the mean bully jumping out from any bush or turn in the road. I cannot only sit all the way back on a couch now but I sometimes nap in and out all through the day and night. I've lost the ability—no, the

## OBSERVATIONS FROM A VISIT TO THE MUSEUM OF SAINT BARBARA

*From Little Fortified Stories by Barbara Black. Published by Caitlin Press in 2024. Barbara Black writes short and flash fiction, poetry and libretti. Little Fortified Stories received an Honourable Mention in the 2024 Royal Dragonfly Book Awards. She lives in Victoria, BC, where she gardens and rides her trusty Triumph motorcycle.*

1. St. Barbara of Nicomedia, my holy namesake, offers protection from lightning, kitchen explosions and mid-life detonations.
2. We regret that the saint's head and left hand are missing.
3. Only when Saint Barbara was headless did she gain authority. In what way does this make sense?
4. Confined in her tower, she painted blood-splashed canvases with just one hand. Fire in its many manifestations. The first small, quivering flame. Voracious bonfires. Conflagrations of the heart that consumed entire landscapes. The saint herself, however, is said to be fire-retardant.
5. Alternate legends say Saint Barbara carried her head in a goat skin purse and applied lipstick to her pallid lips. This is apocryphal.
6. Once you are a martyr you are no longer a woman.
7. No one ever dared call her "Barb" for the flesh-tearing implications.
8. With St. Barb by your side, the storm will have passed and the lightning vanished before you could say *Dad's your killer*.
9. The saint's right hand is kept in the Monastery of Saint Michael in Kyiv. The glove covering the hand is changed frequently. Pieces are given to pilgrims. It is so quiet in the crypt you can hear the heartbeat of the guard who stands vigil, his fixed eyes like two steady coals.
10. Many admiring electricians, miners, explosive experts and laymen who do not understand fireworks drop by the saint's tower to squeeze prayers into the building's crevices. The paper flutters in the wind like captive birds' wings.
11. The saint's tower has three windows: one to see god; the next to look down on Van Eyck's masons toiling to finish the never-finished tower; and the third window to cast her glance toward the hard edge of the world.

desire—to read, as I'd have to want to know what happens at the end but I don't care so much now. I used to read everything in sight. It just seems so arduous now. Instead, I play word games. When my scores are good the game tells me I'm fantastic or spectacular. The lowest compliment I've received in months is, You're very good, and I'm thrilled with that assessment. Because maybe then, for a moment, I forget that I am ultimately part of a generation who sold our souls for things we thought we couldn't live without, wanted for ourselves, for our kids, for a retirement, for a future not yet attainable. For a brand new car, a trip to Spain, an expensive pet, a hop to Vegas or a venture capital investment. It was while living in Michigan, putting together a flannel quilt for my sister, glued to the screen for the Kavanaugh Supreme Court hearings and Trump and all that entailed, that I saw that we, our generation, were as ensnared as a cat with a ball of wool. Or a pup bounding into a pile of clothes fresh out of the dryer. The comfort of it all. And the shame of it all.

Soon I'm going on tour with Holly Near and San Francisco's own political dance troupe, Dance Brigade. A women's peace tour. Last time we all toured together we were raving against Pinochet and Oliver North, and Chile and all the dead buried in the coliseum walls. We knew that America was deeply involved in all those coups but what an inconvenient truth, to be sure. With everything going on now, Nixon and Watergate seem almost blasé. And that's what time and decades do—they take the wind out of our sails, convince us that we are simply misremembering. Like when my parents said, *We don't hit our kids*, but there I was, battered and in a foster home. So yeah, I've taken off my watch and put the calendars face down along with family pictures and the Ferron and Holly posters. Sure, we were singing for our lives and for freedoms we couldn't quite attain. I'm reminded of socialists and communists of the '40s finally walking away from it all in the '50s, losing themselves in the comfort of a cul-de-sac. In small increments things change but then, like the tide, drift back onto themselves. The world changes us and I'm here now on this island 'til death and I intend to be honest and true but in the smallest of ways, with very little urge to drive my truth home to others other than . . . I may just be part of the generation that lost its way, or gave it away, or let life have

its way. In Chile, with the Sandinistas, in Argentina, Venezuela. In Iraq. In Afghanistan and the rest of the Middle East, Ukraine, in Israel and Gaza, in so many American cities, in flooding Spain and undernourished Somalia and in my own human heart. But everyday the sun sets along a big ocean sky and I come down to the pub for beer at beer o'clock like a good expat and take photos of the horizon and another sunset and send them out to my scattered and somewhat shattered friends. Look at you! The sun exclaims. You are nothing without hope. Look at the hope! Dig in because it is there. And if I do not hang my head too low I can

see it shimmering through the trees, over the water, see it in the eyes of our young, in their craving for authenticity. But something's gotta give. Something has to give . . . not take. That is what's required. And so maybe Monday, after all you brave hearts head back into the details of your lives with its own particular pain and small mercies, I will walk back into my sewing room and pull out a piece of generous and colourful cloth and bend it and stitch it into an act of love and offer it to the beauty of the day, admitting that hope can hurt but there is no other way.



---

## How to Find Your Most Beautiful Parking Lot

LEILA MARSHY

*From My Thievery of the People by Leila Marshy. Published by Baraka Books in 2025. Leila Marshy is of Palestinian-Newfoundland parentage, which explains a lot. She has worked for the Palestinian Red Crescent Society in Cairo, Gaza and Montréal. She is the author of The Philistine (Linda Leith Publishing, 2018).*

1. **Budgeting: Curb your spending.** At the entrance to the bank you see toes poking out of someone's boots as you stomp the snow off your own.

"Bonjour," an old man says, holding the door open. His other hand is stretched out for money.

The sky has just gone dark, and the kids are outside hitting the stop sign with chunks of ice (with instructions to yell if they see the bus coming) and now this guy wants your money. Except for the occasional toonie you save for the laundry, you rarely carry money. You're only there because kids need cash for their school bake sale. You pull your mitts off at the *guichet*, and two twenties flutter stupidly out of the slot. A glance at your balance makes your insides freeze. The old guy holds the door open as you leave. He tries to make eye contact, it's his best marketing technique, but you look down and barely mumble

thanks. A group of teenagers come in to warm up. "Bonjour," he says. The girls snicker. You vow to give money to the next person who asks, but no one asks. When you find some coins a week later you feel rich.

2. **Driving: Adjust your mirrors.** A standard transmission is a thing of beauty. But you can't appreciate that. He yells at every gear shift so you miss out on the oily way it's supposed to move from second to third. You don't pay attention to how the engine coils around itself and, like a springtime crocus, comes to life. You hold your breath while the car crests the hill, the honking behind you competing with a noisy formation of geese overhead. They are returning north, honking and honking. You want to race them. He makes urgent noises beside you. But the geese, the geese, they are glorious. You hear the crunch before you feel the impact. You lurch forward and the horn goes off when your head hits it. The geese continue on. He gets out to negotiate with the driver. The two men flap their arms wildly.
3. **Parenting: Record the milestones.** You count to ten, but the kids don't listen. The sink is overflowing with suds, the table still needs clearing, but he's already on his laptop. He has clients now, he says, and they expect him to be working all the time. The house smells like lemon lime and its toxic derivative. The kids start going at each other, furniture

their best ammunition. One cushion, then another. *Thump. Thump.* He yells but not at them, at you. Get them to quiet down, he says. I'm *working*. The word is like a weapon. The kids hear it too. You're not like Léa's mom who's always early. Not like Vanessa's mom who bakes cookies. Not like Felix's dad who goes on every field trip and writes the

goddamn newsletter. What kind of asshole does that, you think. Now the boys are crying, both of them. You hesitate: you want to scoop them up, pour their livewire bodies into pyjamas, kiss them. But everything you might have had went into the sink, down the drain. *Tabarnac*, he swears, as you herd them to their rooms. No story tonight.

## APRIL BABIES: DROP DIAMOND, ADOPT DOORKNOB

*An alternative birthstone article published on July 26, 1925, in The Indianapolis Star, also known as IndyStar. List found by Kelsea O'Connor.*

There is no reason we should go on forever with our present set of birthstones, so I am offering a couple of new lists for public consideration. These will not be official until they are adopted by the International Association of Jewellers and Stone Masons at their Asbury Park convention sooner or later, but you may adopt one of my birthstones as your own tentatively and unofficially in the meantime, if you are disgusted with your present one.

### BIRTHSTONE LIST NO. 1

January ..... Olive Seed  
 February ..... Rock Salt  
 March ..... Hailstone  
 April ..... Lemon Drop  
 May ..... Concrete  
 June ..... Elk's Tooth  
 July ..... Beer Bottle  
 August ..... Brickbat  
 September ..... Hard-boiled Egg  
 October ..... Pee-wee  
 November ..... Coal  
 December ..... Wood

### BIRTHSTONE LIST NO. 2

January ..... Moth Ball  
 February ..... Shoe Button  
 March ..... Soap  
 April ..... Doorknob  
 May ..... Rivet  
 June ..... Brimstone  
 July ..... Ice  
 August ..... Rivet  
 September ..... Glass Eye  
 October ..... Bran  
 November ..... Tapioca  
 December ..... Slag

#### 4. **Shopping: Make a list before you leave the house.**

He says it will be a quick stop but you know better. He likes the oversize carts that can be steered with the touch of a well-placed finger. Up and down the aisles you follow. He tosses in clothes, frozen meats, cereal boxes, garden equipment, a toaster. Extra-large slots, big enough for four bagels. He spends money like a magician; this is not the magic you married him for. You find a swinging garden chair, the kind with a canvas overhang, and shut your eyes. The massive klieg lights are thirty feet up and they buzz like hovering locusts. He likes to say *success is just around the corner* at every aisle. You always hope it means no more shopping. But it means more shopping. You feel sick. An hour later he retraces his steps calling your name, but what you hear is his embarrassment and anger. You keep one foot on the ground, easing the swing back and forth, back and forth. Row by row the lights shut down with loud *thwanks*. By the time you get out, the parking lot is empty and the wind sighs through your hair like fingers. Empty of cars, of shoppers, of time, the parking lot is beautiful. You don't want to leave, ever.

#### 5. **Healthy living: Cook simple meals.**

He's late again, and that's just how it's going to be. You don't dare text or work yourself up about it. He's got ambitions, goals, new clients, he's doing it for you, can't you understand that? Evidently not. You eat your dinner after the kids go to bed. Then you eat his. This might teach him something about hunger, you think. Then you throw up.

#### 6. **Cellphone etiquette: Do not talk about personal details in public.**

You were lucky to get on the bus. Standing tucked in behind the driver you can't help but lean over two older women. Passengers jostle your backpack so you bring it round front, almost in the women's faces. You mumble apologies. They

trade looks. Your phone starts trembling and you scrounge through every pocket and of course it's in the last one. At this moment the bus screeches to a stop and the bag crunches into the four breasts of the two women. You understand the sound of swearing, even in Portuguese. As for him, he's mad. You can tell from the first word, the way he slows his speech, e-nun-ci-a-ting ev-ery syll-a-ble like when you first met and neither of you could speak the other's language. You hold the phone away from your ear because now he is screaming. The Portuguese ladies stop talking. How the hell is he supposed to pick up the kids when he *told* you he had a late meeting and he has to stay at work and it's halfway across town and how do you expect him to get anything done if he has to get to the school by five o'clock and why can't you do it you're not doing anything you're just, what, writing, right? You can't call that a job, he says. You could tell him you're already on your way, but you don't. You could also tell him that you know he doesn't have a meeting. The driver slams the brakes again and your backpack rushes ahead and lands squarely in the first

woman's face. She's not worried though, and pats her lap telling you to rest it there. They smile gently, the two old ladies, their eyes twinkling with some kind of understanding.

7. **Stand-up comedy: Use your life as inspiration.** He doesn't look up from his laptop. It's good you're thinking of getting a job now that the kids are both in school, he says. If you tell him what you are looking for he can help, that's his specialty, and you don't even have to pay him. Yet, he grins. You remember when that smile was actually a smile. But you tell him you've already found a job—in Ottawa. You tell him you're going without him, just you and the kids. He doesn't hear that last part, but Ottawa? Ha! he scoffs, Québec should have separated when it had the chance. What do you think you're doing, he asks, separating? Yes, I am separating, you say, I am separating. Then you laugh and laugh and laugh. It's the funniest thing you've said in a long, long time.



---

## Whole Man Removal Services

SHASHI BHAT

*From Death by a Thousand Cuts by Shashi Bhat. Published by McClelland & Stewart in 2024. Shashi Bhat is the author of three books, most recently the story collection, Death by a Thousand Cuts, longlisted for the Giller Prize. She was a finalist for the 2022 Governor General's Award for fiction.*

Mike clicks through Facebook. Twitter. Instagram. CBC. CNN. *New York Times*. This takes about three minutes. He opens Reddit. Navigates to r/AmItheAsshole. Sorts by hottest posts. He reads about a girl who baked a triple-layer chocolate ganache cake for her own birthday and then her dad ate the whole thing and refused to apologize because nobody told him not to eat the cake. Then he reads about a woman who let her brother and his wife and kids move into her two-bedroom

apartment for free, but now the brother and family are demanding she give them the master bedroom because it's bigger.

He scrolls down past a couple of dull ones about household division of labour and finances (a very common theme), until he sees a headline that makes his chest tighten. His chair stops spinning as he reads: *My boyfriend keeps grabbing my breasts. AITA?*

He glances over at Prish, then adjusts the screen away from her. He opens the post and starts to read through the text. Initially, he's relieved—she didn't write this. It's just a coincidence. The ages are different, for one: *My (30F) boyfriend (31M) keeps grabbing my breast whenever we're hanging out . . . He (26M) and Prish (25F) are younger than this Reddit couple. He does it when we're watching Netflix or when I'm cooking—he kind of just reaches around me when I'm not expecting it . . .* This part does sound like them, though. One time she was stirring pasta sauce with a ladle in her hand when he came up behind her and squeezed. She was so startled she screeched, and

the pasta sauce splashed everywhere. He remembers laughing loudly. He remembers her fury: her face contorting, struggling to spit out a feeling she couldn't seem to express out loud; how she flung the scoop end of the ladle at him and got sauce on his shirt and then he was pissed, too.

*I've been trying to set boundaries, but he doesn't seem to respect them . . . Would Prish use the word boundaries? He doubts it. I feel like I need some kind of protective armour. Like a chest plate. I've started bringing my clothes into the bathroom with me when I shower and putting my bra on before I leave the bathroom just in case . . . Prish has been wearing bras around the house, but Mike thought it was one of her body insecurity things. She has even been wearing a bra to bed; more than once, he has taken it upon himself to unhook the latch through her T-shirt while she is lying there falling asleep, with her back to him.*

The post continues: *I teach kids, and our curriculum has all this new stuff about bodily autonomy. We're supposed to tell them, "Don't let others touch you without your permission," and I'm like, I can't even teach my own adult boyfriend not to do this!*

Okay. He doesn't know why she bothered to change their ages.

He scrolls down to find the ones calling Prish the asshole. Sure, he knows lots of people will say he's the asshole, but there will be lots on his side too, and they will tell her to lighten up. Sure, he has to scroll down further than he would like to find these responses.

*I don't see what the big deal is. You need to reciprocate. Grab his butt once in a while.*

*Yeab, man!* thinks Mike.

*My boyfriend does this every couple of hours.*

*See, it's just part of being in a normal relationship,* thinks Mike.

*Let him have this. We're in a pandemic. It's therapeutic.*

*Exactly. Like a stress ball,* thinks Mike.

*I do this to my girlfriend whenever I know it will bug her. Also during sex. Sometimes those two times overlap.*

*Funny and true,* thinks Mike.

*That's what women are there for.*

*Hmm,* thinks Mike. *Hang on.*

Okay, he has psyched himself up and will now read the NTAs. He scrolls haphazardly, saving the top comments for last.

*Throw the whole man out.* This one has a link to a GIF showing a garbage truck with *WHOLE MAN REMOVAL SERVICES* painted on its side.

*Why do we let anonymous voters decide what is forgivable and what isn't?* wonders Mike.

*Yeet him into the sun.*

Mike groans. Why do we outsource and crowd-source our morals?

Tell him he doesn't have consent, and this is sexual assault.

Oh, come on, thinks Mike.

He scrolls to the top. The post has over a thousand upvotes and counting. Below it, so many responses thread down that he cannot see where they end.

*My boyfriend grabbed my boob when we were at the farmers market and I was buying caramel corn from a nice old lady. I don't think she noticed, but . . . I was so embarrassed.*

*My husband does this, too. Whenever he feels like it. I don't know how to get him to stop. I look him in the eye and tell him directly to stop and that it makes me uncomfortable. He never stops.*

*My ex used to do this. Then I woke up one night and he was groping me while I slept. He knew I had taken my prescription sleeping pill, and he had removed my Pj bottoms. I don't know what he would've done if I hadn't woken up . . .*

Mike scrolls and scrolls, the votes urging him on like a divining rod. His pulse spikes. His right leg starts to jiggle in his chair.

He closes the Reddit window and turns back to Prish, dressed in her chaste and brightly coloured Zoom teaching outfit as she leads her six-year-olds through the "moving and grooving" gym routine she learned from YouTube. He knows the routine so well by now he could stand up and do it along with them. Prish rotates a pretend hula hoop around her hips, and all of a sudden this seems inappropriate to him, her movements taking on a grotesque momentum. He can't hear her because of the headphones, but he sees her mouthing, "One! Two! Three!" and he imagines the six-year-old voices chiming in with her. Maybe their dads are watching, too, off screen. Acid spills into Mike's throat. He can taste the recycled black coffee he has been drinking all morning on an empty stomach. Distantly, he can hear his co-worker speaking from within the vacuum of sound, as though from outer space—"Mike . . . are you still there?"



*Give Geist.  
Get love.*



**UNDER THE BELL CURVE**  
Unhappily Married / Bling Around with Crayfish / King of the Chihuahuas / Casual Encounters



**ACTS OF APPEARANCE**  
FORCES OF NATURE / FORBIDDEN METADADA / ROAD TRIP WITH CUPID / MARRIAGE POEMS

Take advantage of the *Geist* gift offer: give your loved ones the year-long gift of *Geist*—that's three issues of the Canadian magazine of ideas and culture, delivered right to their door.

Order today using the handy form on the other side.

**GEIST**

FACT + FICTION • NORTH of AMERICA

**YOUR INFO:**

Please start my own subscription, and count it as **my first gift**.

I AGREE TO PAY \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ subscriptions.

Cheque enclosed     Visa     MasterCard

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Credit Card # \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Prov \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Sign cards and mail directly to recipient(s):

from: \_\_\_\_\_

**GIVE TO:**

NEW GIFT     RENEWAL

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Prov \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**GIVE TO:**

NEW GIFT     RENEWAL

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Prov \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**GIVE TO:**

NEW GIFT     RENEWAL

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Prov \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

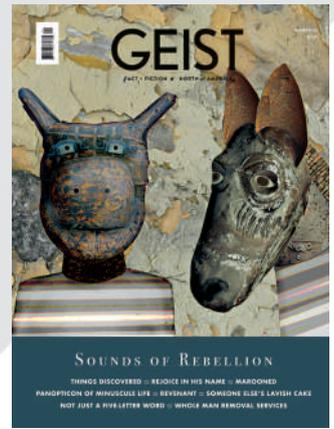
**US & International: add \$15 per subscription for postage.**

Geist does not share phone numbers and email addresses but we sometimes share snail mail lists with other like-minded organizations. Check here if you do not wish us to share your address.



FILL OUT  
THIS  
FORM

...and give  
the gift of  
Geist!



**YOUR OFFER**

**\$25**  
each

**TWO OR MORE  
SUBSCRIPTIONS**

2 Gifts = \$50  
3 Gifts = \$75  
4 Gifts = \$100

**\$30**  
each

**ONE  
SUBSCRIPTION**

Your own or a gift

Note: gift rates apply to one-year subs only.  
Postage and tax included.

**MAIL THIS  
FORM TO**

GEIST  
#210 - 111 W. Hastings St.  
Vancouver, BC V6B 1H4

**OR GIVE  
GEIST NOW**

call 1-888-434-7834  
email subs@geist.com  
go to [geist.com/gift](http://geist.com/gift)

**GEIST**

FACT + FICTION • NORTH of AMERICA

# Someone Else's Lavish Cake

MISHA SOLOMON

## Meditations in an Emergency

*after Frank O'Hara*

Am I to bring a child into this world? Or find one in the world already?

Each time I look at a screen something new is aflame (sometimes the screen itself), but maybe that's how people used to feel upon unrolling their morning paper.

Why should I starve myself of this? Why don't I take a forkful of someone else's lavish cake?

I am the greatest father who never lived. All I do is sit around and wait to take my child to their activity.

Even trees mock me! Good heavens, I'm allergic to their gametes, aren't I? I'm just attacked by breeding every time I leave the house.

However, I have never tried to let myself be germinated by a tree. To hold in the sneeze so that the pollen can find some flower deep within my guts and make a sapling. A tree is slow to grow: I could live my life and then, when I am ready to depart, the crossbreed could erupt. I'd get to live forever, my skull perched upon my child's topmost crown of branches. And I'd be dead, so I'd never have to worry about all the burning.

To my colleague Ernest,  
for his eyes only,  
in response to his confidential queries,  
1934

Your reading of this letter is predicated upon your having safely arrived home, which is predicated upon the țuică not having completely overwhelmed your ability to walk. The țuică also filled you with questions, which rendered me uncharacteristically speechless. I'd like to blame the țuică, but I was

having such fun watching you imbibe that I simply forgot to drink. No, it seems you've found a way to shut me up, without having to stuff anything in my mouth. You asked, and when you asked your eyes shone and I saw in them the earnestness—ha!—

the Earnestness of a younger you. You asked why I liked you, or in fact you asked why I was wasting my time with you, and when I rolled my eyes, you rephrased, but the reason I didn't answer isn't because I don't know the reasons. I know the reasons. I like you with all of my senses.

I like the way you look, your skin shaded brown with the persistence of your pilosity. I like the way you look looking at me, your being brimming with a hunger so different from the fanged appetite I've seen in other men, more like the hunger of an old, old dog, if you'll forgive me,

who has lost all his teeth, yet cannot wait to gum his meagre meal. Moving down the face, I like the way you smell, onions just beginning to sweat in hot butter, the gentle liquorice of dill, and once your clothes are off, the forest moss after a rain.

I like the way you taste, your salty neck, your briny  
cock, you're blushing now if you weren't already,  
the sweetened dairy of each toe. I'm a gentleman, so I'll  
speak not of your jism. I like the way you sound,

especially when your lips are very close to my ear  
and I hear so much in the silence of your breath.  
I like the way you feel, like cornstarch mixed with water,  
solid between my fingers but threatening to come apart.

The reason for my silence lies in the secret encoding of this letter.  
It's a very simple code in fact: simply replace each use of "like"  
with "love," including in the following phrase: I like you far too much  
for any time we spend together to be anything near waste.

This would be a lovely place to end the letter, but I feel  
compelled to answer your other query. Yes, I have been with gentle men.  
I know you well enough to know there's some reason that you asked,  
but I don't yet know you well enough to know what that reason is. So all I'll say

is that there's something about their foreskin that makes them seem  
more masculine, at first, but then leaves you with the feeling that it's quite  
coquettish how they hide themselves behind a sheath of skin, like a schoolgirl  
giggling behind her hand after sending a note to a boy she likes.

---

*Misha Solomon is a homosexual poet in and of Tiobtià:ke/Montréal. He is the author of two chapbooks, FLORALS (above/ground press, 2020) and Full Sentences (Turret House Press, 2022). His work has appeared in Best Canadian Poetry 2024, Arc Poetry Magazine, CV2, the Fiddlehead, Grain, the Malahat Review and Riddle Fence. His debut full-length collection is forthcoming with Brick Books in 2026.*

# Silver & Blue

SORAYA ROBERTS

*Did you hear that the railway built Canada? That's probably all you heard*

---

---

I can't remember exactly when we first saw each other. I think it was in the late afternoon that first day. I think it was that time because the porter had started making our beds—the upper and lower berths in train car number 11—which she never started doing earlier than that. If you were in the previous car (car number 10), you had to pass through ours to get to any of the social areas—the bar car with steps to the dome (windows all around, often full); the activities car (often not full, save for a lone puzzle maker); the dining car. He must have been staying in number 10 because he passed through a few times over those three days and three nights. I assume he also had a berth, since he seemed to be travelling alone. But maybe he had one of those rooms that looked tighter than a prison cell, with a toilet smack in your face. I was standing next to the porter watching the bench-to-bed transformation she kept calling a “workout” when he first passed by. I turned around for a better look, and that's when I noticed he had turned around too.

This is what I saw: big blue eyes, lots of freckles, sandy hair in that messy, feathery kind of cut a certain ilk of boy seems to favour, a kid made for sport socks and hoodies and way too many boxes of cereal. I don't know what he saw when he looked at me, neither the first time, nor the second. I was wearing my new hoodie though. This hoodie is a magnet. I bought it specifically for the train and people have not stopped mentioning it since. It sticks out, this bright red, fleece-lined Hudson's Bay Company (I know) sweatshirt covered in patches—an Olympics 2012 one-off. Maybe that's what caught his attention that first day. Or maybe it was my shaved head. What caught my attention was his face—the kind that ignored me countless times growing up. His face noticing mine, as mine noticed his.

At this age, the age I now was—middle age, the age of crisis—you go forward or you go back. And here it stood, the past, staring right at me, asking me to redo it.



“I shouldn’t be looking at a teenager like that,” I whispered to the porter. Her face went red, and she let out one of those gasping, soundless laughs.



This is about trains, I swear. I had to get to my family on the West Coast from the East Coast that summer, and I didn’t want to fly. I hate to fly. I wished Canada had transnational trains. And we do, we have one: The Canadian. From Toronto, Ontario, to Vancouver, British Columbia, it takes four days and four nights and costs \$2000. Even if you’re only travelling from Toronto to Jasper, Alberta, like I was, in high season it still costs \$1700—not even for a room, just for that bench, the one that’s so hard to turn into a bed. Via Rail runs it because of course it does—it’s the one and only company operating passenger rail nationally in this country. A salesperson who had worked at the Crown corporation for almost twenty years explained that travelling The Canadian in winter is half as expensive as summer and it’s one of the few trains in the world that offers overnight sleepers that aren’t luxury. The class (middle) I eventually booked, Sleeper Plus, used to be called Silver & Blue for the azure line at the top of its metallic cars. This train operated twice a week and was once forty-three hours late. This train sounded stupid. I wanted to take it. So I applied for a writing residency to which I could take this train so I would have an excuse I wouldn’t have to pay for (freelance tax write-off). I did the research. I went to the library. I talked to railway experts. I got bored. The history of trains in this country is boring. A bland cover for the slow, steady exploitation rumbling beneath it all. Did you hear that the railway built Canada? That’s probably all you heard. Everything else is bureaucracy—bureaucracy and incompetence.

I wanted this residency because I wanted to write this essay because I wanted to make people understand how important trains are. I want trains to be more important than cars and planes—there are too many cars, and too many planes, and also planes scare me. But the way the history was laid out, the way it was told, it was like it was daring me to care. Like this was none of my business. Like trains were the business only of men who made decisions about them and men who wrote history books about those decisions. Canadian trains felt like a closed door with men smoking behind it.

This is about the railway lines connecting this enormous country—forming it, really—in the nineteenth century, connecting land, but more importantly, people, from coast to coast, and how Canada was one of the first places to do that, to be nationally stitched together like that. This is about how that founding identity laid the track (if I can already use a pun this early) for the railways’ decline. This is about a transcontinental train, established seventy years ago, using the same cars to this day. It is about how trains became a relic in our national mind, which is how they came to be invisibly trundling across the country, slowly connecting products rather than people, as the rest of the world surpassed us with better versions of what we left behind. “We are the world’s leading laggard when it comes to passenger trains,” is how Anthony Perl, who once served on the board of Via Rail, put it to me on the phone from Vancouver in his aptly flattened cadence. (I wanted to speak to him because he researches transportation and policy and has advised multiple governments and says things like, “On good days Via can be something that almost makes you happy.”)

***This is the kind of history that’s reserved  
for classrooms no one wants to be in—  
it’s vending machines,  
it’s cramming, it’s no sleep.***

This is about a vast country of people yearning for connection. But Canada has never, in its infinite practicality, accommodated yearning. This country actively (the rare actively) refuses to reach, for fear of faltering. This country will allow one rail company to monopolize its tracks, one airline to monopolize its skies, highways to be blocked blocked blocked built built built, because that was the future and the future is here and this is what we committed to, even if it no longer works. Even if it never really did.

This was going to be about my fear of planes. This was going to be about a country underwriting that fear. “What do you do when the thing you fear most is the only way to get to the people you love most?” I wanted the answer to be simple, and in a way it was: You grow the fuck up. You make a

decision. Like taking the fucking train across the country instead. An expensive choice, but a choice I made. (The rare actively.) I didn't check with my mom. With my brother. With some guy. With some friend. Just me. Finally. On a track I chose by myself, for myself. Why the fuck did this take so long? And why did it feel like it was coming too late? The real question underneath all of this wasn't about planes. Or trains. The real question was the one I didn't want to ask: how do you go forward when all you want to do is go back?

It was that freckle-faced kid. He had me staring in the face of my own mortality.

***When you're on a passenger train in Canada, it becomes abundantly clear how much less important you are than cargo.***



He wasn't a kid. I figured that out pretty fast. Not directly—we didn't speak for ages. We mostly just looked. Three looks. Four looks. Five. Time accommodated each glance, like some slow-motion scene in a hackneyed romance; three seconds . . . stretching . . . to . . . ten. But we were rarely alone. He was often surrounded by older white-haired women who seemed to be looking after him. I overheard one of them saying he was cute and that he reminded her of her son. Did she remind him of his mother? I caught bits of their conversation while working on my laptop. He was from the South of France, which explained the accent I couldn't place (and how he might be attracted to a woman twice his age). He was studying to be a Phys. Ed. teacher. Something about a scholarship. This trip—a reward for finishing his final year at university—

Twenties. He was in his twenties.



Okay. The history of the Canadian railway—don't skip this. I want to skip this. We all want to. This is the kind of history that's reserved for classrooms no one wants to be in—it's vending

machines, it's cramming, it's no sleep. Ahead of the trip, I researched trains on my laptop in the dimness of my study (my apartment gets little light even during the day and this was going into the night) and then researched trains in book after book in the dimness of the Toronto Reference Library, that enormous orange sprawling space, with windows too high up and too far away to correct the gloom of fluorescent light and obligation. I tried to be interested, the way I tried to be interested when I had a test and had to memorize what I would immediately forget the second I handed it in: the Canadian Pacific Railway was built from eastern to western Canada between 1881 and 1885 to fulfill a promise to British Columbia so that they would join the Confederacy, the last spike was driven in the same year Banff became a national park and—oh, wait, wait, wait, that's actually important because that's where the residency is, that will get me in for sure.



It took less than two hours for a freight train to interrupt us. I counted. I'd been waiting for it. Not that there was an announcement explaining anything. None of us ever really knew what was going on on The Canadian. When I first boarded in Toronto I had a Tim Hortons bagel and half my bag was apples and nuts. I didn't realize meals were included. Other people had granola bars and sandwiches; they didn't know either. I didn't bank on ever stepping outside because it was unclear when the train stopped or for how long. But I knew we shared the tracks. Anyone who has ever taken a train in Canada knows we share the tracks.

Via Rail has shared the tracks with Canadian National Railway's freight service since 1990, the year The Canadian became the sole cross-Canada train after budget cut after budget cut after cars and planes took over travel. Share is the wrong word. CN *owns* the tracks. Its freight **DOMINATES** them. CN, private since 1995, *permits* Via to use their tracks. But they never let them go first. Ever. Before 1990, this journey was far more frequent—seven times a week—and way shorter—three days, three nights. It takes so long now because Via built in buffer time for the ballooning number and sizes of freight. When you're on a passenger train in Canada, it becomes abundantly clear how much less important you are than cargo.

Perl compares it to mixing oil and water: "The intelligent way would be to build two pipelines,

one for water and one for oil.” The unintelligent way is this: Via owns less than one per cent of Canada’s tracks. More than a third of passenger trains late over two years (2022 to 2023) because the country once bought a bunch of trains without the tracks to go with them. Like buying a pair of ski boots without the skis—useless. Or not; one of the worst passenger rail services in the world must be benefiting someone. And, yes, those endless trains of multi-coloured boxes with unidentifiable branding, seldom moving faster than a car on a country road, one person at the helm, are a rolling gold mine. “That’s the formula that works to bring in the billions for these freight rail operations,” Perl said, becoming particularly animated when he told me that Bill Gates is the biggest owner of CN stock and not because he likes trains.



Our first real stop was Capreol. It was a small community in Greater Sudbury which appeared to be populated only by us. As I got off, I passed two men inhaling cigarette after cigarette. (No one wanted to deal with the smokers, so they were allowed off more often than the rest of us.) Walking along the train, the Polish-Italian oddball I’d befriended pointed out the wooden tracks with special interest like we had stumbled upon an ancient relic. This was his first time outside of Europe. In Europe, he said, they don’t have wooden tracks anymore (they do). They’re considered antiquated. I felt immediately ashamed. I didn’t know how old those wooden ties were, but I knew the trains were some of the oldest in the world. I imagined other passengers like him coming from all over with some magnificent trip in mind only to be faced by a grand but parochial site. These tracks, these trains, exposed Canada for what it was: a country shoddily built on various levels of compromise.

“I believe that many in this room will live to hear the whistle of the steam engine in the passes of the Rocky Mountains,” Nova Scotian politician Joseph Howe said in 1851. The room was in Halifax—the now-defunct Mason’s Hall—but this was three decades before the train in question would be built, so I’m not sure how many of the people in that room did in fact live to hear it. But this is the thing with some of the very early history—there’s spirit to it, there’s passion. Howe sounds like a man who has just stepped off an actual train and is about to step back on

one. Like a decision about trains might actually affect him, like he has skin in it and the elegance of his era’s diction to express it. But it’s easy to be poetic when you let the sound of a whistle drown out the noise of extraction—of Indigenous land, of Indigenous people, of Chinese immigrants, of Chinese labour. As time wore on, men like Howe seemed to lose their proximity to what they were talking about, and with it any of this materiality. Trains turned from something real, tangible, into protocol, theory. Less than two hundred years later, they are nothing but flat white documents, i’s dotted, t’s crossed by a bunch of grey suits crunching hypotheses so unwelcome no one bothers to even test them (see *High-speed Passenger Rail in Canada: A Feasibility Study Conducted by Via Rail Canada, 1984*). Whether trains are better than planes or cars for the climate, and therefore better for the economy, and therefore better for the people, and therefore more useful, is moot. They’ve been reduced to “infrastructure,” existing only in rooms with artificial air and cardboard coffee. An entire country of people pulled apart by a national fiction from which they’ve become too alienated to question: that trains are over.

***An oppressive present, it bore none of the usual distractions—no Wi-Fi, no friends, no family. There was nowhere else to go. It was just me, this train, these people.***



I don’t know why I couldn’t be more direct with this guy—why I didn’t try to talk to him when he was curled over his phone or sitting alone musing out the window. No, I do know: it was too confronting. Where was I gonna go when this jock I finally had the courage to approach rejected me? When this chance at redoing my teens became a repeat of my actual teens? When he shoved my actual age back in my face. How was I supposed to run away from that? This train was too confronting. An oppressive present, it bore none of the usual distractions—no Wi-Fi, no friends,

no family. There was nowhere else to go. It was just me, this train, these people. This guy. That past. A relentless togetherness. It was the kind of sustained proximity to strangers—a pushy intimacy—I recognized from school, but was no longer practised in, if I ever was to begin with. Surrounded by these people, outside reality, I felt unmoored. I lay on my back in my upper berth on the first night—no window, nothing to orient me—rocking with the car, my heart at triple speed, dizzy, almost vomiting, a ladder between me and the floor. I felt like I was dying. I knew I was not. But the next night I moved to the lower berth—a window, a horizon, the ground at my feet—and I felt better.



Canada is half the size of Russia and barely bigger than China. It is not bigger than Europe. But Canada feels huge, sprawling, like you can barely get across it. The longest high-speed rail route runs from Beijing to Guangzhou and is about half the length of The Canadian's. At its slowest it takes eleven hours and at its highest cost is \$250. Using the same arithmetic, a high-speed train across Canada could take double the time at double the price. Instead, it takes nine times as long and costs eight times as much.

***Because this train that likely moves slower than locomotives did in the literal 1800s is so weighed down by the past it is unable to move into the future.***

“Canadians have put trains into a box that’s back in the nineteenth century,” Perl told me. Then why bother keeping them around? The Canadian dates back to 1955, when air travel and the Trans-Canada Highway hadn’t yet taken over. But the years wore on, the passengers departed, and the money along with them. So why, now, was my only option, outside of a cheaper, *much* faster flight, to arrive three days early in Jasper, a town nearly 300 kilometres from my final destination (no Via to Banff)? Because this train that likely moves slower than locomotives did in the literal 1800s (after twenty-eight hours we were

still in Ontario) is so weighed down by the past it is unable to move into the future. Not unable—condemned. By men in charge who created passenger rail like some political afterthought (Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau founding Via Rail in 1977). Modern men who thought freedom meant no rules (Prime Minister Brian Mulroney underwriting the “Freedom to Move” document in 1985). Because of them, the freedom not to go by road or by air meant spending more than anyone ever should to be stuck on a pair of termite-riddled tracks behind a freight train. Forever.



I think he tried to connect at one point. Maybe. On his way to lunch, he descended from the glass dome into the bar car where I was working at my laptop near the toilet and the only two plugs for miles (this train was built when plugs were only needed for men to shave their big faces). I sat at a table with a girl about his age from Korea who had discovered this train on social media and kept saying she was bored. There were other people in the car besides us, but maybe because I looked well ensconced behind my computer, he beelined to me. “Are you going to be here for a bit? Can you watch this?” Holding out his tablet, his blue eyes, his head, his body, took up my entire field of view, blocking out everything else around us. I took the tablet. “Unfortunately, I will be here forever,” I said (cute). “I am sorry,” he said with a smile (cute).

When he departed, I gave the Korean girl a knowing look. She giggled. I asked if she had noticed how handsome he was. She said she hadn’t noticed shit. I flipped open his tablet. The Korean girl expressed mock shock. The wallpaper, a photo of Niagara Falls, would have been distastefully touristy if I hadn’t found him attractive, which made it disarming instead. The battery was at only 65 percent. I plugged it into my plug (hot).



I sat with my back to the booth, my eyes following the prairies rolling by as people spoke around me, conversations conjuring and evaporating. Empty time with nothing asking to fill it. Nowhere else to go, just me, this train, these people, this guy. The sweaty, disarming chef who checked on us at every meal. The young porters cycling in and out, reminiscent of camp counsellors. The guy

who did the announcements, lacing his script with jokes so dry he told me his colleagues wondered if he might just be mean (“Saskatoon—Saskatchewan’s biggest and therefore best city”). The retirees. The passengers from afar with more desire to see Canada than Canadians.

History rests on those decrepit tracks snaking across the country. It passes over bridges I didn’t know had been built, through fields of crops I didn’t know had been planted, into tiny towns populated by people I didn’t know had been born. Those tracks, those trains, unchanging, immovable, insignificant . . . until you actually take them, and they quietly, unexpectedly drive you into a gloriously intertwined humanity you had forgotten even existed. Trains turn a country into a home. Their tracks stitch it together.



And then, just like that, at the last lunch (I got a wrap which got stuck in my teeth), he was seated right in front of me (with something huge that demanded cutlery) and the entire dining car fell into a black hole. All that was left of the world was him and those blue eyes—eyes that had the bigness of youth. His whole face did—that kind of sloppy, not-quite-settled slapdash of immaturity. I could see those protruding lips and that overbite lose their chaos as he aged, I could see the bump on his nose become more defined, his eyes settle in his head, his expression—those thick, raised brows—lose their perpetual question mark. “I like your hoodie,” he said, dropping the *h* and extending the *o*’s the way the French do (that hoodie, man). I explained that it was thrifty and that I knew nothing about sports (“I mean, I jog”). I asked him about studying here, which seemed like an acceptable segue, since I knew he was studying sports. He said he remembered wanting to be a Phys. Ed. teacher since he was three. His parents were teachers too. He had that quality of people who spend their entire lives being of service to others, who are invigorated by it—a selfless energy.

I told him I had studied French literature, that I hadn’t practised speaking the language in forever, but I used to visit France in the summer, the Pyrenees. He asked where else in Europe I’d travelled. I told him all the places I could remember, and he said: “That’s nice.” He repeated “That’s nice” a few times to various things I said in that quaint way you return to a familiar phrase

when you don’t know a language enough to comfortably elaborate. I then explained that this trip, for me, was a project, an ornate plan, like a miniature heist, enlisting a writing residency as a way of getting across the country without flying. “Wow,” he said, looking moony. He asked if I was doing “portraits” of the passengers. Portraits.

***I told him I had studied French literature, that I hadn’t practised speaking the language in forever, but I used to visit France in the summer, the Pyrenees.***

I imagined myself sitting in a car with an easel drawing those terrible cartoons you come across at carnivals. “No,” I said. “It’s about me.” I don’t know why I said it like that. I heard myself say it and I hated it—the selfish in front of the selfless. I said I might add stuff about other people. “You might be in it—sorry.” He said he didn’t mind.

I suddenly felt a distinct urge to tell him my age. Like a moral thing. Like not telling him was lying. But less like I was lying to him, more like I was lying to myself. “I’m forty-four,” I said. Not out of nowhere. It was apropos of something, but not so apropos that I could have not said it. No response. Not even a flicker. A man of service. I would later tell the older woman in my car that I did this and, dropping her head into her hands, she’d say: “WHY DID YOU DO THAT? YOU LOOK TWENTY-FIVE!” (I don’t). To be generous, I may have said my age to provide context for what I had told him about journalism, how I had entered it decades ago just at the start of its descent. I don’t know why I felt compelled to even tell him that. Maybe to temper his “cool” (long *o*’s again) when I told him I was a journalist. Or maybe I just wanted to own up because that’s what grown-ups do.

I think the real reason I said my age is because in front of him I felt nothing but it. You are perfect and I am forty-four—that was how it felt.



How could something so imperfect still feel so much better than everything else? The symphony of overturned teacups vibrating on tiny plates in the dining room as I charged my phone; so many communal meals spent talking about our lives and still learning nothing; the rain-splashed impressionist painting of a window blurring the fields that we would never walk; the framed storm clouds and oncoming downpour on one side of the train, clear bright skies and white clouds on the other—a split Magritte. The fraternity of anonymous humanity crashed into it all, creating an opening of possibility within an otherwise fixed life where everything is decided, the end written in the beginning.



We were alone together once. It was close to the end. When the train stopped in Edmonton, we all got off but somehow I ended up walking side by side with him in silence. We sauntered toward the edge of the station, away from the others, the darkness pregnant, and we both stopped—a pause that quickly swelled to hold the weight of infinite possibility. I just needed permission—another look like that first look, like that second. Another anything. He was so much taller than me. *Just give me something, dude.* So I wouldn't have to make a decision alone. So I wouldn't have to be the adult. How do you go forward when all you want to do is go back? The answer was standing right next to me, refusing to be the answer. And I couldn't do it. (I know.) I just stood there. (I know.) At the risk of making the wrong choice, I made none. (I know.) And he turned and walked the other way.

I can't believe I never even asked his name. I can't believe I never asked anyone's name (if only to have his). But anonymity was everything. It was the amber preserving his perfection. The Via employee told me it's rare for people to give their names on these long trips, in these suspensions of everyday reality. And I wondered why Canada didn't care to preserve that? That little bit of magic? Any of this magic? I wondered why Canada was happy instead to power through its own mid-life crises, one after the other, as those tracks slowly deteriorated, all of those connections fragmenting into nothing.



*It's about me*, I had told him, and in the end it was. On the last day, I was sitting with the Pole, with whom I had been talking for hours about nothing much, just where he was from and where I was from and what we were doing and not doing with our lives. At some point we remembered that after four o'clock you were allowed to walk all the way to the back of the train, to the very last car (which up until that moment belonged exclusively to the wealthy Prestige passengers).

"Wanna go now?" We got up as I said it, even though it was already becoming too dark to see outside. Maybe that's why the Pole moved so fast. I think he didn't realize how much shorter I was, or how much smaller my stride, so as he proceeded to glide through narrow passageway after narrow passageway, I had to almost run behind him, through car after car, berth after berth, cabin after cabin, narrow corridor after narrow corridor, all the way to the end, as the train's interior changed from off-white to blood red.

By the time we reached the shimmery bar car that opened onto the panoramic lounge, a compartment lined with windows and plush couches and vases full of flowers, it was pitch black outside. We collapsed into the seats in one big exhale, exhausted. We had passed through nineteen cars. It took so long that the end wasn't even the point anymore. In all that darkness, it didn't look like we were even connected to a track. All I could see through the window was me. All I could feel was forward motion. I guess you would call it a kind of peace. *How do you go forward when all you want to do is go back?* In that moment, the question didn't even occur to me, but this felt pretty close to the answer.

---

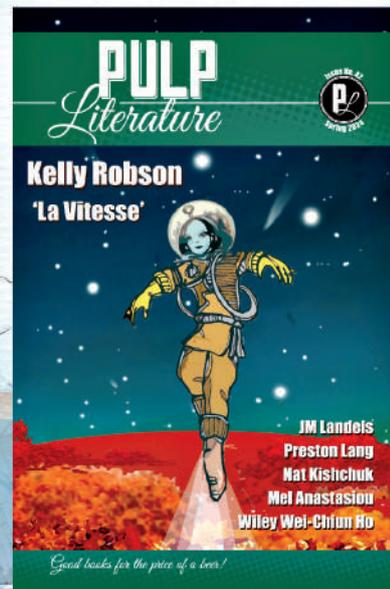
*Soraya Roberts is a contributing writer at Defector. She is the author of In My Humble Opinion: My So-Called Life (ECW Press, 2016) and is currently working on a book for Liveright. She is grateful to the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity's Literary Journalism: Memoir writing residency class of 2024, without whom this essay would not exist.*

# PULP *Literature*

Six awards for genre-busting  
fiction and poetry

## The Bumblebee Flash Fiction Contest

Deadline: 15 February  
Prize: \$300

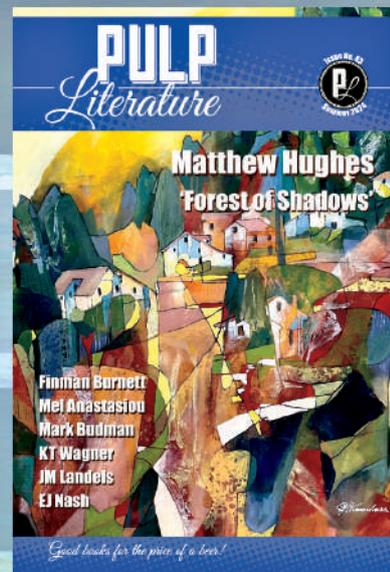


## The Magpie Award for Poetry

Deadline: 15 April First Prize: \$500

## The Hummingbird Flash Fiction Prize

Deadline: 15 June  
Prize: \$300



## The First Page Cage

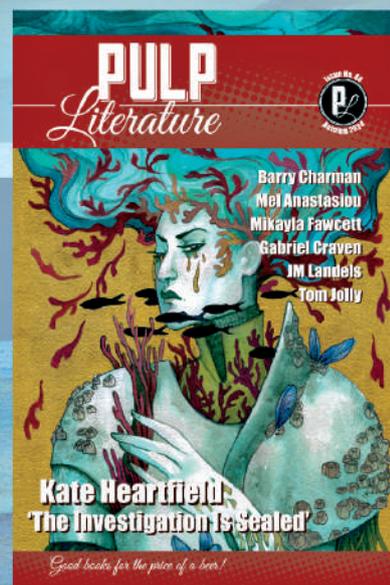
Deadline: 30 September  
Prize: \$300

## The Raven Short Story Contest

Deadline: 15 October Prize: \$300

## The Kingfisher Poetry Prize

Deadline: 15 October  
Prize: \$300



[pulpliterature.com/contests](http://pulpliterature.com/contests)

# Rejoice in His Name

FINNIAN BURNETT

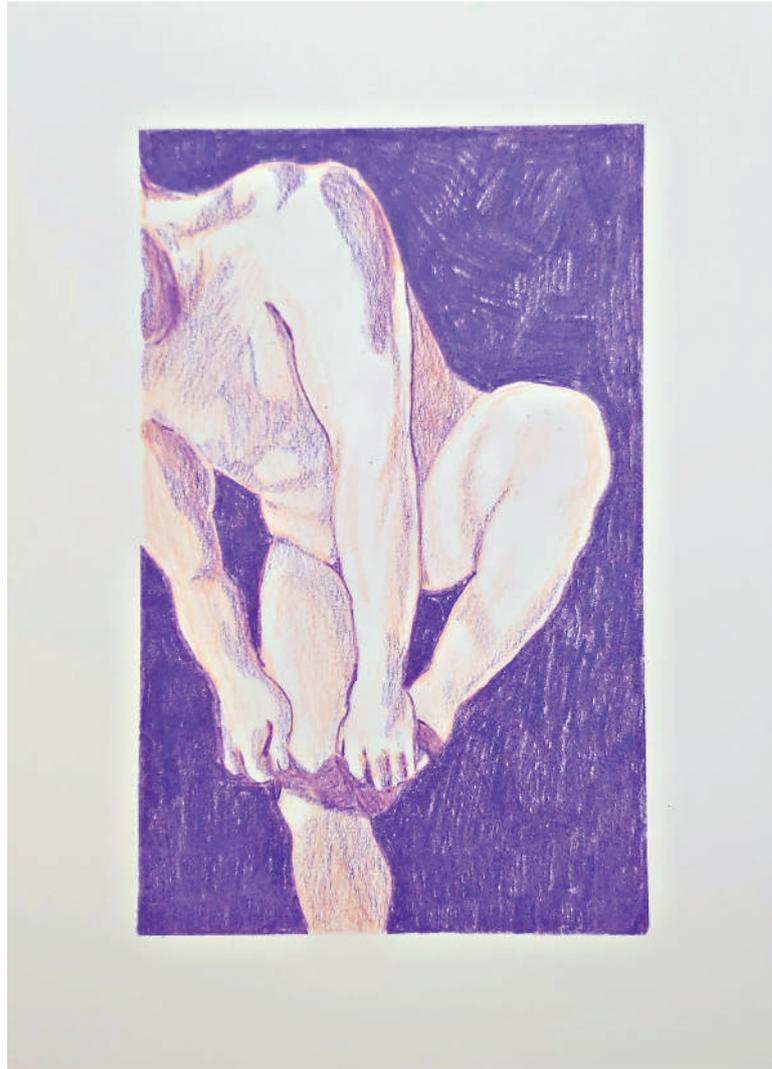
*He shreds the envelope until Sarah becomes arah, then rah, then nothing*

*I've been alive for 76 percent of my life*, Jake tells me, and he lies on the living room floor, hands crossed over his chest. The collar of his shirt grazes his razor-reddened chin. He shaves every day, Jake, whether we leave the house or not. *I don't know that I can last another 24 percent*. His hands rest on a wrapped package, red bows, plaid wrapping paper, a gift from a greeting card company advertisement—I'd had them wrap it at the store since my corners always come out awkward and misshapen.

I'm pulling ornaments from a cardboard box, vestiges of my childhood. The chipped porcelain ballerina I'd begged and begged my mom to buy. The scuffed wooden train. The Santa-on-the-beach series I got the year we went to the Virgin Islands for a family holiday. I hook them onto the branches of our Christmas tree, along with the set of cross-stitch pictures my mother made—angels with glowing halos and *god bless this season* in block print over their heads. She sends a box every year, no matter how many times I tell her we have enough. *God bless you*, she always writes in the card. *You and even Jake. Even Jake*, she writes. We're atheists now, or we try to be, though belief still chokes us, wraps itself around our throats, our hearts. I want to call my mother and tell her that I'm an atheist, and even Jake, that miserable sinner, but I don't because we only see her every other year when we go back East and it's not worth giving her one more thing to pray about on our behalf.

Jake hates the angels, hates anything from our families, but I put them on the tree anyway, bury them toward the back. I touch the stitching on an angel's face and wonder how many she has left, how long we'll keep getting ornaments in the mail though her hands can't do fine needlework anymore. How many does she have in boxes, ready to pull out every year, to pray over, to put in the mail and carefully label with Jake's name, and Sarah's? Every year, Jake shreds the envelope, tears it into careful pieces until Sarah becomes arah, then rah, then nothing.

I hang them all, even the handmade snowman with *Sarah* on his scarf, the ornament my mother made years after I came out, changed my name, started taking T. *Sarah*, she wrote on the card. *Sarah*, she hand-lettered on the envelope in careful script and *Sarah, Sarah, Sarah* she wrote repeatedly in her Christmas letter to family, as if cementing it in everyone's minds. *How dare you*, she'd said when I told her to start calling me Jayden. *How dare you*, I hear every year when I see Sarah's name on the envelope. How dare I?



*Throw that one away*, Jake says when I pull the snowman out, but every year I don't. He's never known me as Sarah, never had to stumble over the S, worry about my pronouns. I touch the snowman to my cheek for a moment before I hang it on a bough next to an angel, facing the wall, knowing I'll compulsively pull the ornament out and stare at the tiny scarf every time I walk past the tree. *Sarah*, the snowman whispers from the back branches.

I can't figure out what 24 percent of the rest of Jake's life is but he's here now and I want to ask him how he knows. Does he plan to die at a certain age, like his father who was fifty-six when he dropped dead at the front of the church, kneeling in prayer, perhaps asking forgiveness from god rather than his wife and children?

*I smiled when he died*, Jake told me once. *Laughed, actually*. A woman in the front row said Jake was in shock because he howled with laughter as his father clutched his chest and dropped to the floor. Jake told me that, later, he sobbed and then hated himself for grieving his father. In that moment though, when his dad fell over at the altar, Jake felt nothing but relief. *For our heart is glad in him because we trust in his holy name*. That's what Jake said after he told me the story, which was probably a psalm. He's always quoting from Psalms.

I'm trying to do math in my head. Jake is forty so if he has already lived 50 percent of his life, he'll die at eighty. That would give us forty more years together. But Jake says he's lived 76 percent which is oddly specific and probably means he's going to die at sixty or fifty-seven or something and dammit, why I am so bad at percentages? Seventeen more years isn't enough time when we've only been lovers five. When sometimes after making love, we both still curl into ourselves. *When lust has conceived, it brings forth sin*, Jake told me the first time we kissed, hands gripped, stubble rubbing rashes on each other's skin.

Jake hides pictures of us when his mother comes to visit though she knows we're together, knows we married last year without inviting anyone but my sister, Emily, who was kicked out of the church after getting pregnant by a married man who asked forgiveness and was granted it. He, the man, still goes to the church. I see his face smiling from the news section when I stalk the church's website looking for crumbs of information about my father or the rest of the family.

Why 24 percent? I ask, and he rolls over on his side to look at me. I'm holding an angel ornament, the cherubic face smiling at me from the canvas square, gold ribbons festooning the edges, the eyes somehow sinister. For the wage of sin is death, it says, and I fold it into the branches of the tree.

Kevin and Aadi come for cocktails, loaded with cedar simple syrup and fresh basil and non-alcoholic wine in solidarity with their surrogate, who promised not to drink until after the birth of the baby. They kiss in our kitchen as they unload gifts. They call me Jayden like I was never anyone else and they tease Jake over his Christmas sweater. We don't talk about dying or our parents or god.

Kevin makes virgin spiced sangria and I put out shrimp cocktail and Nanaimo bars from the bakery down the street where we go every Sunday morning because the owner sells rainbow cupcakes and has a sticker in the window that says hate has no home here.

Kevin and Aadi touch hands and feed each other shrimp and Jake turns away. But I can't stop staring, can't stop wondering how it feels to love someone without hating that you love them. They can't stay long because Kevin's parents are hosting dinner. All the family is coming, even Aadi's eighty-six-year-old grandmother who made them a quilt for their shared bed. Next year, they'll bring their baby to family Christmas, and no one will say *the lord told me to love you and hate your sin* or *I'll pray for you*, and Kevin's dad will hold the baby, and everyone will take pictures of Grandpa and his first grandchild and no one will care that the parents are two men. *Come with us*, they say, but we shrink back, terrified of a family whose love knows no conditions.

Kevin and Aadi hug us goodbye, kiss us on our cheeks, hold hands as they tumble back onto the street, laugh and raise their faces to the sky to catch lightly falling snowflakes on their tongues. We both hold our breath until they're in their car, watch as they pull away, brush the backs of our hands together as we shut the door and retreat to the safety of our living room.

That night, Jake lies on the floor again, under the Christmas tree. I curl next to him, graze his face with my fingers, marvel at the soft spaces of skin between sharp edges of stubble. *What do you want for Christmas?* I ask him, ignoring the stack of presents on the floor. *What do you really want?*

And he presses his face against my chest, but he doesn't answer. He never does.

---

*Finnian Burnett explores the intersections of mental health, gender identity and disability. Their work has been published by CBC Books, Blank Spaces Magazine, PULP Literature and more. When not writing or teaching, they watch too much Star Trek and try, futilely, to grow a garden.*

# The Capilano Review

Dedicated to experimentation across boundaries, forms, and contexts — with particular emphasis on promoting dialogue between the literary and visual arts — each issue of *The Capilano Review* is critically and socially engaged, language-oriented, and rigorously interdisciplinary.

In addition to our print subscriptions, readers can now subscribe digitally to *The Capilano Review* on Exact Editions to gain full access to our digital archive, featuring 140+ issues over 52 years. Subscriptions are available to individuals, libraries, and institutions.

Visit Exact Editions to learn more:  
[shop.exacteditions.com/ca/the-capilano-review](http://shop.exacteditions.com/ca/the-capilano-review)

Image: Cover of Issue 4.3: *Real Materials* (Fall 2024), featuring Anne Low, *Clay suitcase (detail)*, 2023, hand-woven cotton and silk, calcium carbonate, hide glue, wood, plaster, metal, 152.4 x 88.9 x 5.08 cm. Photo by LFDocumentation. Courtesy of Franz Kaka, Toronto.



# EVENT

## 38th ANNUAL NON-FICTION CONTEST

### CASH PRIZES

\$1,500 • \$1,000 • \$500

Non-Fiction Contest winners feature in every volume since 1989 and have received recognition from the Canadian Magazine Awards, National Magazine Awards and Best Canadian Essays. All entries considered for publication. Entry fee of \$34.95 includes a one-year subscription. We encourage writers from diverse backgrounds and experience levels to submit their work.



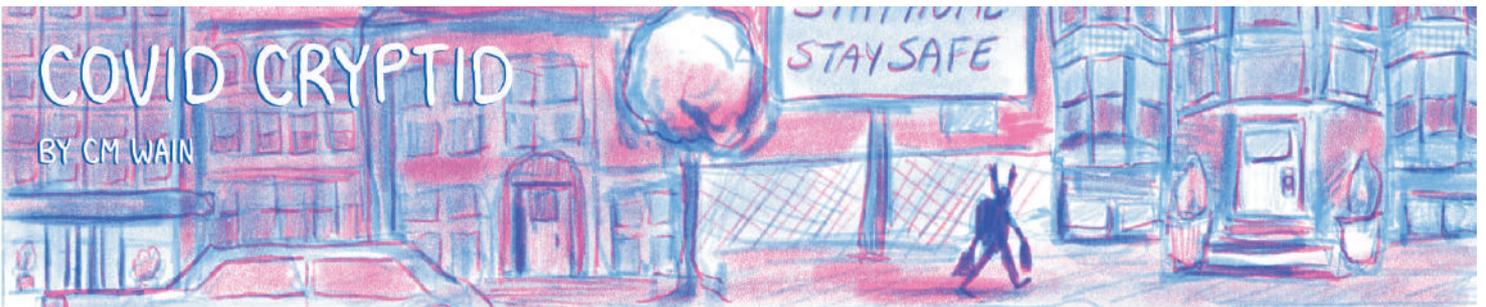
DEADLINE  
OCTOBER 15



[eventmagazine.ca](http://eventmagazine.ca)

# COVID CRYPTID

BY CM WAIN



I STARTED WATCHING THE REALITY SERIES *ALONE* IN 2021, DURING THE PEAK OF THE PANDEMIC. I CHOSE IT FOR THE TITLE, WHICH SEEMED ODDLY APPROPRIATE GIVEN THE CIRCUMSTANCES.



THERE WASN'T MUCH TO IT AT FIRST GLANCE. JUST PEOPLE RECORDING THEMSELVES WHILE STRANDED IN THE WOODS, TRYING TO NAVIGATE ABSURD ARTIFICIAL SCARCITY OF THEIR OWN MAKING.



I BLINKED, AND SUDDENLY I HAD BINGED NINE SEASONS AND WAS STARTING THE TENTH.

I QUICKLY LEARNED THAT *ALONE* IS NOT REALLY ABOUT SURVIVAL.



IT IS A WAITING GAME TO SEE WHAT BREAKS YOU FIRST: YOUR MIND OR YOUR PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT.



AS THE SPOUSE OF A FRONTLINE WORKER, THAT MADE A LOT OF SENSE TO ME.

MY PARTNER WAS IN THE MIDDLE OF HER MEDICAL TRAINING WHEN THE PANDEMIC HIT. WE KNEW THINGS WERE GOING TO GET BAD TWO WEEKS BEFORE ANYONE ELSE DID.



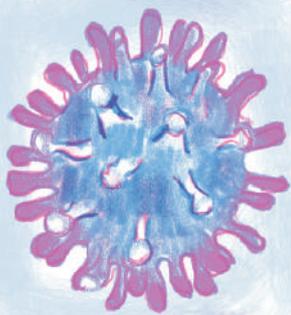
WHEN THEY ANNOUNCED LOCKDOWN, IT WAS HER JOB TO RUN TOWARDS THE CHAOS, NOT AWAY FROM IT.



HER TRAINING WAS SUSPENDED AND SHE DOVE HEADFIRST INTO FRONTLINE WORK. SHE WAS FACING AN UNKNOWN ILLNESS WITH NO TREATMENT OR VACCINE.

THE TIMELINE GETS BLURRY. ONE MOMENT WE WERE OVERJOYED ABOUT THE VACCINE, THE NEXT ANTI-VAXXERS WERE MAKING DEATH THREATS. THE HOSPITAL TOLD ALL EMPLOYEES NOT TO WALK HOME IN SCRUBS FOR FEAR OF ASSAULT. HORROR STORIES OF SO MANY NEEDLESS DEATHS. I HAVE A LOT OF TIME TO THINK AND WATCH TV.

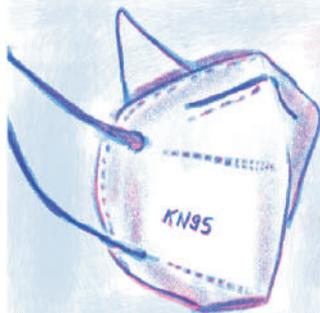
WE HAD NO IDEA WHAT EACH DAY WOULD BRING.



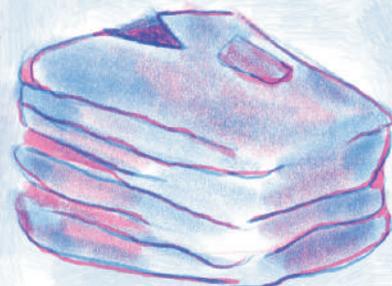
IN OUR TINY APARTMENT, IF ONE OF US GOT SICK THERE WAS NO WAY TO QUARANTINE. THE HOSPITAL TOLD US TO WRITE OUR WILLS.



THAT WAS 2020, AND 2021 AND MOST OF 2022- SHE WENT TO WORK, I SANITIZED LOAD AFTER LOAD OF SCRUBS ALONE IN OUR APARTMENT. I HAVE A LOT OF TIME TO THINK AND WATCH TV.



I HAVE A LOT OF TIME TO THINK AND WATCH TV.



IN A TINY APARTMENT SURROUNDED BY GHOSTS, I WATCHED SEASON AFTER SEASON OF COLD, WET, HUNGRY PEOPLE AT THE MERCY OF THE ELEMENTS, AT RISK OF DIRE INJURY, MENACED BY PREDATORS.

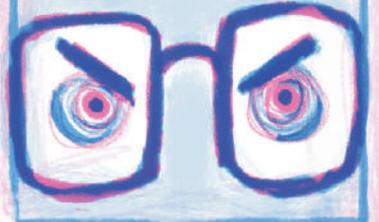
ON *ALONE*, THE MONOTONY AND GRIEF ALWAYS CATCHES UP WITH YOU.

LIKE ME, THE CONTESTANTS ON *ALONE* HAVE A LOT OF TIME TO THINK.

INVARIABLY, THEY VOMIT THEIR FEELINGS INTO THE BLINKING RED CAMERA LIGHT, TELLING IT ALL ABOUT THEIR LOSSES AND DISAPPOINTMENTS, HOW MUCH THEY WANT TO HUG THEIR CHILDREN, THEIR MOTHER, THEIR SPOUSE, THEIR DOG.

BUT THEIR TRUE AGONY IS ALWAYS LONELINESS.

THEY CHANT, "DON'T THINK ABOUT IT, JUST DON'T THINK ABOUT IT," WHITTLING A FIGURE OF SOMEONE LEFT BEHIND SOMEWHERE WARMER AND MORE ACCOMMODATING.



**WEAK!** I SCREAMED AT THE TV.

**PATHETIC!** I YELLED AT A STARVING STRANGER WEeping INTO THE CAMERA. I COULD LAST LONGER THAN YOU.



I HAVE TO LAST LONGER THAN YOU. CAN I LAST LONGER THAN YOU?

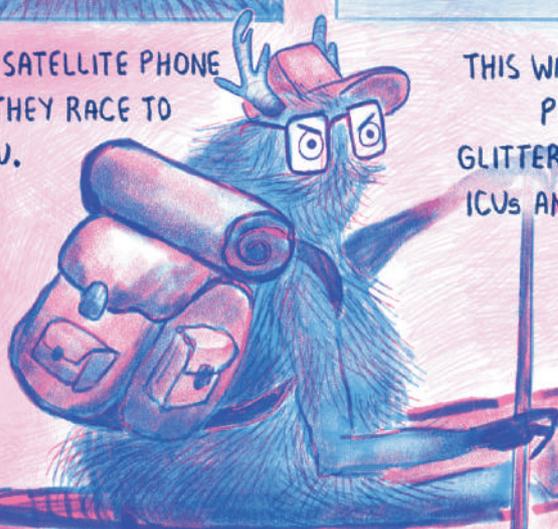


BECAUSE THE TRUE JOY OF *ALONE* IS QUITTING.



ONE QUICK SATELLITE PHONE CALL AND THEY RACE TO RESCUE YOU.

THIS WAS MY TRUEST FANTASY, A BIG RED BUTTON I COULD PRESS TO MAKE IT ALL STOP, TO SEE THAT BOAT CUT A GLITTERING TRAIL ON THE WATER, WHISKING ME AWAY FROM ICUs AND TENT HOSPITALS AND NIGHTMARES AND ISOLATION AND ANOTHER DEAD-EYED ZOOM CALL.



I WOULD DO MY FINAL INTERVIEW TO CAMERA, APPROPRIATELY HUMBLE AND CIRCUMSPECT.

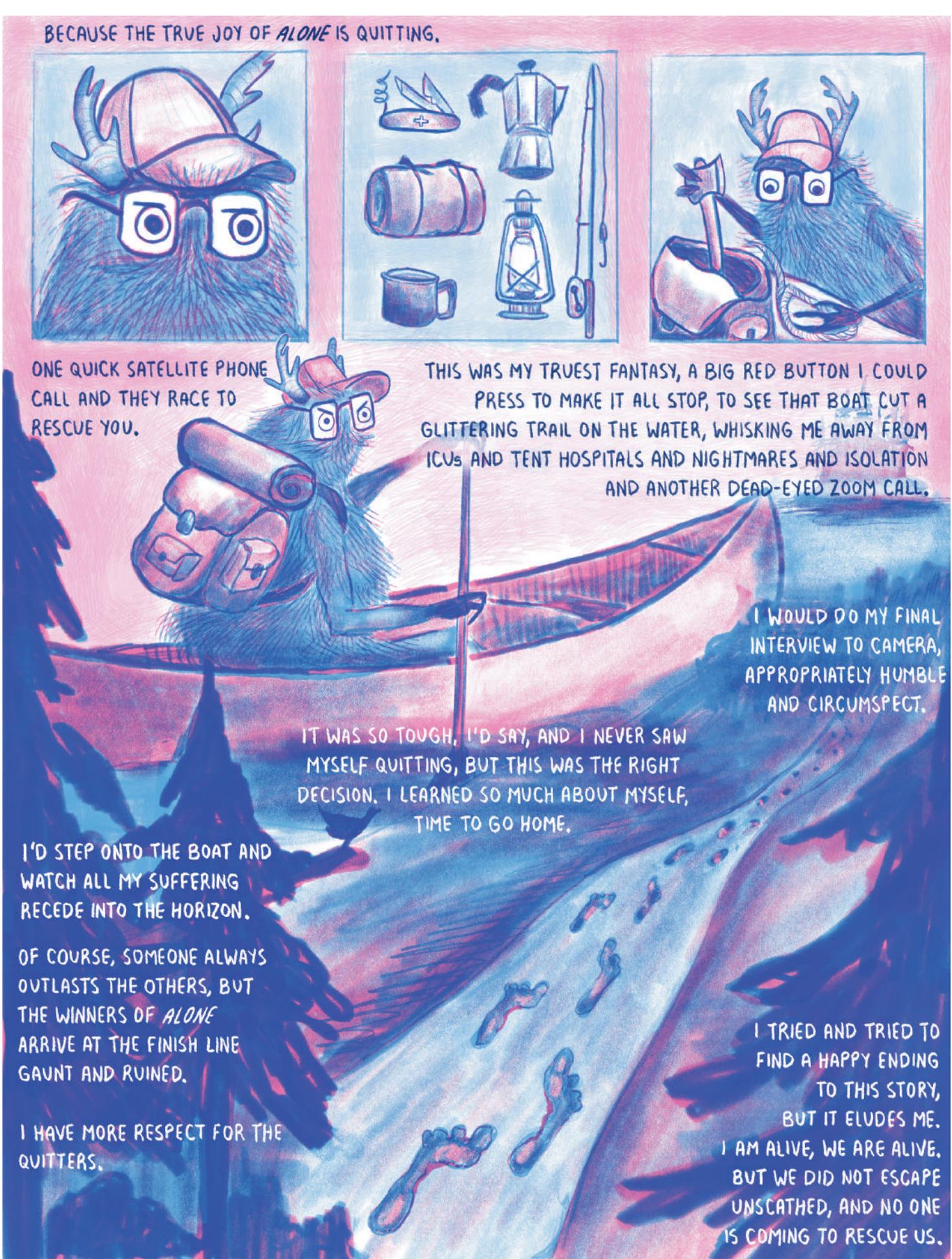
IT WAS SO TOUGH, I'D SAY, AND I NEVER SAW MYSELF QUITTING, BUT THIS WAS THE RIGHT DECISION. I LEARNED SO MUCH ABOUT MYSELF, TIME TO GO HOME.

I'D STEP ONTO THE BOAT AND WATCH ALL MY SUFFERING RECEDE INTO THE HORIZON.

OF COURSE, SOMEONE ALWAYS OUTLASTS THE OTHERS, BUT THE WINNERS OF *ALONE* ARRIVE AT THE FINISH LINE GAUNT AND RUINED.

I HAVE MORE RESPECT FOR THE QUITTERS.

I TRIED AND TRIED TO FIND A HAPPY ENDING TO THIS STORY, BUT IT ELUDES ME. I AM ALIVE, WE ARE ALIVE. BUT WE DID NOT ESCAPE UNSCATHED, AND NO ONE IS COMING TO RESCUE US.



# ENDNOTES

---

REVIEWS, COMMENTS, CURIOSA

## TRUTH WALKING

Since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report in 2015, Vancouver Island University has hosted live recordings of the **Indigenous Speakers Series** every fall, in partnership with CBC Radio's *Ideas* program. The lineup of speakers has been impressive—Riley Yesno, Wilson Williams and Connie Walker are just a few. As the Nuu-chah-nulth Elder-in-Residence for the Nanaimo campus of Vancouver Island University, I regularly do openings and welcomes. A couple times with the Métis Elder, Auntie Stella Johnson, and once with Snuneymuxw Elder, Auntie Geraldine Manson, I got to do the welcome for the Indigenous Speakers Series. (VIU Elders have the title of either “Uncle” or “Auntie.”) I am not shy about praising *Ideas* and the host, Nahlah Ayed, because I very

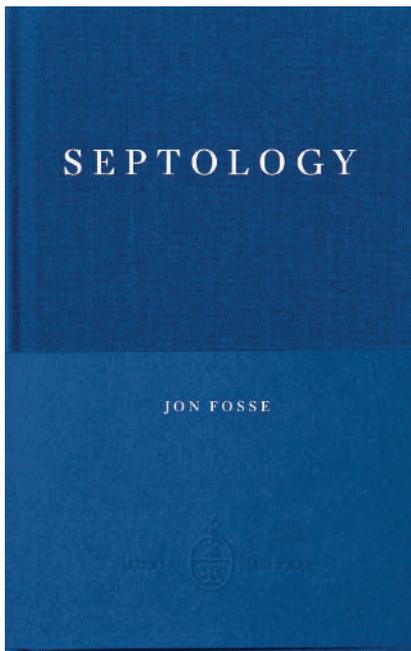
much enjoy the show. The 2024 Indigenous Speaker was Brandy Morin, author of *Our Voice of Fire: A Memoir of a Warrior Rising*, and winner of several prestigious journalism awards. Brandy is a powerful warrior determined to ensure the truth is always shared. She was a victim of systemic police violence, and even spent a bit of time in jail for doing her work. During the 2024 keynote, Brandy shared her experiences reporting on two important British Columbia protests: the Fairy Creek old-growth logging protest, and the fight against the expansion of the Trans-Mountain Pipeline. I found it quite scary the way she was treated by the police, and how the RCMP responded to the protests. Brandy's stories about the police brought to mind a relative of mine who went to Regina to attend the RCMP training school.

On the first day, my relative arrived early to class. Several other students, also early, were sitting around chatting. Suddenly, a man rushed into the room and quickly sat in a chair. He slammed his open hands against the table and said, “I can hardly wait to kill my first Indian!” My relative walked out of the classroom and became a chef. —*Randy Fred*

---

## SCHRÖDINGER'S BOOKS

A friend of mine, someone I've known most of my life, is a bit of a book collector. He reads them too, of course, but for him, collecting books is more about the acquisition of books than the reading of them. Over the years he's managed to get a number of the books in his collection signed by their authors, and he



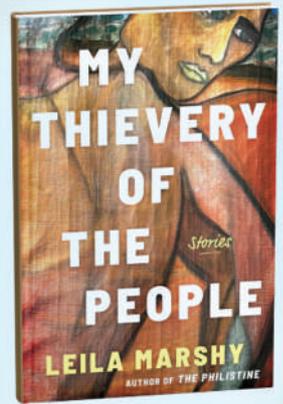
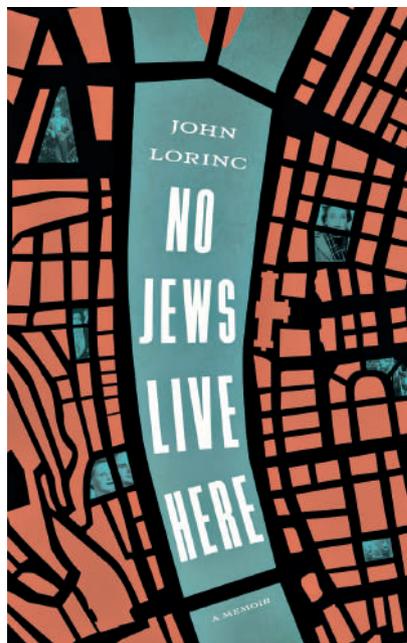
values these books more as a result. So he was intrigued to learn that **Fitzcarraldo Editions**, an independent publisher based in England, was planning to publish special limited editions of ten titles from their list, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the press. These ten books—several of them written by authors who had won the Nobel Prize in Literature—were to be signed and numbered by the authors themselves; each book would be “casebound in fine linen cloth,” and would feature “a belly band and custom marbled endpapers.” My friend selected two titles from the publisher’s list of ten, submitted his order, and waited patiently. Eventually—delayed by a Canada Post strike and a Christmas backlog—a package was left upon his doorstep. Inside were the long-awaited books, each of them protected by a shrink-wrapped prophylactic covering of plastic film. So far my friend has left the plastic film intact to preserve their theoretical value, he says, and to protect the books in their original pristine state. I pointed out that, shrink-wrapped, these books might be nothing more than two bricks of unprinted paper. But my friend trusts the books are as promised: signed by their authors,

and graced by marbled endpapers and a belly band—the publisher’s website offers photographic proof. He takes comfort in knowing that, as long as the plastic film remains in place, Schrödinger’s cat will (probably) have something good to read.  
—*Michael Hayward*

---

### SURVIVING HUNGARY

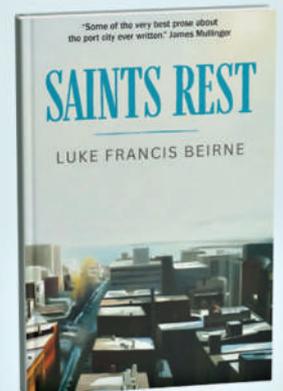
Before John Lorinc’s family left Hungary for Canada in late 1956, they experienced unimaginable trauma. **No Jews Live Here** (Coach House) is about their unique family history, but also the broader context of events that rocked Hungary for much of the twentieth century. The highs and lows of life for this Hungarian Jewish family makes for fascinating and often devastating reading. During a period of national cosmopolitan flourishing, the Jewish community was given access to more professions and obtained more legal rights than in many other European countries. But this did not last; Lorinc’s grandparents’ generation benefited, but then lost everything in WWII, the Soviet occupation, and the failure of the 1956 revolution. Eventually his



### MY THIEVERY OF THE PEOPLE Stories by Leila Marshy

“Tightly woven, electric and exciting. Marshy’s voice is both stark and a pulsing half-dream. An excellent follow-up to her wonderful debut, *The Philistine*.”

ELI TAREQ EL BECHELANY-LYNCH  
*The Good Arabs*, Grand Prix du Livre de Montreal, 2022



### SAINTS REST A novel by Luke Francis Beirne

“Beirne captures the hard-boiled spirit of Saint John—the dense fog, the salty air, the cold-in-the-bones life of the working class. A fine example of East Coast Grit Lit.”

JERROD EDSON  
*The Moon is Real and The Goon*

INFO@BARAKABOOKS.COM  
WWW.BARAKABOOKS.COM

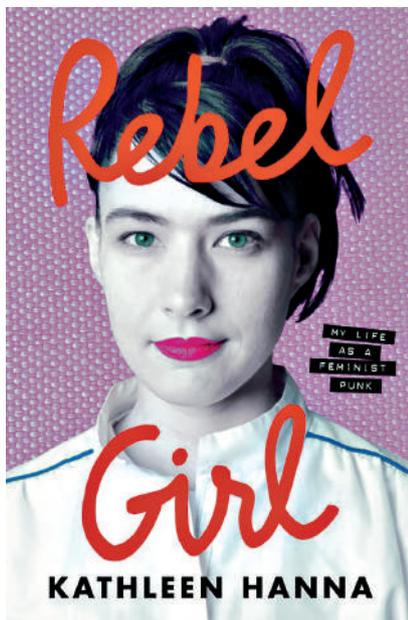
**BARAKA  
BOOKS**

parents embarked on a somewhat unlikely and perilous journey, jumping off a train at the Austrian border with few possessions, and petitioning the Canadian embassy, where refugees were allowed to wait inside, rather than on the freezing street outside the American embassy. Each book I read that touches on the Holocaust contains fresh stories of hell and tragedy. In this one, it is the story of Lorinc's father's sale as a slave to work in a Serbian copper mine, where he toiled with around six thousand other young Hungarian Jewish men. He was a lucky survivor, liberated by Yugoslavian partisans. There is perhaps a little bit too much secondary history here because, though this framework is interesting and often essential, what is so exceptional about the book is this one particular family's story. Lorinc captures the complex personalities of his surviving family members, especially his grandmother, Ilona. Their stories are told with care and precision, and the result is enthralling. —*Kristina Rothstein*

### INSIDE A TINY TORNADO

In her memoir **Rebel Girl: My Life as a Feminist Punk** (Ecco), Kathleen Hanna describes her singing as “the tiny tornado I most want to be in,” and that pretty much describes the book. In the '90s, Hanna and her friends began and ended many punk bands (the most notable being Bikini Kill and Le Tigre), and the women's group/zine (and later, publishing house) *Riot Grrrl*. Hanna's love of singing started when she began belting out “Away in a Manger” as loud as she could in front of the bay window of her family's house in suburban Maryland. From there she played around with musical theatre and then, when she left home for college, she entered the exciting, scary and sometimes dangerous world of punk rock. Hanna and her fellow punk rockers drove back

and forth across the US in piece-of-shit cars, wrote their own songs, slept on people's floors, made their own posters, and played through shitty PAs in tiny, dingy venues for almost no money. The audiences were mostly violent and misogynistic men who yelled insults at the musicians and harassed any women in the audience, but Hanna did not walk away. She loved the music too much. Between songs she talked about rape and domestic violence while the men yelled “Shut up and play!” and after her shows, she talked with the women who lined up to share their experiences of rape and abuse. In her spare time, Hanna volunteered at a rape relief and domestic violence centre. This sounds bleak, but Hanna manages to convey the joy she got from being a scrappy, outspoken woman fighting for stuff she believes in. The ability of Hanna to pick herself up and carry on is inspiring, as is her ability to recognize her own issues and try to do something about them. She writes that as a white woman she could be “ignored, belittled and told I wasn't a ‘real musician,’ but I was also a privileged monster, holding onto stupid grudges while ignoring how much leeway I was given as a pretty white girl.” The audio book

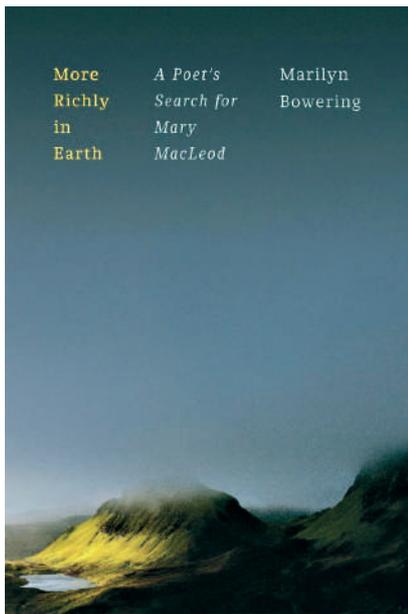


is read with irreverence and gusto by Hanna herself, but the ebook offers photographs of Hanna and her band members—snapshots that will make you realize how young these trailblazers were. Try them both!

—*Patty Osborne*

### PRAISE THE LAIRDS

**More Richly in Earth: A Poet's Search for Mary MacLeod** (McGill-Queen's University Press) is Marilyn Bowering's account of her investigations into the life of Mary MacLeod, a seventeenth-century poet of the Scottish Hebrides. Poetry was political back then, and MacLeod's surviving works—Gaelic songs, poems and panegyrics—often praise the accomplishments of the lairds and clan chiefs who served as her patrons and sponsors. But the details of MacLeod's life are in dispute, and Bowering, who is a poet and novelist living in Victoria, BC, comes to feel “as if I am carrying water or sand as each fact I come across slips through my fingers.” The result is a text studded with uncertainty: “Mary's mother *was (perhaps) of the MacLeod's of Morar*”; “a sister *appears to have lived . . .*”; “*Likely of low economic status . . .*”; “*Mary is thought to have . . .*” [italics mine]. Even the dates of MacLeod's birth and death are in doubt, as is the reason for her “notorious” burial treatment (“placed face downward in her grave”). This may have been at her own request, “to repudiate her own work”—but it could also have been imposed as a punishment (face-down burial being “usually reserved for those accused of witchcraft”). Bowering's deep attachment to the land and people of Scotland dates from her twenties, and her descriptions of the landscape give this book a luminescence and vitality: a walk through heather up the shoulder of Creag na Caillich; driving the single-track roads of western



More Richly in Earth  
 A Poet's Search for Mary MacLeod  
 Marilyn Bowering

Scotland in a British-racing-green MGB, “through ice and snow and fog” over the Bealach na Bà pass. Though published by a university press, *More Richly in Earth* is so much more than another dry, academic treatment of an almost-forgotten poet; Bowering’s writing sings, and as you read it, you can almost feel the wind coming off the Minch, driving rain before it. —*Michael Hayward*

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

C. Pam Zhang’s second book, **The Land of Milk and Honey** (Riverhead Books), is speculative fiction, both virtuosic and exhausting in its use of language. Strings of phrases, lists of foods, and unflinching records of cruelties and disasters are flung at the reader. Set in the (oh-god-please-no) near future, it describes a disastrously smog-filled world where crops have failed and the basic food is “the mung-protein-algal flour distributed by the government.” The narrator, whose name we never learn, is a young Asian-American woman, who applies for a position as chef in a research community funded by a reclusive billionaire and located on an Italian mountaintop. The appeal of

working in a compound where seeds have been saved, and where the best livestock is bred and tended, is obvious, seductive. The billionaire is—surprise—villainous. His complexion suggests makeup or a spray-on tan. His voice is coarse. He is awkward in speech and manner but crude in exerting power. We may be able to imagine such a person. The food descriptions are positively sexual (the skin of strawberries is “yielding as a woman’s inner thigh; oysters are “swollen through butter”). The wealthy investors lured to the compound eat feasts of excess (Bresse chicken “stuffed with truffles and foie, steamed inside an inflated pig’s bladder” soaks in a bath of Madeira and Armagnac). There are rarer, grosser foods that cause the diners to vomit—and then to be thrilled by their own daring. There is a hunt of endangered animals reminiscent of Oscar Wilde’s description of a fox hunt (“the unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable”). There is a climactic scene redolent of recent tragedies and current hubris. Zhang manages a fine balancing act, periodically veering over the edge into absurdity without alienating the reader—though I think a strong-minded editor would have trimmed away much of the narrator’s life, post-denouement, as the chef’s remaining experiences don’t provide a lot of sustenance.

—*Angela Runnals*

### BUILDING A FIBRESHED

**Fleece and Fibre: Textile Producers of Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands** by Francine McCabe (Heritage House) is a beautiful, large-format book showcasing the wide variety of animal fibres available along the Salish Sea, in an attempt to bridge the gap between the farmers who produce them and the makers who want them. The book discusses the idea of building a Vancouver Island

"A timely, controversial, well-researched book that will either get you reading in agreement or screaming in opposition—the perfect reflection of a polarizing time."  
—FRAN SCHUBERT

**KEN MCGOOGAN**  
**SHADOWS OF TYRANNY**



DEFENDING DEMOCRACY IN AN AGE OF DICTATORSHIP

**SHADOWS OF TYRANNY**  
 Defending Democracy in an Age of Dictatorship  
**KEN MCGOOGAN**  
 HARDCOVER | \$36.95

“McGoogan is a master history teller, and as much as his past Arctic fact-based tales spellbind me, this may be his most important work. Learn from history goes the saying, and *Shadows of Tyranny* is a detailed warning we should not and must not ignore.”  
 —**PETER MANSBRIDGE**



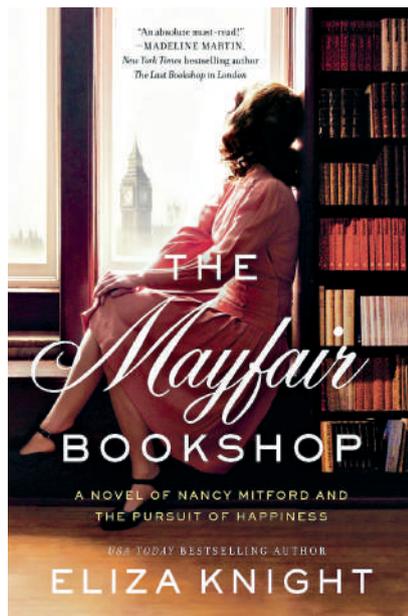
**Douglas & McIntyre**  
 www.douglas-mcintyre.com

“fibreshed,” a regional fibre system that breaks from the global textile framework to construct sustainable agricultural practices and connect products to local markets. McCabe began by interviewing regional farmers to discover what kinds of animals they raised, and what they do with their fibre. I was surprised to learn that, due to processing costs and a lack of local fibre mills, most fleeces are not turned into yarn, but instead sit in barns for years, or end up as compost or mulch. The book’s main section classifies the animal breeds and fibre types (sheep, alpaca, angora, goat, etc.), and profiles the farms where they are raised, illustrated with lush, full-page colour images of frolicking animals, sunlit meadows and heaps of raw fibre. McCabe also describes what could be made from each type of fibre, and lists any products sold by the farm. There is a section on plant-based fibres, exploring the potential for growing these locally, or leveraging invasive plant species as a fibre source. As a Vancouver-area knitter, I was interested to learn about the concept of a fibreshed, and where to look for locally-produced yarn. I understand McCabe’s aim to promote local fibres, but the book’s focus on the many breeds of sheep feels too specialized for the casual reader. I also wondered how to access this wealth of local fibre, short of visiting these farms myself. To some extent this is McCabe’s point: it is frustrating to know that these products are available and not be able to obtain them. *Fleece and Fibre* opened my eyes to what I’ve been missing out on and inspired me to seek it out for myself.

—Kelsea O’Connor

### FOUND IN A LITTLE FREE LIBRARY

In our neighborhood there are several Little Free Libraries, those bookshelves-on-a-post which offer books on a “take one, leave one”

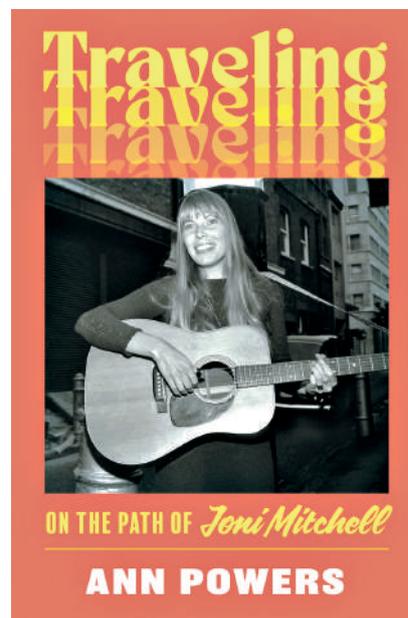


basis. I always check them out, and recently found a copy of **The Mayfair Bookshop** (William Morrow) by Eliza Knight, “an award-winning, *USA Today* bestselling author of women’s historical fiction,” who lives in Maryland “with her husband, three daughters, two dogs, and a turtle.” The turtle clinched it, so I took the book home. Described as “a novel of Nancy Mitford and the pursuit of happiness,” *The Mayfair Bookshop* was, according to one of the cover blurbs, “an absolute must-read”; a “moving, touching tale of a Bright Young Thing turned bookseller/author and her quest to find fulfillment, inspiration, and love in the chaos of the World War II home front” according to another. A book about books and bookstores, the love of books, and the writing of same; What’s not to like? I thought. Well: plenty, as it happens. The novel plays out in two time periods, in alternating chapters. One thread takes place in the 1930s and ’40s and is narrated by Nancy Mitford herself. The other thread is set in present-day London, and follows Lucy St. Clair, a “book curator” from the US, as she “lands a gig” working at Heywood Hill, the Mayfair bookshop of the title. In Chapter 1 Nancy describes the launch of her new novel, *Highland*

*Fling*: “‘Why, if it isn’t the brilliant Evelyn Waugh,’ I gushed, tugging him into my arms. Looking dapper and tan from his recent trek across the globe, he seemed in good spirits after the not-so-unfortunate demise of his marriage to that horrible cow who’d so sorely abused him. ‘And if it isn’t my equal in clever articulation as well as good looks, Nancy Mitford.’ I laughed, the first true one of the evening.” Nancy laughed; I rolled my eyes. Back to the Little Free Library this one will go. —*Lascia Tagen*

### UNWANTED JOURNEY

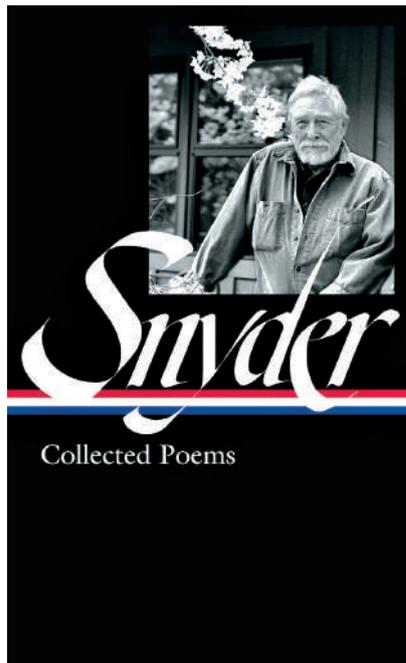
What drew me to **Traveling: On the Path of Joni Mitchell** (HarperCollins) wasn’t the author or her bylines (I’d never heard of Ann Powers), it was of course the subject—Joni Mitchell. After reading *Traveling*, my question is: what (apart from money) compelled Powers to write it? Powers makes it clear from the outset that she never had an interest in Mitchell’s work, mainly because she couldn’t get over Joni’s good looks (this somehow impeded her from taking the music seriously, an odd admission from a supposed feminist and music



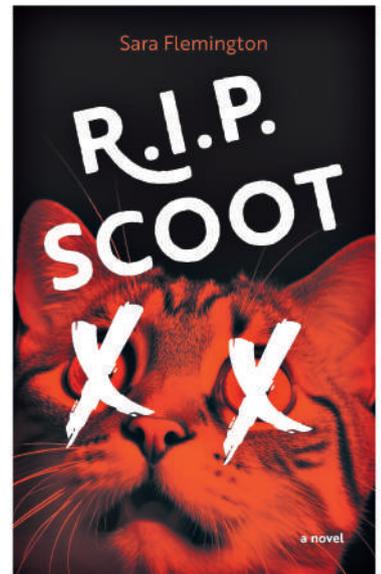
journalist). The book is unquestionably well-researched, and it occasionally shines when Powers manages to pull herself out of the narrative. But the entire premise—Powers travelling down the path of Joni Mitchell—feels like a device cooked up by an editor to make the project more enticing to a writer with no real interest in the subject. Also, there is very little shift in Powers’s perspective, and she admits as much: she begins a skeptic and ends a skeptic. Powers points out how she avoided any direct contact with Mitchell over the years, even while writing the book. She also has a disturbing habit of conjecture (“I’m pretty sure she tried psychedelics”) and of projection (“This familiarity, I realized, was a projection—as my original hostility toward Joni the Ice Queen had been.”). Maybe this internal struggle is what she means by “the path”? But, to me, the most readable parts are where Powers distances herself, not where she overlays her own process of understanding (and of not understanding) on Mitchell’s life work. Do we really learn anything new about Mitchell or anything interesting about Powers on this path? I’m not convinced. I would suggest that if you want to learn about the artist herself—Mitchell, that is—you’re better reading the original sources than reading Powers’s paraphrased versions of them, and if you want to gain insight into Mitchell’s work, you are better off listening to her music. —*Cornelia Mars*

### THE BEATS GO ON

At age ninety-five, Gary Snyder is the last survivor from the group of writers known collectively as the Beat Generation. In 2022, Snyder’s work became part of the Library of America, one of the few living writers so honoured. **Gary Snyder: Collected Poems** (Library Of America) is a handsome volume of over a thousand pages that includes all eleven of his books



of poetry, plus a generous selection of previously uncollected poems. Snyder’s deep interest in Buddhism, and in our relationship with nature, shows up frequently in his writing, as in this poem from *Axe Handles* (1983): “As the crickets’ soft autumn hum / is to us, / so are we to the trees // as are they // to the rocks and the hills.” Snyder eventually settled into a hand-built home he named Kitkitdizze, situated in the San Juan Ridge area of northern California. One of his neighbours on that ridge, for too brief a time, was Snyder’s good friend and fellow poet Lew Welch, who had hoped to build a small cabin for himself on a portion of Snyder’s land. Welch’s life and poetry is explored in **He, Leo** (Oregon State University Press), a recent biography by Ewan Clark. Welch left his first marriage and a career in advertising (some claim that it was Welch who coined the famous slogan for Raid insecticide: “Raid Kills Bugs Dead”) for the bohemian life of a Beat-era poet. Welch’s poetry is collected in *Ring of Bone* (1979), which takes its title from this poem: “I saw myself / a ring of bone / in the clear stream / of all of it // and vowed, / always to be open to it / that all of it / might flow through



### R.I.P. SCOOT

A Novel

SARA FLEMINGTON

PAPERBACK | \$23.95



“*R.I.P. Scoot* is an unpredictable charmer—a shaggy-dog story about a patchy cat. Sara Flemington writes like a kookier Paul Auster, exploring the mysteries of coincidence, obsession, and grief with sweet, strange prose.”

—GREG RHYNO,  
author of *Who by Fire*



NIGHTWOOD EDITIONS

www.nightwoodeditions.com

// and then heard / ‘ring of bone’ where / ring is what a // bell does.” Welch drank heavily throughout his life and struggled with depression; before he could build his cabin near Snyder’s, he walked away one May morning in 1971, age forty-four, into the wilderness surrounding Kitkit-dizze. His body was never found.

—Liam MacPhail

## WE’LL ALWAYS HAVE PARIS

There is no plural for Paris, though there are many of them (Wikipedia offers help—wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris\_(disambiguation)—for those who might get them confused). There’s a Paris in Ontario (voted “the Prettiest Little Town in Canada” by *Harrowsmith Magazine* in 2017), and more than twenty in the United States. The most famous of these (thanks to the 1984

Wim Wenders film) is *Paris, Texas*. I recently rewatched the film for the first time in decades, in a high-resolution restoration just released on Blu-ray and UHD by Criterion. In 4K resolution you really *see* the sweat-sheen and dust on Harry Dean Stanton’s road-weary face, and every filament of Nastassja Kinski’s hot pink mohair sweater is distinct. Colours pop, and when the camera frames those far horizons and the empty roads that head toward them, you understand immediately why American landscapes fascinated so many European filmmakers (Antonioni’s *Zabriskie Point*; Adlon’s *Bagdad Café*). Yet another Paris is **Paris: A Poem**, by Hope Mirrlees, which Faber recently republished to celebrate the centenary of this “daring and dynamic experimental long poem.” Virginia Woolf called it “obscure, indecent, and brilliant,” and a glance at the typography and

layout shows why: words are set in ALL CAPS and in different type sizes; lines run vertically; a scrap of sheet music and bits of signage are embedded as fragments of “found poetry.” This was modernism, and very audacious for its day; the poem was written in the spring of 1919, immediately following WWI. Mirrlees, twenty-six years old, tried to capture her impressions of the streets of Paris by day and night. “The sky is apricot; / Against it there pass / Across the Pont Sol-férino / Fiacres and little people all black.” There’s a helpful foreword by Deborah Levy, an afterword by Sandeep Parmar and an extensive commentary—longer than the poem itself!—explaining references within the text. Delicious.

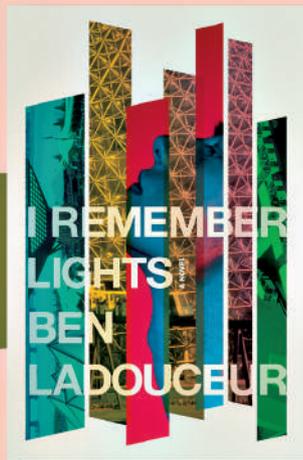
—Michael Hayward

## THE TRUTH SHALL SEND YOU DOWN EIGHT ALTERNATE ROUTES

If anyone wanted to test the idiom, “Wherever you go, there you are,” Myriam Lacroix has formulated an effective literary experiment to do so: force the same two characters into a handful of outlandish circumstances in disparate settings. **How It Works Out** (Doubleday Canada) is Lacroix’s debut collection of linked stories. She explores the bond between the central character (also named Myriam) and her partner Allison, suggesting eight possible endings for their doomed relationship. The opening story, “The Meaning of Life,” prepares the reader for the wacky, altered realities that lie ahead. In “Mantis,” Myriam the Praying Mantis and Allison the loyal mutt discover a moving truth about their bond while their captor is away from home. Communication breaks down in the titular story, while sweat and marathon-training begin to replace anything verbal.

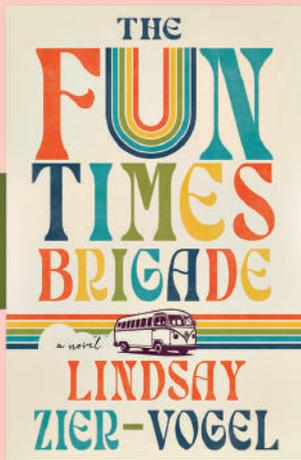
## New Fiction from Book\*hug Press

B\*



**I Remember Lights**  
Ben Ladouceur

“I loved it with my whole heart.”  
—Kim Fu, author of *Lesser Known*  
*Monsters of the 21st Century*



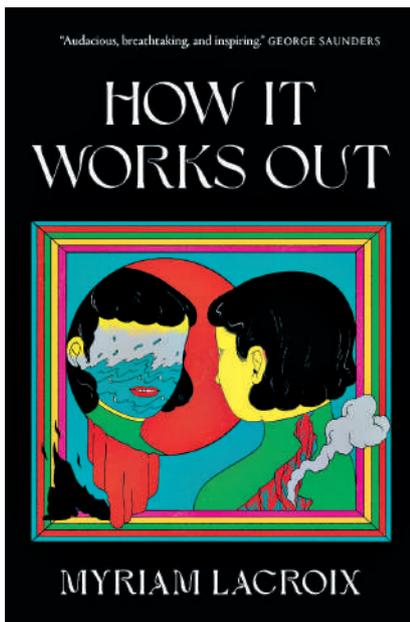
**The Fun Times Brigade**  
Lindsay Zier-Vogel

“I could not put this one down.”  
—Jennifer Whiteford, author of  
*Make Me a Mixtape*

Proudly publishing  
Canadian-made  
books since 2004

@bookhugpress





But what if the couple had a baby? One that they found in an alley, sure, but which, for all intents and purposes, was theirs? The refrain of “what if” forms the bedrock of each story, propelling the collection forward. Lacroix’s writing is shot through with dark humour, shifting between the surreal, the unbelievable and the very likely. Even when stories slip far from reality, character insights are empathetic and grounding. Myriam, a big-deal CEO in “Anthropocene,” tells her employee (and plaything), Allison: “I thought if bad things happened to me, it must mean I’m a bad person. I think that’s what feels good about being submissive. If I’m not making any of the decisions, then I can’t be bad. For a few minutes or hours, I’m absolved.” In the final story, “The Feature,” the previous seven worlds inhabited by Myriam and Allison crash into one another. Here, Lacroix reveals the true nature of her characters who, having experienced an impressive range of alternative lives, from cannibalism to illegal parenting, come to understand the ways that circumstance can both be *of* consequence and *of no* consequence, and find out, of course, how it works out.

—Dayna Mabannah

## FOUND IN A CAVE

You could be forgiven for at first believing that José Saramago used a speech-to-text app when writing his novel *The Cave* (Harcourt) and forgot to tell the app to insert punctuation. Every one of the 307 pages in my paperback translation (by Margaret Jull Costa) looks exactly like every other page: there’s not a whisper of punctuation beyond the very occasional period. There’s a great deal of talking with no quotation marks. There’s no paragraphing, and the text is justified right as well as left. Thank goodness for chapter breaks (though without headings or numbers, of course). And to compound the lack of visual clues, very little seems to happen. So why is the book so readable, so compelling, despite all this? For characters, we have: a widower potter, his assistant potter daughter (*mea culpa*), her security-guard husband and an adopted stray dog they call Found. Yes, the dog has an inner life and observes the lives of the other three, but always remains very much a dog. Why do the destinies of these characters matter? A fifth character, perhaps, is The Centre, the looming monolithic urban complex several hours drive from the semi-rural pottery, arbiter of commercial (and political?) power, that seems to offer our friends salvation and damnation, both. The destinies of the other four *do* matter, so perhaps the real question is: how do we find ourselves willingly seduced into their minds and hearts? How has the writer done it? Open *The Cave* anywhere—the pages all look more or less the same. Every line is packed with the minutiae of our inner workings, our hopes, fears, insights, delusions, resilience, our love for each other, everything that is banal if unexamined, but epic under Saramago’s microscope. His pages, like life, seem formless until we read them. —D. G. Shewell

## NOTES FROM DESOLATION PEAK

My first “book as Bible” was Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*. I once donated a hardcover copy—soon stolen, I imagine—to the reading room of Shakespeare & Company, George Whitman’s Paris bookstore, in the belief that I was evangelizing for some sort of poetic truth and a vagabond way of life. Kerouac’s 1956 summer as a fire lookout in the North Cascades formed the basis of two later books, *The Dharma Bums* (1958) and *Desolation Angels* (1965). Reading them, I imagined Kerouac in his lookout cabin, gazing north past Mount Hozomeen—“most beautiful mountain I ever seen”—and across the Canadian border into southern BC. **Desolation Peak: Collected Writings** (Rare Bird Books) offers a fascinating glimpse into that fire lookout summer, with an introduction and notes by Charles Shuttleworth, and a complete transcription of Kerouac’s shirt-pocket notebook. There’s even a photographic insert, with reproductions of some of the notebook’s pages, including drafts of haiku, or “pops” as Kerouac called them, and a meticulous tracking of his finances. One of the pages is a list of things to buy when he’s done: “Hornrim dark glasses,” “Red bandana,” “New Jeans size 33-30.” *Desolation Peak* also contains Kerouac’s notes toward a pair of unfinished novels, “Ozone Park” and “The Martin Family.” In “Ozone Park,” Kerouac chronicled his life from June 1943 to May 1949 and the acceptance of his first novel *The Town and the City*. He intended “The Martin Family” to be a sequel to *The Town and the City*. As a testament to the enduring power of the Kerouac myth, people still make the trek every summer—a thirsty climb of 3,400 vertical feet—from the shore of Ross Lake to that original lookout cabin, which still sits atop Desolation Peak. —Michael Hayward

# GEIST in the Classroom



*Geist* is always looking for  
new writers and readers



Teachers are always looking  
for good readings

*Geist* in the Classroom puts us together.

Sign up now for FREE class sets!

“*Geist* is an inspiration in my writing classes. They’re thrilled—with the publication itself, and with the clear invitation to publish. Thanks from all of us!”

“*Geist* helps motivate me and my students to continue with our own writing and artwork. Love it.”

If you are a teacher of writing, composition, literature, publishing or any kindred subject, you can get free copies of *Geist* for you and your students, just by asking for them.

P.S. If you are a student, hand this to your instructor!

# GEIST

FACT + FICTION • NORTH of AMERICA

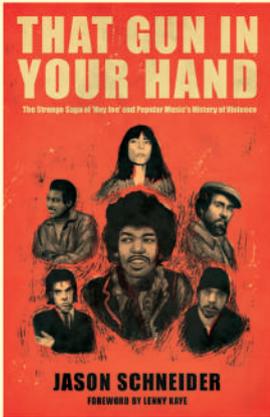
FOR DETAILS VISIT [GEIST.COM/GIC](http://GEIST.COM/GIC)

OR CALL 1-888-434-7834



# NEW FROM THE FORGE

www.anvilpress.com  
info@anvilpress.com



**THAT GUN IN YOUR HAND**  
JASON SCHNEIDER

This is the story of a song. Yet, it is a song that binds nearly every strand of 20th Century American popular music. This is the strange saga of 'Hey Joe', the murder ballad that launched the career of Jimi Hendrix.

\$22 | MUSIC | MAY



**POOLS**  
MARTIN WEST

*Pools* is a novel that delves into themes of excess through the lens of 1980s party culture. Set in Vancouver, *Pools* weaves a rich tapestry of human experience, illustrating the often tragicomic elements of this thing we call life.

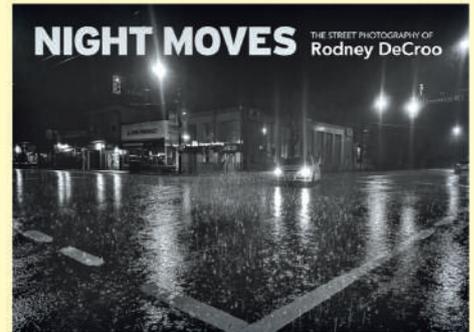
\$22 | FICTION | JUNE



**PARADE OF STORMS**  
EVELYN LAU

Storms, floods, wildfires, and environmental devastation are at the heart of the latest volume of poetry from award-winning author Evelyn Lau. Weather, both physical and emotional, forms the backdrop to *Parade of Storms*.

\$18 | POETRY | APRIL



**NIGHT MOVES**  
THE STREET PHOTOGRAPHY OF RODNEY DECROO

A gritty, touching, poignant, and truthful portrayal of contemporary urban life. DeCroo faithfully captures the living character of East Vancouver, especially the Commercial Drive area that he has called home for the past thirty years.

\$40 | PHOTOGRAPHY/POETRY | APRIL

AVAILABLE TO THE TRADE FROM PGC/RAINCOAST

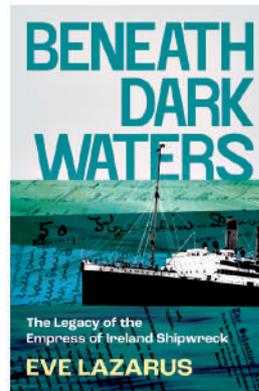
## NEW NON-FICTION *from* ARSENAL PULP PRESS

[arsenalpulp.com](http://arsenalpulp.com)



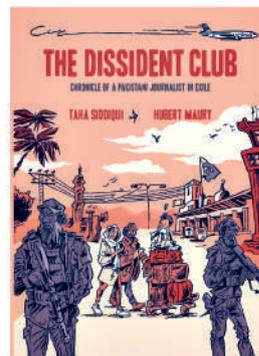
**SEARCHING FOR SERAFIM**  
Ruby Smith Diaz

The life and legacy of Serafim "Joe" Fortes, Vancouver's trailblazing Black lifeguard who became a cultural icon in a racist society. "An exquisitely written book about a figure both emblematic and enigmatic." —David Chariandy



**BENEATH DARK WATERS**  
Eve Lazarus

By the author of *Cold Case BC*: The poignant and very human drama of the 1914 Canadian maritime disaster that claimed the lives of more passengers than the Titanic.



**THE DISSIDENT CLUB**  
Taha Siddiqui & Hubert Maury;  
translated by David Homel

An urgent and compelling graphic memoir about a Pakistani investigative journalist at odds with his fundamentalist family and the Pakistani military that kidnaps him.

# The GEIST Cryptic Crossword

Prepared by Meandricus

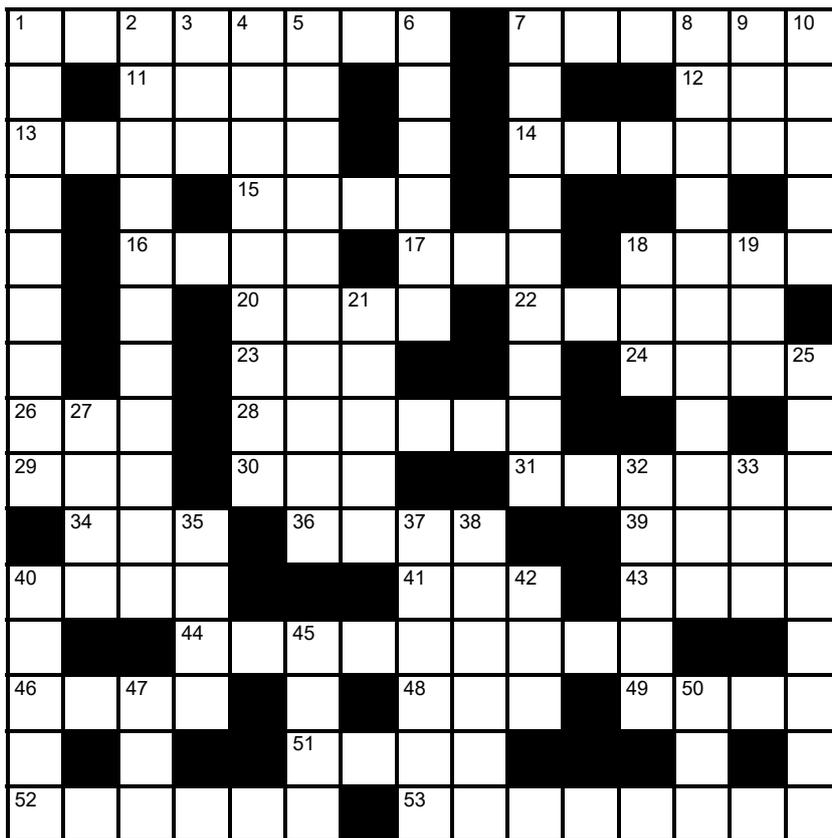
Send a copy of your completed puzzle, along with your name and address, to:

Puzzle #129 GEIST  
#210-111 West Hastings St.  
Vancouver BC V6B 1H4  
or geist@geist.com

A winner will be selected at random from correct solutions and will be awarded a one-year subscription to *Geist* or—if already a subscriber—a *Geist* magnet.

## ACROSS

- 1 Some flowers are not meant to be seen
- 7 There was a mix up with his escort for the Foundation event
- 11 This will never work unless you get over yourself
- 12 I really dig the funny stuff
- 13 At the gates, I hope Pete won't say I'm too old!
- 14 Keep your money and just be nice to me (2)
- 15 That synagogue is certainly lush!
- 16 I hesitate to ask who that Chinese stringer is
- 17 This counts as writing about the fifth sign
- 18 Are you familiar with an award-winning TV tube?
- 20 For God's sake, take me as I am! (2)
- 22 Did you hear the news that Mr. Robertson secured the channel?
- 23 Sounds like Kotter kept track of each student numerically
- 24 Are they the first ones to give us advice on computer techniques? (abbrev)
- 26 Little Joey couldn't bear being stuffed in her pocket
- 28 When she's too tired for takeout (2)
- 29 Is that the best dance in the Maritimes? (abbrev)
- 30 Who're you gonna call when you're lost near Vancouver? (abbrev)
- 31 When Gil and his pal killed the bull, I nuked my idea of a hero
- 34 Buy that drink! It comes with a free shirt
- 36 When Gigi plays the accordion, all of Canada listens
- 39 What happens when I see my bus leaving? (2)
- 40 Verbal fanfare is short and sweet! (2)
- 41 How did Harper get mixed up in that fishy business?
- 43 An eerie place to take drugs
- 44 If that nut drowns it'll be because they were often unacceptable



- 46 Good Lord! Those fellows are monstrous!
- 48 Temps in this program can be mischievous
- 49 Finn said that I'm ok
- 51 In the end, there is no parking
- 52 She had a band in her Foundation
- 53 Why do those undies cover her knees?

## DOWN

- 1 Over-shoulder-boulder-holder
- 2 What did the Expos ever do to get that huge social media coverage?
- 3 Remember when they ventured into no longer closing historical records? (abbrev)
- 4 What's that ship's name? It looks deformed
- 5 After the tsunamis, she excitedly rearranged her correspondence
- 6 In England the little things always go under
- 7 She got hooped when her dress stiffened up
- 8 I miss rhythm when I dance in a tight tee (2)
- 9 That one will take forever
- 10 Roosevelt couldn't bear to go sleeveless
- 18 I have no more to say (abbrev)
- 19 Molly likes the stronger stuff (abbrev)
- 21 Will the train start inside?
- 25 Is she suing each one that got their underwear in a knot?

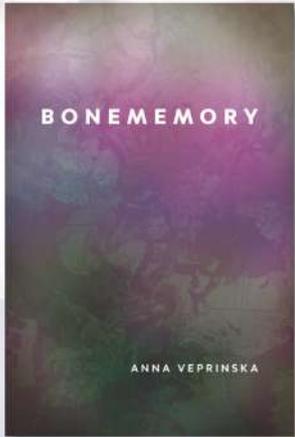
- 27 My cat Puss started eating eight fish
- 32 Buy a ticket in that small shop so that we can ski, ok?
- 33 Jack and Daniel sure blew their road trip (abbrev)
- 35 That spread wears away my resolve
- 37 Please be kinder with your comments when we mess up our finances (2)
- 38 Apparently Charles's guard gets paid in e-money
- 40 Old-fashioned sandals now cover up down there
- 42 Get out before I have to give you money (abbrev)
- 45 Are you building it up or tearing it down?
- 47 On a trip, Otto loves dining
- 50 At the game, an old fellow chanted three times

Solution to Puzzle 128

S	U	F	F	R	A	G	E	C	A	U	C	U	S
U	A	L	M	B	A	O	O						
B	I	N	C	U	M	B	E	N	T	P	A	R	
H	E	N	N	A	S	L	E	V	I	T	Y	T	
E	G	Y	M	F	E	R	A	L	I	I			
A	E	P	R	O	M	I	S	E	R	S	T		
D	A	R	K	H	O	R	S	E	S	T	M	I	
					F	O	P	S				O	
T	A	X	C	R	E	D	I	T	S	B	A	R	N
U	F								K	C	S	A	
R	Y	A	S	P	S	E	P	H	O	L	O	G	Y
N	E	C	T	A	R	B	O	V	I	A			
O	N	T	O	O	A	P	O	L	L	O	R		
U	O	V	E	N	N	L	L	L	I				
T	A	R	E	G	R	A	S	S	R	O	O	T	S

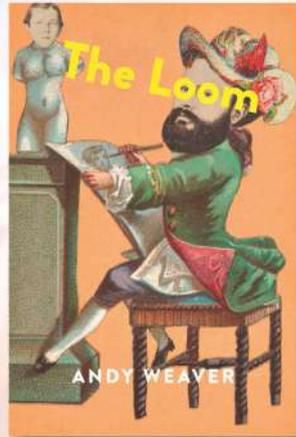


# READ BRAVE & BRILLIANT POETRY

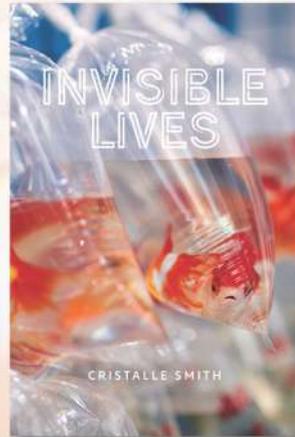


*Here is a poet who knows all too well that language is here to wake us up, and she does it playfully, tenderly, unabashedly—and with style that is all her own.*

—ILYA KAMINSKY, author of *Deaf Republic*

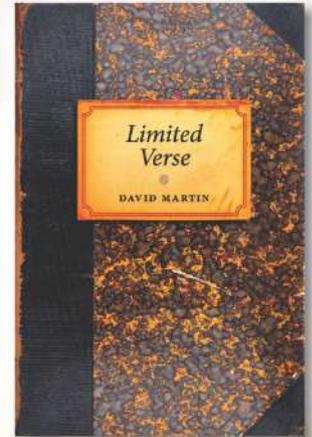


A book of love that celebrates the sleeplessness, fear, pressure, and transcendent joy of parenthood, an experience at once universal and deeply personal.



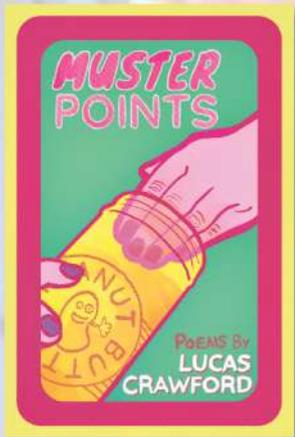
*Brave, devastating, and formally daring, Invisible Lives is dazzling poetry that tells terrible truths.*

—NANCY HOLMES, author of *Arborophobia*



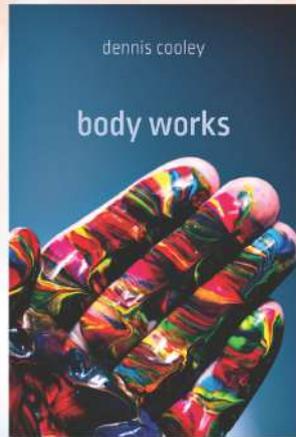
*Seeing so many old, familiar favourites in new clothes leads us to consider what the essence of poetry is, and how much of its meaning and effect is changed with the change of a word.*

—THE TORONTO STAR



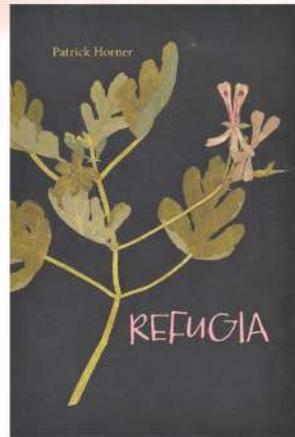
*Burns bright as a flare in a blackout. Heartfelt and clever, this collection thrashes and sings amidst the din of unrelenting, overlapping crises.*

—ADÈLE BARCLAY, author of *Renaissance Normcore*



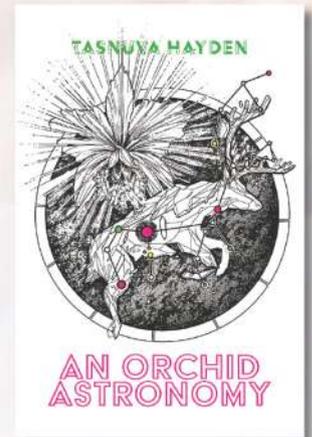
*Ever the master, dennis cooley reminds us of his stature as the grand magician of poetic play, even alongside the pain and vicissitudes of aging and winter and breaking.*

—KIMMY BEACH, author of *Nuala: A Fable*



*Patrick Horner weaves visceral, earthbound moments seamlessly with vast, inquisitive themes in this deeply serious and simultaneously playful collection.*

—LESLIE GREENTREE, author of *Not the Apocalypse I Was Hoping For*



*There is a beauty, a terrible beauty to this fragmentary assemblage where orchids and constellations, polar bears and underage affairs, suicide, murder and global warming share the same collision course with mass extinction.*

—DIANNE CHISHOLM, *Alberta Views*



UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY Press

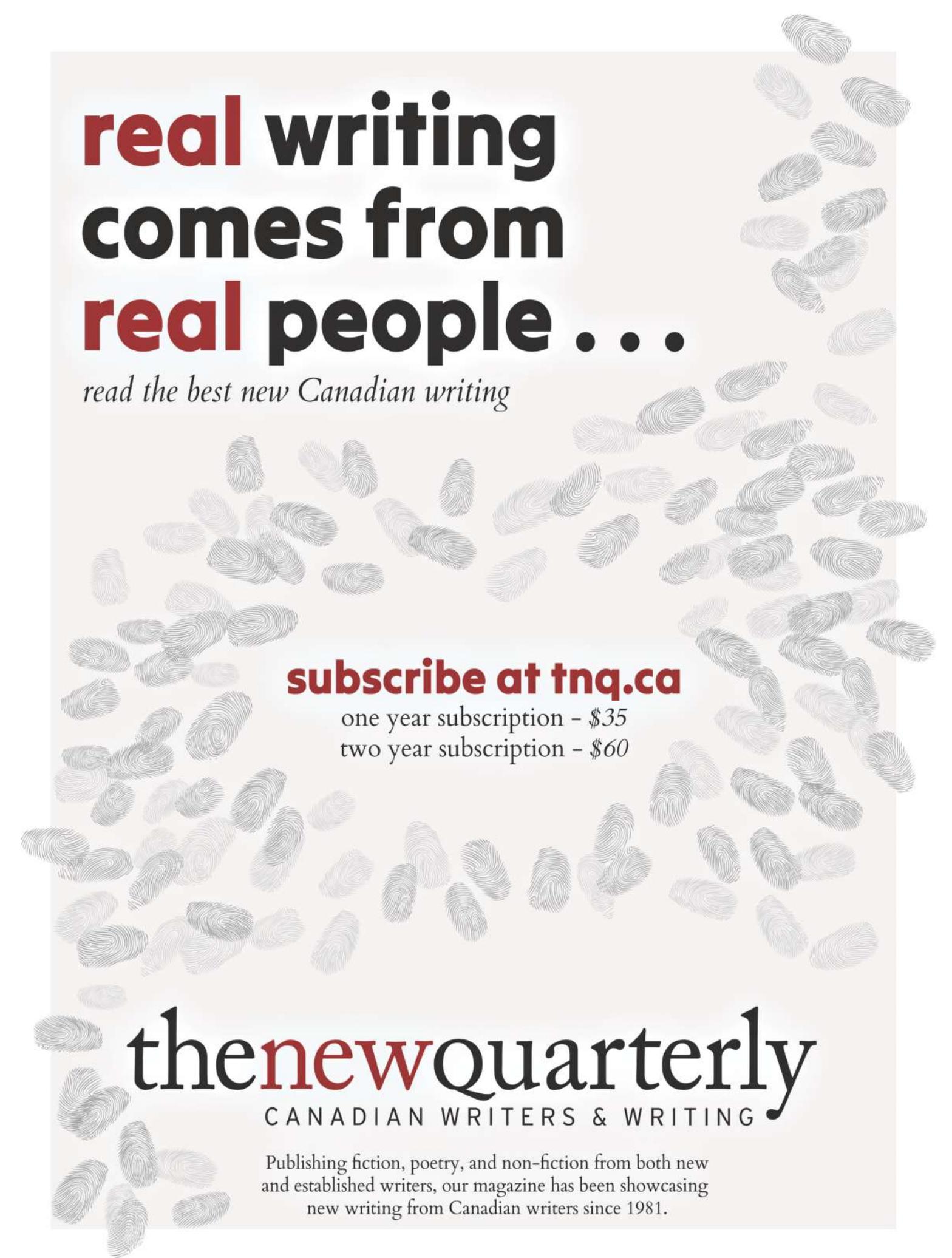


Canada Council for the Arts / Conseil des Arts du Canada



@UCalgaryPress

press.ucalgary.ca



**real writing  
comes from  
real people . . .**

*read the best new Canadian writing*

**subscribe at [tnq.ca](http://tnq.ca)**

one year subscription - \$35

two year subscription - \$60

**the***new***quarterly**  
CANADIAN WRITERS & WRITING

Publishing fiction, poetry, and non-fiction from both new and established writers, our magazine has been showcasing new writing from Canadian writers since 1981.