GEIST

FACT + FICTION NORTH of AMERICA

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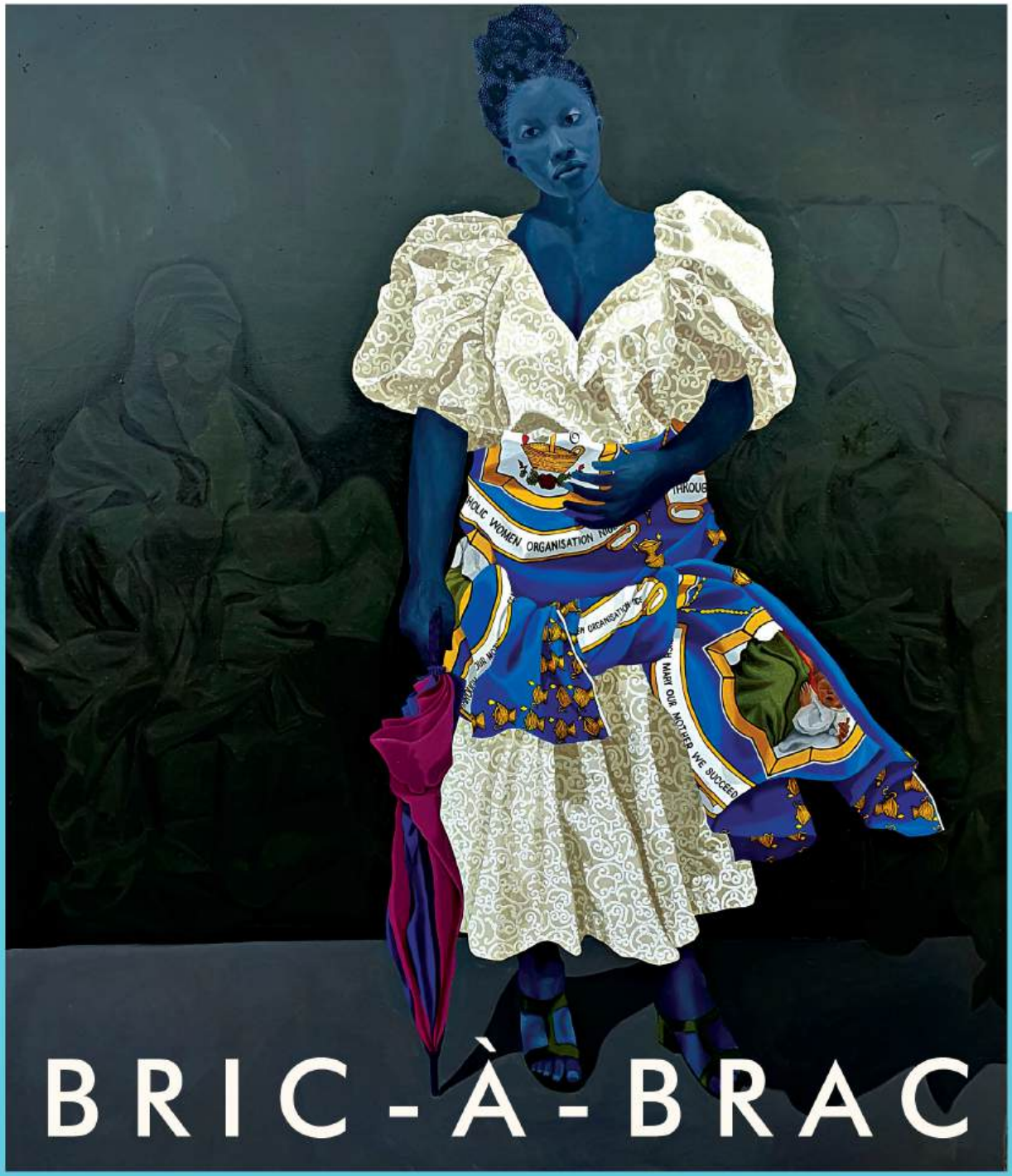
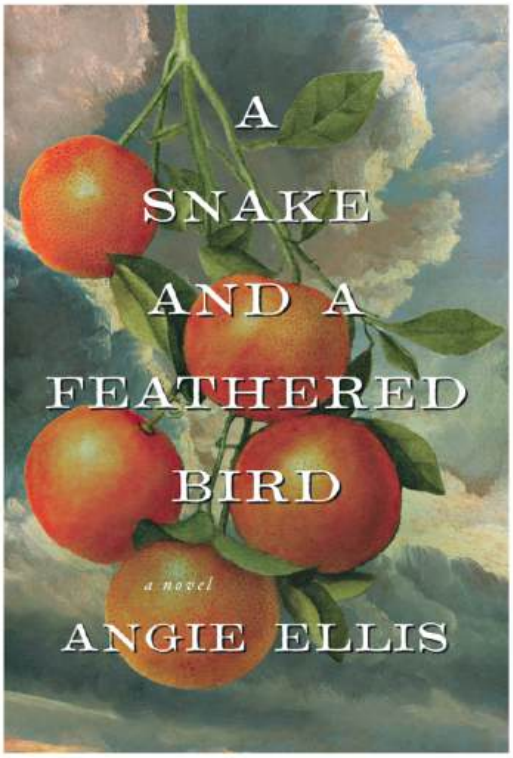


Luck of the Meat Draw | Yams | Endsickness
reading comprehension | Villanelle for the Blue Line | Some Ribs
2024 Short Long-Distance Lit Contest Winners



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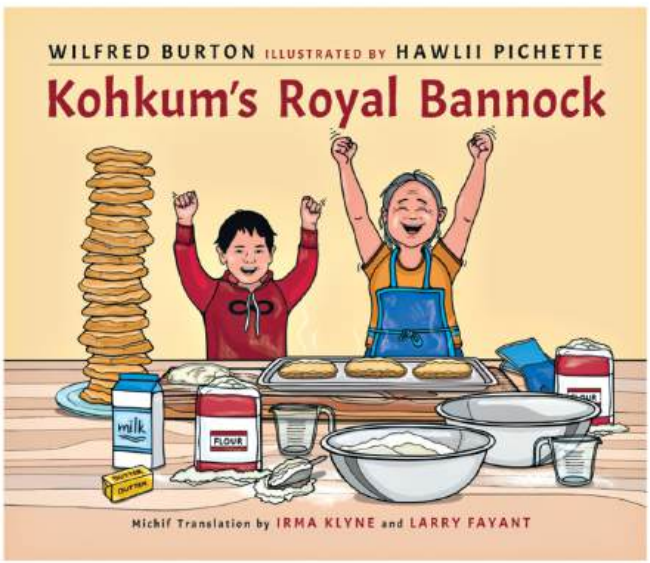

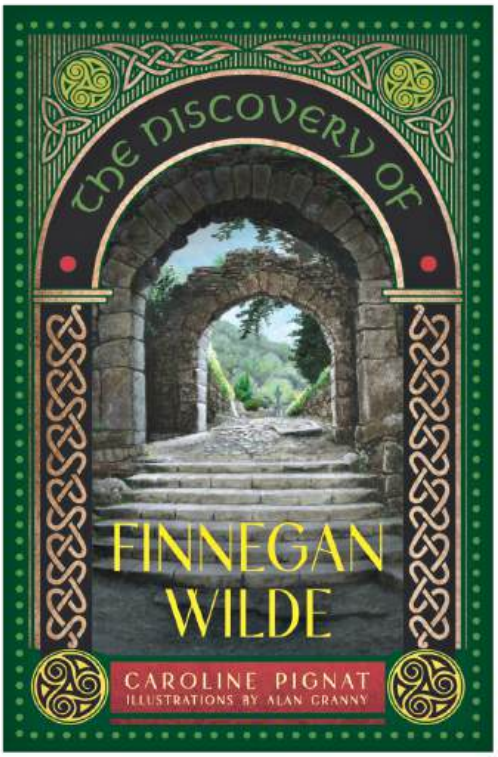

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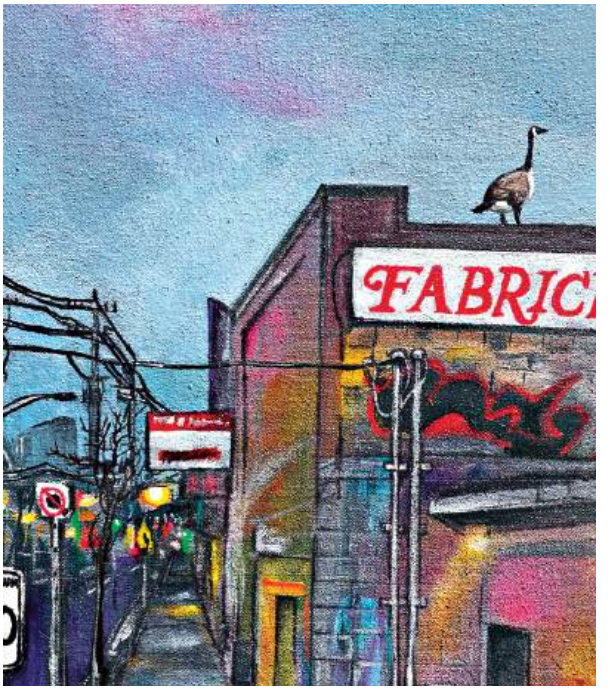
Volume 33 • Number 130 • Fall 2025

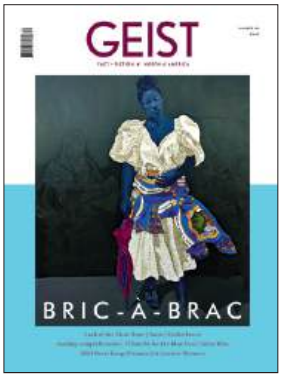
FEATURES



Detail from "bric-à-brac," see page 47

GEIST

Fact + Fiction, North of America



COVER: *The Feast Day*, 2022, acrylic and oil on canvas by Tonia Nneji. A note from Tonia, July 2025: "Fabrics serve numerous roles within religious societies in Nigeria, especially in Pentecostal and orthodox churches, taking on qualities from the associative to the commemorative. They serve as markers of events and periods, as well as tools of recognition, status and solidarity among members. Drawing from research and personal experiences travelling across parts of the West, the works in this series create imaginative scenes that examine the new meanings these fabrics take on in Diasporic environments."

GEIST

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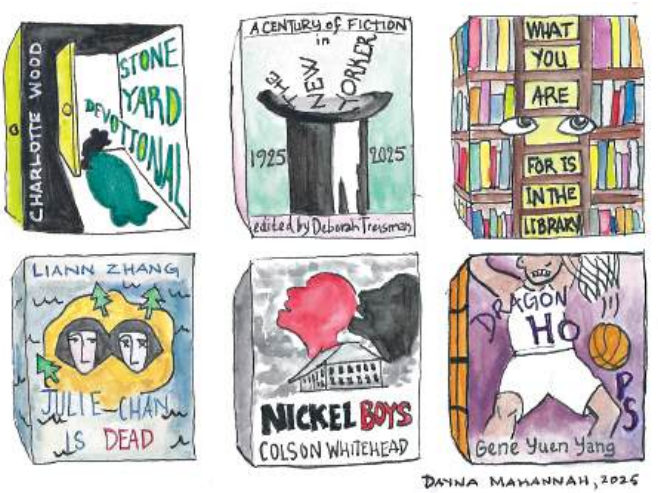


Select titles read by Geist staff, 2025, with alternative covers

GRATITUDE X INFINITY

After a wonderful four-issue stint as Geist's interim editor-in-chief, Dayna Mahannah welcomes back Emma Cleary to the role! While Emma was on maternity leave, Dayna put together Nos. 127 to 130. Highlights from her time at Geist are all people-centric (with the literary side of things coming in a close second): catching up with her funny co-workers at the office; working with wonderful authors; and meeting the lit-minded at events and issue launches. Dayna sends endless gratitude to Toke, Michelle and Sylvia, to the lovely board members, the designer Michał, the inimitable Reading Collective, *Geist* readers, and to Emma, for the guidance and special opportunity.

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

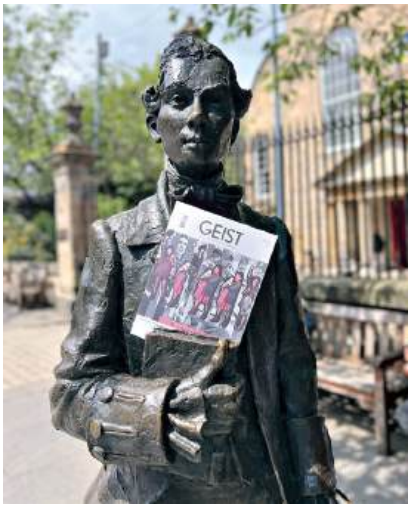
This misunderstanding led to an allegation of a breach of contract. We have recently reached a settlement that addressed Mr. Cran's concerns. As part of the resolution, we are developing a complaint policy to prevent such misunderstandings from happening in the future, and we have republished Mr. Cran's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

—Board of Directors,
Geist Foundation

GEIST IN EDINBURGH

Geist board member and correspondent, Michael Hayward, proves the magazine's global reach! Here is *Geist* 128, held by Scottish poet Robert Fergusson (1750–1774), who is commemorated in bronze on Edinburgh's Royal Mile. From Michael: "The Wikipedia entry for Fergusson notes that his main claim to fame rests on his poem 'Auld Reekie,' which celebrates Edinburgh itself. As the inscription at his feet reminds passersby, he 'died in bedlam,' which I suppose illustrates the tendency (or the ability) of poetry to drive people mad."



OVERHEARD

Overheard in her sister-in-law's art studio in Prince Albert, SK, by Geist *reader Kim A. Neudorf. Comic by Mare Wollner and Tania De Rozario. Mare works primarily in fibre arts, watercolour and ink. Tania creates poetry, essays and images.*

WRITE TO GEIST

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

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Based in the Tri-City area outside of Toronto, ON, **Elle D. Ablo** works with mixed media, installations and video. Drawing on her diverse heritage, intersectional identity, and place within the world, she encourages viewers to see beyond what they first perceive and to consider the layers and perspectives that exist within art.

Tereza Allen is an artist who lives and works in Victoria, BC. She has been a creative person all her life. She is a self-taught artist, primarily working in oils and focussing mainly on portraiture. In 2018 Tereza was awarded the Best Work on Paper under Glass at the Sidney Fine Arts Show. Art is her constant learning experience. You can find her work at terezaallenart.com or @terezaallen22.

Kim Collins is a multidisciplinary artist and graphic designer from Lincoln, ON, who specializes in bicycle graphics and marketing collateral for Canadian distributors. Beyond client work, Kim creates joyful, humorous pieces using recuperated content through painting, sewing and sculpture. Her diverse practice includes publications, exhibitions and public art projects. Her work can be found at kimcollinsart.ca or @4x5design.

Aislinn Gallivan is an Irish Canadian writer and photographer based in Vancouver, BC. Her creative work explores her connection with the natural world, mythology and folklore. She has published in *SAPP Zine*, *emerge 24*, *SAD Mag*, and the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*. You can find her on Instagram @aislinngallivan.

Samuel Garland is a multimedia multitasker based out of Montréal, QC. He enjoys taking photos of the everyday and editing them.

Zion Greene-Bull (they/them) is a mixed Guyanese interdisciplinary artist with a primary practice of tattooing, digital artwork, lino printing and acrylic painting. Their art primarily focuses on Black joy, queerness, processing emotions, and themes of liberation.

Kip Johl is a mixed media artist. She has worked in commercial art, and has been a fine artist for fifty years. A sense of provocation continually prompts her to produce visceral work with constraint and reckless abandon. She lives on Galiano Island. Work can be found at kipandjim.ca.

Tonia Nneji is a contemporary artist who was born in Lagos State, Nigeria, and now lives in Calgary, Canada. She comes from a long line of traditional carvers and masquerade carriers. Following her family tradition of artistry, she graduated with a BA (Hons) in Visual Arts from the University of Lagos, Nigeria, in 2016. Instagram: @tonia_nneji

Jerome Stueart is a queer Canadian/American artist and writer. His work is whimsical, joyful, and lately, more political. His recent illustrated essay, "The Dead Viking My Birthmother Gave Me," (*Geist* 126), was nominated for a National Magazine Award. Find him on Instagram @jeromestueart or jeromestueart.com. He lives in Knoxville, TN.

The Luck of the Meat Draw

JORDAN KAWCHUK

I came for the meat draw and stayed for the next ten years

Welcome home, boy."

Louie greeted me the same way, every day, from just inside the metal door of Legion 298, his voice thick with gravel and Polish singsong. He was the beer hall's unofficial greeter, and when he wasn't welcoming members or giving the stink eye to newcomers, he sold trays of homemade cabbage rolls from the trunk of his sedan out back.

Vancouver's Legion 298 on Main Street had gradually become my second home, so Louie's welcome both warmed and wounded a heart that knew better. What started off as an eccentric escape from work and household duties was now my watering hole, my living room, my numbing station. I once considered the rugged regulars here with the healthy distance of amused character study. Now I was one of them.

It was Friday, four o'clock. That meant Meat Draw time—when we gathered to drink draft and buy tickets in hopes of winning butcher packs of steaks, wings and pork chops. For outsiders and drop-ins, it was a funny story to share at work on Monday, but for us regulars, the Meat Draw was a definitive ritual. It gave structure to the structureless pastime of drinking for hours inside a windowless bar.

I walked to the head table, to my designated barstool. The tavern looked and smelled as if it hadn't changed since my grandfather's first shave. Everything at the Legion bled a hue of bygone red—red Naugahyde chairs, red terry cloth tables, red threadbare carpet. Even the cheeks of the drinkers here burst spidery veins of hard-lived crimson. Patronizing this wine-coloured place was like living in the belly of a very sick animal. And I absolutely loved it.

I took my seat at the long, narrow stretch of table we affectionately called the Ironing Board. In the morning, it sat about ten devout drinkers sharing the same newspaper, trading turns with the word scramble. By happy hour, it buzzed with dozens of extroverts standing, leaning, and elbowing to get a word in or to tease each other with inside jokes. At the Legion, a place at the Ironing Board meant you'd made it. For me, it was a sense of patron pride, of community. For my wife Cathy, it was more a cause for concern.

The seniors from the Ladies Auxiliary Club circulated the Legion and began selling the Meat Draw tickets, dressed in ceremonial navy uniforms. They hosted the lottery every weekend to raise money for their luncheons. Every half hour, from the cooler behind the bar, the ladies hauled out oversized packages of meat bursting from cellophane skins—T-bones, roasts, chickens, chops, *anything*—and spun a metal cage of ticket stubs to pick the winners.

Image: Tereza Allen, Pencil Head, *2023, oil on Gessobord*

Tickets sold three for a toonie. Some guys, like Bad Ted, would buy entire arm-lengths at a time, and win over and over until the room booed him. Then he'd drink until last call, a towering pile of warm meat gathered at his feet.

I could never put my finger on why—as a professional, as a family man, as someone who knew healthier ways of connection—winning meat with this crowd excited me. Even when the old-man-tavern novelty faded, the quotidian practice of buying tickets, drinking and bullshitting with this bunch was ambiguously reassuring.

"First draw's up," called Sophie, today's Meat Draw host. She had a thick roll of red dollar-store tickets hooked on one meaty arm. "We got a breakfast pack this round. Eggs, bacon, hash . . ."

Loonies and toonies hit the Ironing Board with a clang.

Thirsty for a cold one while doing renovations on our first home off Main Street in the summer of 2005, I asked the guy renting me a floor sander where I could grab a quick glass of beer. He pointed me directly across the street to a white, Tudor-style building with colourful crests as its only signage. When I walked in and surveyed the scene of old timers, pickled eggs and a raffle for Thanksgiving turkeys, I discovered a lost city of kitsch and comfort. I came for the meat draw and stayed for the next ten years.

Legion members schooled me in Meat Draw history: The raffles began as a British response to WWII food rationing, and the draws eventually grew into a sociable tavern tradition for veterans. Then, with a financial need to attract a clientele without canes, most veterans' clubs no longer required mandatory military memberships to drink the cheap alcohol. That meant Legions like mine became boozy melting pots of old-timers, millennials, labourers, artists, bachelorette parties and drunks—all happily sharing tables and pissy draft. And at meat o'clock, the place was packed.

The community of characters provided as much a buzz as the booze. Peggy the Vet often brought in her homemade Scotch eggs and Trucker Ron cut them up with his pocket knife for the table. Lawyer Larry wowed the Ironing Board with his tales of locking up criminals using unlawful shortcuts. Ray, a career guitar man, played on a forgotten Grammy-nominated jazz album and Donna the bartender ordered pizza for the regulars, sending us home too stuffed for our real, more nourishing family dinners.

It was there I learned how to do crosswords ("pens are for pros, pencils for pussies"), how to buy cheap, hot items like tires and cheese from local thieves who took orders, and how to appreciate Main Street's old guard, far more genuine than the influx of young couples like me and Cathy. It became the place from which I brought home mountains of meat over the years.

My winning streaks were exhilarating. I racked up every edible animal like chips at a roulette table—lamb chops, beef pies, chicken breasts, back ribs, flats of eggs. But the problem became how to take the prizes home to Cathy. If the smell of booze didn't give me away, an armful of ground beef would. Sometimes, I hid my winnings inside the little-used freezer in our garage or just immediately traded my meat for another pint and a shot. Not only was I enabling a drinking burden, I was oddly addicted to winning

Yams

DENISE DA COSTA

What grows in a grave
and gives life?
Torn, this tuber—
this thread-barked Black Whisp
this pale fleshed expatriate.

What could not swim
but did not drown—
survived the Crossing;
defended by the Captives—
for hundreds of years?

What gifted history its future
on the long Passage—buried,
to be born? Unearthed, in perpetuity
our Guinea ties, tethered
four hundred years.

Denise Da Costa is a Canadian writer whose work explores mental health and intersectional identity. She studies creative writing as an MFA student at UBC. Her novel, And the Walls Came Down *(Dundurn, 2023), was longlisted for the 2024 Toronto Book Award. She's currently working on her next novel.*

provisions I could afford to buy elsewhere—like, say, the grocery store.

"If I could, I'd burn that place to the ground," Cathy said once, as we drove past the Legion on a Saturday Ikea run.

I agreed, but that didn't relax her brow. No matter how ludicrous it was, I still wondered which regulars were inside and what fun I was missing.

In the middle of the scuffed dance floor, raffle host Sophie sat at a folding table upon which five packs of glistening meat awaited adoption. She spun the metal cage with a clank and pulled a folded ticket. "Your first number is . . . nine-four-eight-one."

Larry the Lawyer leaped from the Ironing Board and jogged up to her, waving his stub.

"That's a good ticket," Sophie confirmed.

The room catcalled Larry as soon as he chose the steaks. Steaks were always the first to go.

We went through one raffle every half hour, five prizes per session. We scowled at strangers who won and cheered on our favourite regulars, especially those who really deserved the win, like 89-year-old Ruby or the poor loner in the dirty disco jacket.

Dead ticket stubs gathered in front of me, soggy from beer spill. My chances of having anything to show for the night dwindled as the stakes—and steaks—skyrocketed, right over my head.

"Your last ticket of the five-thirty draw's been drawn, ladies and gents," Sophie announced.

I looked around at my competition. Almost all the regulars were sporting meat.

"Nine-seven . . ."

In my range . . .

"Eight . . ."

So close . . . This is it . . .

"Five."

Dammit. We cried foul.

Then Bad Ted threw his arms up in victory. "Adios, losers!" He sashayed down the aisle, politely giving everyone the finger, and claimed his prize: a mammoth package of chalky raw chicken wings we knew he'd never bake.

Pete the Painter leaned over to me. "You're always here, bud."

"So are you," I said, and downed a shot of bourbon.

We sat, silent, watching muted sports highlights. The regulars around the Ironing Board carried on—same jokes, same stories. Louie was hauling out the last box of meat from the walk-in cooler.

"Being here is different for some of us," Pete said. "That's all I'm sayin'."

I sipped at my warm draft.

"Just make sure you really want this."

Then he left.

The next Friday, I was still winless, continuing a bone-dry month of meat.

"Last call on the final meat draw!" Sophie shouted over the tavern's din. The handymen, the hipsters, the office mates and the barflies all reached into their pockets. So did I.

"Nine-nine-nine . . . FOUR," Sophie yelled over another Bob Seger song.

That sweet, sobering rush. My dopamine bell rang out with one carnival mallet smash. Instant elation. I slammed down my glass of Molson and threw my fists up. "Suck it, fellas!"

The Ironing Board flung cardboard coasters at my back as I slow-walked to the prize table. I picked the package of stewing beef over the goosebumpy drumettes. A solid choice. The moment was invigorating, and my bar time felt validated, if only for a flash.

With the draw done, a few young guys helped Sophie fold her table and carry the raffle cage and speaker to the storage room. Then, most of the Ironing Board set cleared out. I looked at my watch: 7:25 p.m. I still had two full glasses in front of me.

How could I know at the time? That the next seventeen years of my life would be spent in and out of treatment centres, high-end facilities full of hope, and publicly-funded shitholes fuelled by fighting and loneliness. How could I predict vicissitudes defined by shelters, sober houses and lost jobs? How was I to count how many times I'd say the Serenity Prayer, too often rote and routine, but sometimes bursting bright with new meaning? I could not know the loss I would eventually face. The loss of time. The loss of seeing a daughter grow up. I could not foresee that my body would forever carry a wistful weight and a homesickness for a home I could never return to.

I walked home woozy, with a bag of beef chuck that no longer excited me. Somehow, it was dark and close to bedtime now. I moved slowly, drinking an off-sale bottle of apple cider. I peed in a well-lit parking lot. I looked in the closed shop windows, their cash registers open to reveal emptiness. And a peculiar feeling rose up in me, that somehow I didn't really belong anywhere. And what a strange sensation that was.

When I arrived at our house, a bag of meat swinging from my arm, I gripped the cold railing that led up the stairs. Cathy opened the front door before I reached the first step. Even from a distance, I could see something different, something almost blurred and broken in her eyes.

Jordan Kawchuk is a television producer, journalist and creative non-fiction writer who has contributed to The Globe and Mail *(2024's Top 5 Most Read Essays),* This Hour Has 22 Minutes, The Discourse, *CBC,* National Geographic *and the anthology* Better Next Year *(Tidewater Press). He lives on Vancouver Island.*

Images: Zion Greene-Bull, Trans Expressions*, 2021, digital artwork*

Some Ribs

GRÁINNE DOWNEY

There's no emergency number for bones, right?

When the tide gets low at Kitsilano Beach in Vancouver, a big chain becomes visible. It's stuck right into the sand, deep enough that I think they'd need to bring in some heavy machinery if it ever needed to be removed. I don't know what it was put there for. The chain is constantly corroding, but never enough to break loose from whatever anchors it. One time, I pulled a traffic cone from the shore at low tide because it was filled with sand, and I imagined a fish swimming into the wide end and not being able to turn around. A nature documentary once told me that sharks can't swim backwards, and this was enough to convince me that the cone needed to be removed before the tide came back in.

In April 2021, the tides went out more than usual and I found a pair of ribs. They were big and appeared severed and were surrounded by the paw prints of curious dogs who had no doubt smelled something entirely new. The ribs were too big to belong to anyone except a whale.

The problem was that I only had a half hour for lunch. I wasn't eating lunch in those days, which meant that I could maximize my thirty minutes with a brisk walk to the beach and back. I didn't tend to have many Teams calls scheduled in the afternoons, so it didn't matter if I sometimes returned with wet hair from the rain. But half an hour is not long enough to deal with whale ribs.

The day of the ribs was wet. I saw them as soon as I reached the beach—an unfamiliar whitish-grey mass in the sand, a few dozen metres farther out than the rusting chain. About three feet long, and each rib five or six inches wide. They had oily, gunky fat all over, but they didn't smell. I thought, a week later, about ambergris, a valuable and extremely rare by-product of whales. I selfishly wondered if the ribs could be worth thousands of dollars. But when I looked it up, I found that ambergris only comes from sperm whales. I decided it was unlikely that these ribs belonged to a sperm whale, since I can only ever picture sperm whales in deep waters off continental shelves, but I suppose it was unlikely for these ribs to be on the beach at all.

I texted my sister, who agreed that they were whale ribs, and my brother, who suggested a rorqual whale. I knew what that meant because when my brother was small, I would babysit him and all he wanted to watch was documentaries about whales. He graduated from the childish ones quickly, though not quickly enough to prevent me from watching them all front-to-back a dozen times. One documentary featured a captive beluga named Bubbles who told an entire segment through song, and it still plays in my head when I think about whales in captivity. There was no musical number in the *Challenge of the Seas* series, hosted by the Hollywood actor Ted Danson. I was too young to know about the TV show *Cheers*, so for years I thought that Ted Danson was a leading marine biologist.

A rorqual whale is basically a whale with baleen instead of teeth: fins, humpbacks, minkes. Grey whales are in the mix, too, though they aren't always considered rorqual. I won't get into why. The important thing is that according to my brother, who I have come to trust entirely on all things cetacean, these ribs didn't belong to an orca or a dolphin. I wanted to conjure the truest image possible of this leviathan I had found a part of.

The ribs were somewhat mangled. It looked to me like someone had cut them, but I don't know what could have done that. In all that time babysitting, I never learned what happens to the body when a whale dies at sea. Ted Danson hadn't prepared me for this. The cross-section of the ribs showed tiny holes and now I wish I'd rapped against them with a knuckle so that I could know the sound.

Image: Gráinne Downey. Whale Ribs, Kitsilano Beach, *2021, photo taken with iPhone*

My lunch break was over. I went home. I sat at my work-from-home desk and knew that by the time I clocked out at four, the ribs would be back underwater. I put a photo of the whale ribs in our marketing Teams chat and one of my colleagues typed, "Ew!" I could barely work all afternoon. I wanted to be back on the beach with the ribs. I returned at low tide every day for a week and never saw them again.

Every year, I spend a few hours thinking about the ribs and wonder if I should have called someone, though I have no idea who, exactly, I could have called. There's no emergency number for bones, right? But what if the whale had been tagged and unaccounted for, and some biologist could have extracted the DNA and analyzed it and cried out, "It's Minke 45B! We know her fate at last"? What if those ribs were the last of her?

I could have called in sick that afternoon. I could have dragged them up the beach, carried them home. I'd have cleaned them up and sat them on my kitchen table atop my oldest beach towel, the one embroidered with *The L Word*'s TV show logo. I would have called the museums and the aquarium then and asked if they wanted the ribs. They'd have come by and looked and told me how incredible the ribs were, how thoughtful I was to keep them, that they were mine to keep forever, and that Minke 45B was grateful for the care I had shown her remains. I'd still have them today, and I'd treat them like a holy relic of a giant, baleen saint.

Gráinne Downey is a Canadian writer and visual artist living in Vancouver, Canada, on the traditional, unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh people. She is currently pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing at the University of British Columbia.

Gesundheitskarte

JOSÉ TEODORO

A feeling not unlike that of having visited a place in dreams

Amongst my father's keepsakes from his years at sea is an envelope containing the results of his final medical examination, undertaken at the seamen's hospital in Hamburg when he was nineteen years old. Such examinations were conducted annually and were mandatory for every sailor employed as a German merchant marine. My father had been with the German merchant marines since he was fourteen. He was underage, but an uncle in Ceuta pulled some strings. My father would retire soon after this examination and return home to Spain, where he would fulfil his military obligation at a naval base in Cádiz.

This is kind of stupid, my father tells me, head bowed. He's holding the envelope, showing it to me, not handing it to me. The envelope reads Gesundheitskarte, or Health Card. It's dated March 1968 and remains sealed after more than half a century. We're in his workshop. We're going through everything. I ask my father why he hasn't opened the envelope, why he doesn't open it now. He explains that he decided not to open it in case it contained bad news. In those days was a lot of syphilis, he explains. Was bad, he explains. Plenty of it. He then directs my attention to a large X drawn across the back of the envelope, where the fold is sealed. That's an X, he explains. So probably is nothing there. I don't understand the significance of the X. I don't understand its potential auspiciousness. I don't tell him this. Anyway, the envelope has stayed there, like that, he explains, pointing at the small safe where his keepsakes live. And it's going to stay there, like that, for a long time, he says. I tell him I'm going to make supper. Thank you, son, he says, head bowed. He continues to hold the envelope.

Hamburg is a city I know only from a film I saw many years ago. My experience of this film left me with the beguiling sense of having been there, in its Hamburg, a feeling not

Image: Aislinn Gallivan, Rocky Mountains, *2023, film*

unlike that of having visited a place in dreams, a place unknown to the dreamer in waking life. The film concerns a picture framer who, following a series of circuitous events, becomes precariously involved with a dealer in art forgeries. The framer is afflicted with a rare blood disease. A rumour circulates amongst his colleagues that the framer has only a short time to live. The framer consults his doctor but does not trust his doctor's reassurances that his condition is stable. The framer is approached by a Frenchman who finances an appointment with a specialist in Paris. Just hours after the appointment, the specialist's report is delivered to the framer's hotel room. The framer opens the envelope, and the diagnosis confirms the terrible rumour. The framer is overwhelmed with grief, but moments later feels a strange elation. Knowing that the framer is a modest craftsman, that he has a wife and a young child, that his diagnosis has thrown everything in his life into question, the Frenchman proposes that the framer commit a murder for him, a murder of someone whom the framer doesn't know and who doesn't know him, a murder for which he will be handsomely compensated, ensuring his family's financial security in his absence.

I think of this film as the story of a man doomed by his diagnosis: Might he have been better off not opening the envelope? The film is also a portrait of a friendship, one that emerges purely by chance, between two men who share a feeling of distance from the world. I see their parallel solitudes. I see the framer sweeping up in his workshop while singing the Kinks' "Too Much on My Mind." I see the art dealer taking Polaroids of himself while lying on a pool table. The framer wonders if his son will remember him. He imagines his son, sometime in the future, writing, "My father had a moustache. We lived near the harbour in a building that's been torn down." Indeed, the building in which they live, its height and narrowness making it an ostentatious anomaly on their street, looks as though it could be slated for demolition at any moment. I see Hamburg: abandoned mansions, muddy vacant lots, little old wooden fences. Broad, cobbled avenues appearing wet even on rainless days. I hear seagulls, fog horns, trains. There is a fluorescent-lit tunnel so long that each time we see the framer traversing it, no daylight is visible at either end.

I telephone my father to wish him a happy birthday. He is seventy-four years old. Besides it being his birthday, today is Saturday, so I'm surprised to learn that he's working. My father is a finishing carpenter. For various reasons, he's slowed down in the last few years. He has no hobbies. He no longer makes his own wine. The jobsite is just outside the town of Canmore, Alberta, a short distance from the Three Sisters on the one side, and Banff National Park on the other. It is a beautiful, bright blue January morning, he tells me, and the highway is clean. He's entirely alone on the jobsite, looking after a handful of minor tasks he'd rather not leave until Monday. He sounds happy to be alone on the jobsite. Our conversation is brief but energetic, beginning in Spanish before segueing into English, then returning to Spanish to sign off. Spanish remains our language for salutations, terms of endearment, inside jokes and gestures of affection. English is our language for complicated directions and queries regarding his increasingly frequent medical appointments. They count his blood cells, measure his iron levels, ask after his mental energy. He always tells them he's feeling great, no complaints.

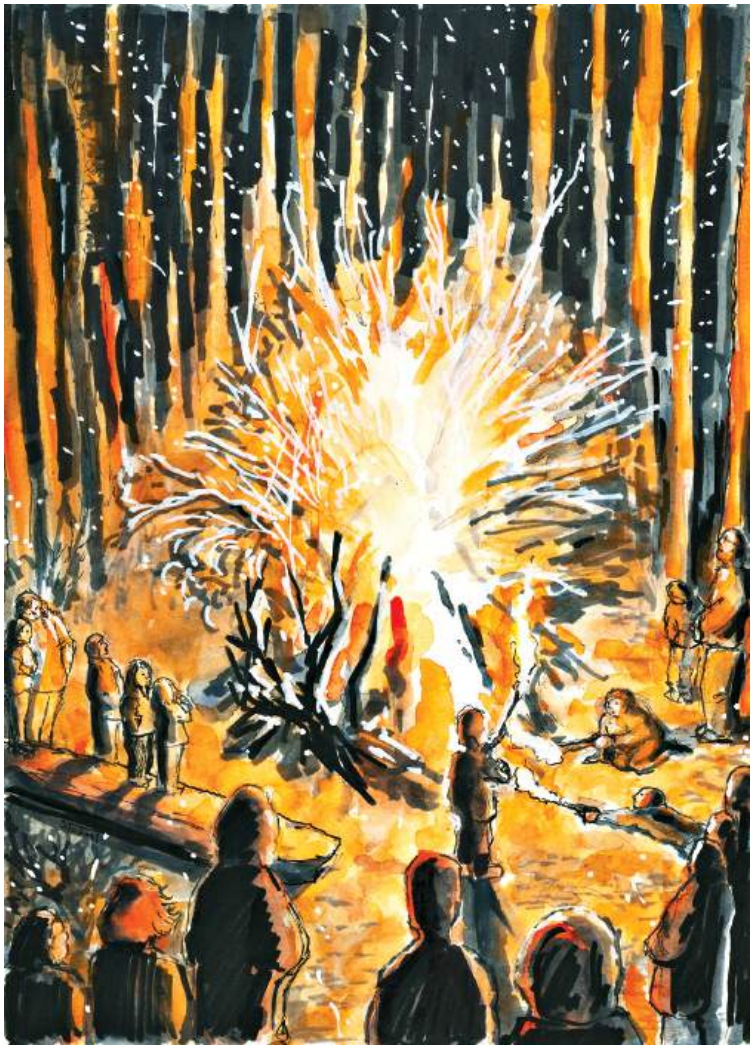
He will take his time today, drink his coffee, be wary of his bad shoulder and occasional dizzy spells. He will measure short distances, pencil figures upon whatever surface is in front of him, the undersides of shelves and drawers or the joints where pieces meet, then obscure those figures under veils of paint, lacquer or dust-mottled super glue. He will take the secondary highway back into the city, the one tucked between foothills to the north of the Trans-Canada. I know he won't say as much, but I suspect there is no place he would rather be today, that this may well prove to be the best part of his day, fixing mouldings, installing shelves, hanging doors, occasionally answering his phone to accept birthday wishes in an otherwise vacant, unfinished house with no heat, water or electricity, at the mouth of the Rocky Mountains. Alone, safe, in clouds of sawdust.

José Teodoro's prose has appeared in Brick, The Fiddlehead *and* subTerrain. *His performance works include* Island, *winner of the Lee Playwriting Prize for New Canadian Plays, and* Screen Door, *which provided material for the debut LP by Applied Silence, José's group with musician-composer Stephen Lyons, and is available via Offseason Records.*

Five Stories about Fire

JESSICA BAKAR

You can feel it in your mouth whenever you step outside



ONE

When I am eight, my dad and I build a crucible out of a trash can. He teaches me how to stick weld in our backyard—bought me the helmet and gloves and everything—to make the vessel's frame. We pour cement, slice Styrofoam, collect brass nuts to sacrifice as test subjects. All this for an ungraded third-grade science fair project.

We melt a year's worth of Sierra Mist cans into an aluminum heart of my design. Rock solid, with small rainbows inscribed. I wait for hours in the afternoon sun, sunglasses turned toward the sky, crouching patiently behind our shed for the cans to coalesce, to do their thing in the privacy of that trash can. When we finally cast the metal soup, it looks like liquid fire. I think our entire backyard will catch ablaze, that we will burn our house down.

TWO

I set my writing on fire in my friend's backyard. We are seventeen and burning out. I feed essays and exams to the fire pit's mouth, esoteric assignments, flashcards with rhetorical devices, select writings from English class. The cover of *Grapes of Wrath* and every other annotated expository chapter. I capture the destruction on my Samsung's camera. Anaphora on fire, disintegrating letter grades caught at a distance as we play pyromaniacs for a night. We throw ourselves into the flame, hoping for respite, destruction, or the cheap entertainment of a warm dancing colour. A melodrama only teenagers can crave. We watch flames feast, swell, splay sideways, bend to the wind. We laugh into the light.

THREE

The 1992 Windsor Castle Fire, ignited by a faulty spotlight, scorched 115 rooms of the world's oldest inhabited castle in England. I learn this on a self-guided tour with my parents, walking through opulence alongside hundreds of strangers in silent synchrony. The fire burned for fifteen minutes before being discovered at 11:30 a.m. The flames drank 1.5 million gallons of water from 36 pumps, all managed by 225 firefighters, as staff shuffled furniture and art and other priceless, royal things away from the danger. It took fifteen hours for it all to stop, for drenched carpets and fallen beams to replace the inferno.

There were no serious injuries. No deaths. Only £36.5 million of damage, rebuilt in five years. Over three decades later, we still talk about it.

In the heart of the castle's drawing room, I lean over to my mom, bitter and biting, dragging my feet under the luminescence of golden chandeliers, and whisper something about wealth redistribution. *Imagine if the world cared this much every time someone's house burned down.*

FOUR

I grew up in a world ablaze—with fire days instead of snow days and Spare the Air PSAs in between. The devastation is so frequent we have an official season for it—yes, the West Coast has a fire season, and no, we

Image: Jerome Stueart, At Winter Solstice, You Must Birth Your Own Sun, *2025, watercolour, mixed media on paper*

don't mean it figuratively. It's as if, through naming, we've created normalcy. Every year, it happens again. Every year, it gets worse.

On August 17, 2020, lightning strikes spark the largest recorded wildfire in California's history. Thirty-seven fires converge to become the August Complex, which ravages the northern coast for months, tearing through seven counties and one million acres of land.

Three hours south, we gawk at the scene on the I-680—grey billows swelling, origami sky unfolding. We watch danger from the safety of a thousand speeding cars, windows rolled, eyes locked on an apocalyptic sun as ash drifts down like snow. September's air quality is so poor that we can't leave our houses. Shouldn't breathe it, everyone in our lives reminds us. Meteorologists, doctors, middle school band teachers. Destruction isn't good for the respiratory system. All that plastic from Barbies and Tupperware and thousand-piece Lego sets, toothbrushes and TVs, chemicals from layers of Behr-painted living room accent walls, melted Hondas and Subarus, toddler car seats still inside.

You can feel it in your mouth whenever you step outside—wreckage, hazard, and a smoky taste of loss. Particles of a stranger's ruined life burn against the throat. It doesn't matter if you hold your breath. You have no choice but to know someone else's grief—to feel it sting your eyes red, fill your lungs, press against your tongue. You can't wear a mask tight enough. Loss infiltrates the body one way or another.

FIVE

We're in a hotel in the London Docklands when my dad tells me he's given up on rebuilding our house in Lahaina, Hawai'i. A year and a half has passed since the United States' deadliest wildfire in over a century—the fire that destroyed our house and two thousand others.

The house was uninsured—too expensive to reconstruct, recover, raise anything in place of. It had no internet or bed sheets but carried lifetimes of stories between its cinder block walls. The house on the same occupied land where generations of family laboured and lived on plantation camps. The house my great-uncle built himself when the land was auctioned off. The one I locked myself in after he died. The house, whose rooms held me between photos and family heirlooms, shrines and old sewing machines, that I returned to, year after year, to remember a past so few knew.

I think about combusted dreams—how my parents and I mourn the place of our memories. How my dad spent last Father's Day visiting a tiny house advertised on Craigslist. He had no clue how he'd ship it from Oakland to Kahului—just went to see it on the off-chance he found a home off the internet, back when he still had hope. I didn't see their aftermath—their sifting, scrolling, silent pleading, calls to neighbours, calculations based on proposed policies, their eventual caving to the numbers—but I know they'd rebuild if they could.

In London, descending the stairs of the hotel lobby, I say nothing to my dad's confession, though I want to tell him, You know, after the fire, I didn't cry for a year, but I thought the world was ending any time it snowed. Flurries seemed like ash in the wind.

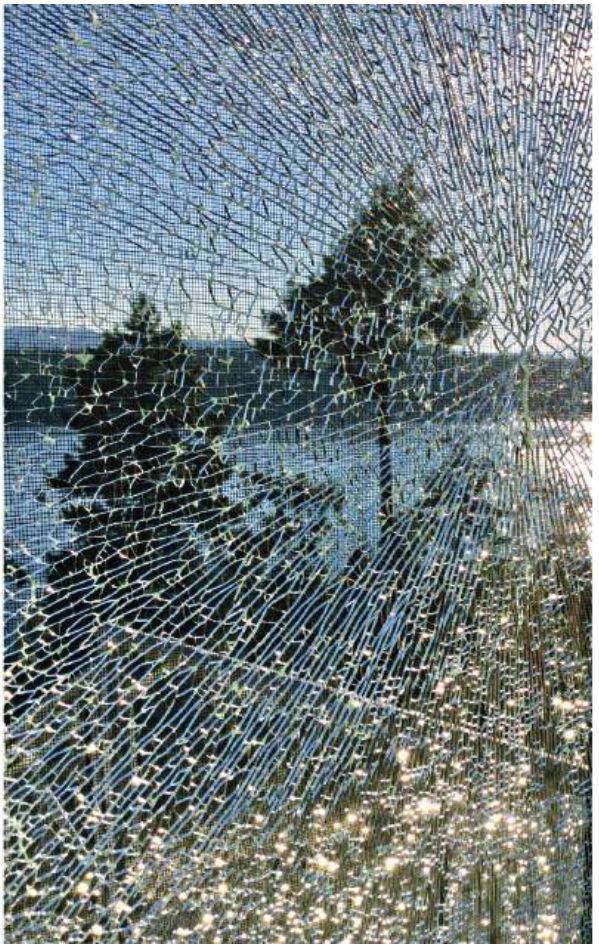
I won't tell him that only after the flakes vanished beneath my feet would my panic melt. I won't say that I wish to recall a time before this, when I believed the flame, in all its fury, could still leave me something to hold with my hands. But I seem to have lost that certainty, too. I only expect destruction these days.

Jessica Bakar (she/her) is from Northern California and lives in Tiohtià:ke/Montréal, where she studies English and creative writing. You can find her at jessicabakar.carrd.co.

Suicide Forest

ALEXIS MACISAAC

Woven within the architectural marvels are fragments of the past



SEA OF TREES

In 864 CE, Mount Fuji spewed magma and ash over ten days, burying people, burying houses. All those corpses, all that fire stoked fertile ground, spawning life. Today, a forest grows upon that eruption's hardened lava: Aokigahara, the Sea of Trees. To speak among the forest's flora is to not speak at all—the rock absorbs all sound.

The forest is alive, and it smothers.

A guide named Agnes offers a few facts to a group of tourists. Her face is flushed because the bus was late arriving, and Agnes is flustered. She plans her excursions by the minute and now everything is running behind. A few winding paths lead her group to a mock village representing a historic town close to the western edge of Aokigahara. The town was destroyed by a mudslide many years ago. Now, it is known as the "healing village" because it offers tranquility from the pace of modern life. One of the buildings sells ice cream that's a few yen cheaper than the ice cream sold elsewhere. The matcha flavour is recommended by the purveyor.

"Aokigahara is also known as Suicide Forest," Agnes declares over a too-hot mic. "People kill themselves here all the time." There is no gravity in her voice, no suggestion of tragedy. She enunciates each word as if she's reading an instruction manual. The facts are simply there to be acknowledged.

While Agnes speaks, a man belches, doesn't even bother covering his mouth. A woman rummages through a plastic bag filled with sour candy. She offers some of the neon-coloured worms to her sister, who accepts them gratefully.

Agnes says officials have since discouraged reporting on the subject for fear that suicide in that region has become a contagion. In 2018, an American YouTuber visited the forest. He discovered a body hanging from a tree, an apparent suicide, and filmed it for his followers. "This is a first for me," he's reported to have said. A still shows him standing among the trees with an open mouth and raised brows. A hat in the shape of an alien sits on his head. Three eyes have been sewn into the fabric.

"The Japanese government was very, very mad. Don't do anything like that today," says Agnes, sounding like a school teacher.

At the entrance of the forest, a sign reminds visitors that life is a precious gift. It urges potential victims to think about their parents, siblings, children. "You only have one life," it says. "Take care of it."

There are whispers about yūrei, spirits who roam Aokigahara's trails, ejected from peace in the afterlife. No ghosts appear the day Agnes leads her group along the well-trodden paths. But if the spirits were there, they may have been frightened by the humans of today who wander unseeing through the lifeless prism of their phones. The yūrei may not have recognized those people as human, but rather as some other kind of creature who inhabits the world but does not really live in it.

There is death in the forest, but there is death beyond it too.

To stand at the foot of those trees on a clear day is to behold Mount Fuji's sloping shoulders, that

Image: Kip Johl, Turning Point, *2014, photography*

snow-capped god capable of breathing fire. A monster who will, someday, once more take life to birth another.

BAMBOO AND JIZO

"It was the proverbial 'love at first sight,' but I had to wait to marry her until she was legal." Tōru laughs; the tourists smile hesitantly. They've just learned that his wife was once his student.

Tōru is a guide. He walks slowly, with a slouch. These features enhance his air of wisdom. He leads a group through some of Kyoto's forests and gardens. He is from Japan and married an American, many years his junior. Together, they've had four children whose names all start with J—two boys, two girls. In their household, they speak English instead of Japanese.

On this day, it rains and even the mammoth bamboo of the Arashiyama forest cannot protect the group from the onslaught.

"Bamboo can grow upwards of thirty inches per day," Tōru says. "But they plateau eventually."

Bamboo only flower once every hundred or so years, and no one can predict when this might happen. They blossom and later they will die.

In that place there seem to be more people than plants; a swarm of humans have come to Arashiyama forest as a kind of irreligious pilgrimage. Tōru says the locals never come here during the day; they visit when it is quiet and the foreigners have gone home. In contrast, the nearby Ōkōchi Sansō, a garden built by the deceased actor Denjirō Ōkōchi, is almost empty. Each day the gardeners rake the gravel in the garden. The crushed rock looks like gentle waves.

"Westerners love straight lines and order in their gardens," Tōru says with a smile. "Japanese like curves. Try not to get seasick."

Outside the garden, outside the forest, Tōru points to a shrine neatly stacked with piles of rocks that look like shields. They cluster around tiny statues of childlike monks, their carved eyes closed. The statues were never alive. Yet to behold them is to sense that they are dead.

"These are jizo. Monuments to the souls of children who have died," Tōru says. His voice is quiet. The tourists strain to hear him through a curtain of rain. "Notice the stone towers. These are offerings to the jizo, to help the children in the afterlife. Never take a stone from a jizo. It's disrespectful."

A woman clicks a photo of the display, before turning apologetically to the others, saying, "It's so sad."

GAIJIN

Sakura season has taken hold of Kyoto. Cherry blossoms are showing off. Shades of white, of deep pink weave colour throughout the city sky. At 10 a.m., everything shines under the April sun.

"The funny thing about the Japanese is that they all like to get drunk during Sakura," says José.

José is from Mexico, but he's married to a Japanese woman who is not Japanese. She's Caucasian. A type of Japanese citizen José says is quite rare.

"Look," he says, pointing to a photo of him and a curly-haired woman. They are both sticking out their tongues. "She really is my wife."

No one objects to this apparent truth. No one asked for proof.

José fell in love with Kyoto years ago when he landed there by chance. Now, he owns a tour guide company, sharing his love of the city with visitors.

"Sometimes I miss my culture and my food." He pauses. "I will never really be Japanese. I'm a gaijin, an outsider. But that doesn't matter. This place just feels right."

José stands taller than most men in Japan. Dark hair recedes from his forehead though he seems young. On this morning, he guides a Canadian mother and her son around the narrow streets of the city. He points to the wooden barrels that once held sake, to the empty heritage homes that are still maintained by city officials out of pride rather than reason, to the koi fish with their gaping mouths.

"Look for the golden one," he says to the boy. "That one is my favourite."

The boy asks why everything in the shops is so *American*. "Where are the Japanese soccer hats?"

"Japan has a funny relationship with the US," says José. "Japanese people love America. They think it's cool. They love the English alphabet. But I think the Americans ruined it all. Japan used to have a strong culture. They had samurai! Merchants! That's all gone now because of the West."

Throughout Kyoto, there are Mind Your Manners signs posted in English for visitors: don't litter; don't block the road; no smoking on public streets; no photos where prohibited. Tourists come here for many reasons. One of the attractions is the geisha who live in Gion. Today, their quarters are shuttered. José says that sometimes the tourists harass the geisha, demanding they pose for pictures, even touching the girls and women as if they are animals in a petting zoo.

Geisha are allowed to quietly lead other lives outside their profession. Most retire at thirty and then marry the men who waited patiently for their girlfriends to age-out. Some come to the city as very young teenagers, leaving family and friends behind. The mother and son are told the geisha are just like other girls and women. It's a statement that everyone present knows isn't really true.

In Gion's streets, they search for painted faces, for the trailing skirts of a hikizuri. But the geisha can't be found. The mother and son each feel the sting of missing out, softened by

a smidge of relief. They are conscious they are foreigners; neither wants to startle people in their home.

TOKYO TIME

A Godzilla head bares its teeth among the high-rises in Shinjuku, its red eyes burning, its claws shining. In Setagaya, a giant gorilla hangs from a three-storey building, holding a young girl in his palm. She does not scream. Elsewhere, in Minato, a bronze spider named Maman stands over thirty feet high, carrying thirty-two marble eggs in her sac.

Some of Tokyo's monsters are invisible and can only be felt by the destruction they wield. Japan floats upon a monster. A megaquake is expected to hit the Nankai trough within the next thirty years. The science isn't exact, but Japan is ready; an estimated 300,000 people could perish in the ensuing destruction brought about by fires and tsunamis and crushing debris. The Japanese are prepared for "the big one;" yet they understand there is no controlling the swiping hand of Mother Earth. They live each day as if the threat won't manifest. What else can they do?

In the early morning hours, men and women stoop to sweep any dirt scattered near their homes. Visitors cannot reconcile the tidy streets with the absence of public garbage cans. What many of them do not know is that the garbage cans disappeared in 1995, after the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo launched five sarin gas attacks in Tokyo's subways, killing thirteen and injuring thousands of others. Garbage cans were seen as vessels for future terror and were vanished. People carry their garbage around with them now instead.

The subway lines seem safe to the mother and son, though. They note that the people who travel on the subway are mostly quiet. Passengers avoid eye contact, scrolling through their phones or reading their books. On one journey, however, the cars are so packed that the boy finds his nose pressed against a stranger's buttocks; it is then that the quiet seems absurd.

Above the Oshiage subway station soars the Tokyo Skytree, the world's tallest freestanding tower. At night, it shimmers with rainbow-coloured lights. The mother's heart migrates to her throat as her son stands on clear glass in the observation deck above the ocean of buildings below. Woven within the architectural marvels of Tokyo are fragments of the past. Temples and shrines that hearken back to an antiquity that cannot be extricated from the city's modern tentacles.

One morning in Taitō, not long after the sun has risen, an old man with a limp and a few missing teeth approaches a closed gate to a shrine where the mother and son stand. Cherry blossoms have sprouted near the site, stark white against a gold exterior.

He nods at the two Canadians, and they watch as the man bows twice, claps twice, bows once. His eyes close then blink open. He sees something they cannot. He smiles briefly and then leaves with his one bad leg trailing behind.

It is peak Sakura season in Tokyo. The trees are engorged. But with each gust of wind, with each rainfall, petals droop and fall. The trees are achingly beautiful for what seems like only one bright second in the year.

The Japanese know, though, that after the leaves sprout green and then turn to bronze, after they blanket a fertile ground, abandoning branches to the assault of brutal, wintry gusts, that the trees will be reborn again.

The blossoms will return.

Alexis MacIsaac's writing has been featured in Masks Literary Magazine, LEON Literary Review, Agnes and True, *RTÉ Radio and elsewhere. In a past life, she was a professional violinist (*Riverdance, *The High Kings, MacIsaac and MacKenzie). She lives in Ottawa with her husband and two sons.*

Floral Muse 1, 3, 4 *and* 5, *2025, digital, by Elle D. Ablo. Vintage images are altered and combined to create something new that encourages viewers to look beyond what they first see.*

What Is the Problem with Canada?

BRUCE MCIVOR

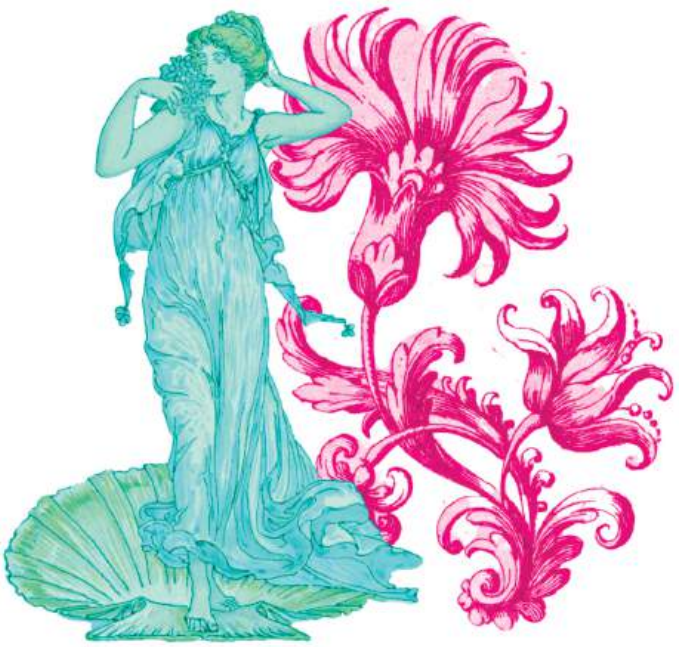
From Indigenous Rights in One Minute: What You Need to Know to Talk Reconciliation *by Bruce McIvor. Published by Nightwood Editions in 2025. Bruce McIvor is the senior partner at First Peoples Law LLP, an adjunct professor at* the *UBC Allard School of Law and a member of the Manitoba Métis Federation. He lives in Vancouver, BC.*

What Is the Difference Between Aboriginal Rights and Indigenous Rights?

Indigenous rights are inherent rights derived from being a member of an Indigenous Nation; Aboriginal rights are practices or activities Canadian courts have decided are integral to what makes Indigenous people uniquely "Aboriginal."

Aboriginal rights are not Indigenous rights. Aboriginal rights are a creation of the colonizer's legal system based on their laws. They are difficult to prove and limited in scope. Inherent rights are the rights of Indigenous people based on their particular nation's laws.

Section 35 of the constitution is not the source of Aboriginal rights. Aboriginal rights were part of Canadian law long before section 35 of the Constitution Act. The existence of Aboriginal rights in Canadian law is based on the fact that before colonizers arrived, Indigenous Peoples were already present, occupying their lands (see "Why Is the *Calder* Decision Important?"). The effect of section 35 was to



provide constitutional protection to Aboriginal rights in existence when the constitution came into effect in April 1982.

In 1982 the intention was to hold a subsequent conference to decide what Aboriginal rights were protected by section 35. Because this never happened, it was left to the Supreme Court to decide the purpose of section 35 and how to identify Aboriginal rights. The Court decided Aboriginal rights are based on Indigenous practices essential in making people "Aboriginal" and uncontaminated by European influences (see "Why Is the *Sparrow* Decision Important?" and "Why Is the *Van der Peet* Decision Important?").

Aboriginal rights are not part of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and so are not subject to the notwithstanding clause. The charter protects individual rights from interference by government, e.g. freedom of speech. Section 35 Aboriginal rights protect the communal rights of "Aboriginal people."

Aboriginal rights in existence in 1982 cannot be formally extinguished by federal or provincial governments. But, the Court decided Aboriginal rights are not absolute—they can be infringed by the Crown for a wide range of purposes (see "Why Is the *Delgamuukw* Decision Important?"). The constitutional protection against extinguishment is not as reassuring as many would assume because for all intents and purposes infringement can equal extinguishment.

What Is Aboriginal Title?

Aboriginal title is Indigenous Peoples' constitutionally protected right to benefit from their lands and decide how their lands are used.

Aboriginal title, one of the Aboriginal rights protected under section 35 of the constitution, is more than a bundle of harvesting rights: it is a right to the land itself. It includes the right to exclude other people from the land, the right to benefit from the land and the right to make decisions about the land.

READING COMPREHENSION

From Stages of Tanning Words and Remembering Spells: Part 1: Scraping Lungs Like Hide *by Tawahum Bige. Published by Nightwood Editions in 2025. Tawahum Bige is a Łutselk'e Dene, Plains Cree poet living in Vancouver. Bige has had poems featured in numerous publications, and their debut poetry collection,* Cut to Fortress, *was published by Nightwood Editions in 2022.*

they think i'm not that bright
'til i turn on the light
switch
my vocab
esl office tested
reading
comprehension
instead of science lesson
grade eight
prove myself comprehensive

and them?
bright as coal
dimmest tool in the shed
they didn't notice my marks
grade seven – english – a
just saw that
ndn status
like no taxes
or free post-secondary access
or stupid fucking indian axis

my mom never understood
"chug"
but before i comprehended
"english as a second
language"
she let 'em have it
racist battery acid
for settler energizer bunny
that keeps going and
going and
going
to school

The Supreme Court's description of Aboriginal title does not disturb its acceptance of the Doctrine of Discovery. In Canadian law, Aboriginal title is a burden on the Crown's underlying title that was acquired through the simple assertion of Crown sovereignty over Indigenous lands.

The interest in land most people in Canada are familiar with is called fee simple title—this is the title you have to any property you might own. Aboriginal title is not equal to fee simple title. Unlike people and companies who own land in fee simple, Indigenous people cannot use Aboriginal title lands in such a way that would deny future generations the right to use and benefit from the land.

There is an important exception to this rule that favours Canada's ongoing colonization project: one generation of Indigenous people can disentitle future generations by surrendering the Nation's Aboriginal title to the Crown. This is the fundamental objective of Canada's comprehensive claims policy.

The recognition of Aboriginal title does not mean lands are protected from exploitation by provincial and federal governments. Aboriginal title can be infringed, i.e. extinguished, for a number of reasons including forestry, mining, hydroelectricity, building infrastructure and settling foreign populations.

While a powerful tool for protecting Indigenous rights, Aboriginal title is not the same as an Indigenous People's inherent title. Aboriginal title is a creature of Canadian law. It is based on the acceptance of the Doctrine of Discovery and has built-in limits and exceptions to ensure it doesn't become an insurmountable obstacle to removing Indigenous people from their lands so those lands can be exploited by non-Indigenous people.

What Is the "Indian Problem"?

There is no "Indian Problem"—the problem is Canada.

Non-Indigenous people often focus on what they see as problems Indigenous people face, e.g. poverty, governance, violence, alcoholism, etc. They fail to understand that what they are describing are the effects of Canada's ongoing racist and violent colonization project.

The long history of non-Indigenous people offering solutions to the "Indian problem" is

deeply embedded in Canadian history and government policy. It is based on the racist assumption that European political, legal and cultural practices are the ideal and Indigenous societies are inherently inferior.

This assumption came to the fore in the early and mid-nineteenth century as part of government attempts to assimilate Indigenous people. It led directly to Canada's genocidal residential school regime. It continues to inform government policy and legislation, e.g. the federal First Nation Financial Transparency Act.

There are many historical and contemporary examples of the concept of the "Indian problem" being weaponized to displace and oppress Indigenous people. For example, Canadian law and politicians often point to Indigenous people's supposed underuse of their lands to justify removing them and overriding their laws and values in favour of exploitation of the land for the benefit of non-Indigenous people.

To forge a new way forward, instead of asking how to solve the "Indian problem," Canadians need to focus on how to solve the problems with Canadian law and policy that justify and support the displacement and marginalization of Indigenous people.

Why Is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Important?

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is important because its work exposed the racism and violence at the heart of Canada's ongoing colonization.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples called for a public inquiry into Canada's residential school system. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created as part of the settlement of class-action lawsuits brought on behalf of survivors of Canada's residential school system. The commission spent six years collecting evidence of the residential school system and hearing from survivors and family members, as well as church and government employees. The summary of its multi-volume final report, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, released in 2015, is over five hundred pages and includes ninety-four "Calls to Action" aimed at redressing the legacy of residential schools and advancing reconciliation. Its records are maintained by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.

The commission's findings on the extent of the abuse and violence experienced by Indigenous children in the so-called school system, which it described as "cultural genocide," came as a shock to many non-Indigenous Canadians. It upset their accepted view of Canada as the "good colonizer" in comparison to other countries, including the United States. While most Canadians have accepted the truth of the commission's report, many continue to underplay or deny the commission's findings and wide-scale suffering of Indigenous children.

As explained by the commission, the residential school system was rooted in Canadian society's racist and paternalistic policies toward Indigenous people. The racism and paternalism that justified the violence perpetuated against Indigenous children, their families and communities was not limited to residential schools. It has also been a central factor in the development of Aboriginal law. The continued centrality of the Doctrine of Discovery in Canadian law, based on the racist assumption of the superiority of "civilized" Europeans in comparison to Indigenous "savages," is an obvious example.

Reconciliation requires exposing, disrupting and uprooting these attitudes throughout the systems, policies and laws that dominate, marginalize and disentitle current and future generations of Indigenous people.

What is "Land Back"?

Land Back is about recognizing Indigenous Peoples' inherent authority over their lands.

The Land Back movement requires Canadians to recognize the fundamental lie at the basis of the Canadian state—the lie that colonizers have simply claimed Indigenous land as their own and relegated Indigenous people to making a claim for their own land. Land Back is also about forging new relationships between Indigenous Nations and the Crown that create space for Indigenous people to exercise their inherent rights and responsibilities to make decisions about their lands and benefit from them.

It is important to understand what Land Back isn't. Land Back isn't about using established legal mechanisms based on the assumption of Crown sovereignty. For example, adding land to

From Endsickness *by Sofia Alarcon. Published by Conundrum Press in 2025. Sofia Alarcon is a comic artist from Guatemala, now based in Halifax, NS. Between 2021 and 2023, she self-published her multi-award-nominated series,* Endsickness. *The completed anthology is now available from Conundrum Press.*

Indian Act reserves isn't Land Back. Additions to reserves, while important for individual First Nations, are based on an acceptance of Canada's claim to Indigenous land. When lands are added to reserves, legally they are owned by the federal government for the use and benefit of an Indian Act band of "Indians." This isn't Land Back.

Land Back also isn't about transferring land through modern-day treaties. The entire premise of Canada's comprehensive claims process is contrary to Land Back because it is based on the assumption that colonizers have a legitimate claim to Indigenous land and Indigenous Nations must accept limited rights over a small percentage of their territory in exchange for surrendering their rights to the majority of their territory.

Aboriginal title also isn't about Land Back. Aboriginal title is an interest in land created by Canadian courts that denies Indigenous People's inherent rights and responsibilities. It is based on essentializing Indigenous people, has significant limits and can be infringed, i.e. extinguished, by the Crown, for a multitude of purposes (see "What Is Aboriginal Title?").

Land Back is about rejecting the lie of the Doctrine of Discovery. It is about accepting that Indigenous Nations have law-making authority over their lands. Land Back is about negotiating Crown-Indigenous agreements that establish a relationship that recognizes and puts into effect this reality.

In the Beginning, There Was Erasure

SIPHIWE GLORIA NDLOVU

From The Creation of Half-Broken People *by Siphiwe Gloria Ndlovu. Published by House of Anansi Press in 2025. Siphiwe Gloria Ndlovu is a Zimbabwean writer, scholar and filmmaker. She is a 2022 recipient of the Windham–Campbell Prize for Fiction. Her debut novel,* The Theory of Flight, *won the Sunday Times Barry Ronge Fiction Prize in 2019. Her second and third novels,* The History of Man *and* The Quality of Mercy, *were shortlisted for the Sunday Times Fiction Prize. After almost two decades of living in North America, Ndlovu has returned home to Bulawayo, the City of Kings.*

It is only after I return to the attic that I become aware that the conversation with Dr Patel has been shared. My mother and Johanna are in my room, whispering. They think I am asleep and I let them think that. It is so much more peaceful this way.

'A mental asylum,' Johanna whispers. 'We had no idea, no idea. Were never told of this, this *history* of mental illness – I mean mental health issues – that runs in your family. We thought the suicide attempt was an isolated incident, completely isolated. And then there was her unprovoked attack on you. Pushing you down the stairs like that. And now this, this information about your mother … and you being born in a mental asylum. If we had known …'

'If you had known …?' my mother whispers back, encouraging Johanna to walk into a trap.

'Then – then – then we would have done all we could to help her … sooner,' Johanna says, cleverly retreating.

'My daughter has given you three children,' my mother says, no longer bothering to whisper.

'Yes, yes … of course,' Johanna says, also speaking in her normal voice. 'But if only we had known sooner … it was our right to know.'

'He used to beat her, you know,' my mother says, punctuating her conquest. 'John used to beat her.'

'He always had a temper,' Johanna says matter-of-factly. 'Ever since we were children.'

'Until she was black and blue,' my mother emphasises.

Johanna accepts her loss. 'We love her. We just need for her to be strong … to get better,' she says.

Black and blue. Black … and blue. Black … and … blue …

I remember now.

My mother is capable of many things. She is particularly good at culling, hollowing things out, removing what is inside.

I had taken a stroll by the beach. It had been the kind of day that wanted you to walk at the water's edge. I had enjoyed the feel of the warm sun on my face and the cold, wet sand beneath my feet. I had collected some interesting-looking stones and put them in my pockets for later … for just in case. It was rare for me to be allowed to go near the ocean after the incident with the scissors. I revelled in the feeling of unbounded freedom even as I placed the stones in my pockets.

I thought my mother was beginning to trust that I was indeed getting better and feeling stronger. I thought that was why she had let me venture out on my own towards the seductive pull and call of the ocean.

It was only when I got back to the attic from my walk that I realised my mother had not trusted anything, not even for a moment. As soon as I walked into the room, I smelled it. At first I thought it was happening again, that I was smelling the cheap tobacco that always came before the sound of the throaty laugh. But the scent in the air was not as comforting as the tobacco smell. It was acrid. It made me want to sneeze and cough at the same time.

Something had been burnt in my room, and yet everything seemed to be as I had left it … until my eyes came across the half-moon table and I noticed that the drawer was open.

The six words I had written in the notebook! *In the beginning, there was erasure.* I rushed to the demilune table, and confirmed my suspicions. The notebook and the pen were not there. I went over to the fireplace and found scattered ash. She must have torn the notebook before burning it.

I crept out of the room and down the stairs. When I entered my mother's room, it was obvious that she was expecting me, expecting the confrontation. In her room, everything was immaculate and in its place. Order. Always order.

'Why did you burn it?'

'I knew you were up to something,' she replied coolly. 'I always know when you are up to something.'

'It was just words on paper,' I said.

'When is it ever just words on paper with you?'

I did not know what to do. I did not know what to feel besides anger. My body shook with it. 'What do you want from me?'

'You need to be happy … contented with what you have. The Good Family has been so good to you. So very kind.'

'How does my writing threaten that in any way?'

My mother just looked at me. 'You take the things you have for granted,' she said. 'That has always been your problem. No, that is not it; your problem is that you destroy the good in your life. You cannot help it. You cannot help yourself. A good man loved you … a good family loves you … good children love you – and you want to destroy it all. You have no idea, no idea whatsoever what it feels like to be truly alone. You think it is freedom. It is the very opposite of freedom.'

'He used to beat me,' I almost screamed. 'The good man you speak of used to hit me until I was black and blue.'

My mother blinked at me. 'You had other relationships when he was away,' she charged with venom. 'You slept with men … and women. You were with John B. Good IX – someone both famous and respected – and he was not enough for you. You were always searching for something else, as though you could do better. You should have been chaste and contented.'

'He saw other people too,' I said. 'We understood that about each other. That was not the problem between us.'

My mother scoffed. 'You wanted to make him jealous. You dangled your affairs and dalliances. You made your proclivities known. You provoked him and when he was provoked, you acted as though you did not know why he was doing what he was doing.'

'You are saying I wanted him to beat me?'

She sighed. 'You have a good life here. You just do not know how good you have it.'

I realised I had been fooled by the gentle touch of her hand on mine into thinking that she loved me. I had been willing to overlook the reality of our long knowing of each other so I could believe she loved me. I had tried to unremember how ungentle her touch could be.

My mother had hit me three times in my life. The first time was after my school returned from an outing to Holdengarde Castle, and I told her of the woman in white I had seen there with mud on her hem and blood on her hands. The second time was after I told her about the woman, black and beautiful, who appeared during the Lady Doctor's final moments, smoking from a long and curved pipe and laughing a throaty laugh. The third time was when I did not tell her that while walking along Abercorn Street, I had looked into a shop window and seen a woman with an English-rose-coloured, high-collared dress with matching parasol and gloves where my reflection should have been.

The problem for my mother was not so much that I had seen these women, but that I had shared what I had seen with someone else: the first two times with her; and the third time with my English

JOL ENE, JOLENE, JOLINE, JOLYNE

Selections from the 2022 and 2023 ICBC (Insurance Corporation of British Columbia) personalized number plate rejection lists. These plates were rejected for referring to obscene or inappropriate language, public figures, driving risks, intellectual property, drugs or alcohol, violence, or other reasons, including already being in use, the possibility of causing identification problems, or an incomplete application. Compiled by Kelsea O'Connor.

2022

LOUD AF	NO ETA	OOF
F HUGH	NO RUSH	OOOF
2FST4U	NO KIDS	OOOOF
FAST AF	NOLOVE	OOOOOF
ZOOOOM		
COFFEE		
COWBOY		
ERR 404		
GRINCH		
MMEMEEP		

2023

OMG MOV	JOL ENE	IDG4F
CAFN8ME	JOLENE	1DGAF
C0W80Y	JOLINE	IDG4F
COWBOY!	JOLYNE	IDGAF
HADES		IDGAF-1
KERMIT!		IDGAF-2
M3ATBUS		
MAN-VAN		
T1M B1T		
WOMEN		
YESSIR		

teacher, in a composition I had written for class. My teacher so loved how I had brought to life the woman in the English-rose-coloured attire that she affixed a golden star to the page of my exercise book. My mother so hated how I had told of having seen these women as reality and not as fiction … as a flight of fancy … as a trick of the imagination. She rewarded my belief in the veracity of what I had seen by making me black and blue. Black … and blue. Black … and … blue. For good measure, she bent my right hand backwards until my wrist broke. I felt the words and the images empty out of me then, until I was light as air.

My mother is capable of many things. She is particularly good at culling, hollowing things out, removing what is inside.

It is a bloody business.

But apparently I am capable of many things, too. I am capable of crouching at the top of the stairs and lying in wait. I am capable of pouncing out of the shadows and pushing someone. I am capable of listening to the thump, thump, thump of a fall. I am capable of having a feeling of victory wash over me as I look down at my mother lying at an odd angle at the bottom of the stairs.

I see myself the way my mother must have seen me then, as *a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure that seems to skulk about;* something she could not manoeuvre herself around.

I am capable of creeping down the stairs to where my mother's body lies. I am capable of standing in the warmth of her pooling blood. I am capable of doing absolutely nothing to help her. I am capable of dipping my finger into her blood and writing on the wall: *In the beginning, there was erasure.* I am capable of crawling back up the stairs, entering my room, looking back and seeing the bloody prints I have created, tell-tale signs between my mother's body and mine. I am capable of closing the door, getting into my bed, and falling blissfully asleep as my mother lies dying.

I remember now.

A Guide to Dim Sum

DONNA SETO

From Chinatown Vancouver: An Illustrated History *by Donna Seto. Published by House of Anansi Press in 2025. Donna Seto is a writer, self-taught artist and occasional academic. Growing up, Donna accompanied her parents on regular ventures through the bustling streets of Vancouver's Chinatown, where they bought groceries, ate dim sum, purchased newspaper, and visited her grandmother. During the pandemic, she revisited her long-lost passion for art and started drawing buildings in Chinatown. Donna has a PhD in politics and international relations. She lives in Vancouver.*

If you're fortunate, you've picked a restaurant that still serves dim sum from carts wheeled around by servers who will entice you at your table with bite-sized morsels. As the dim sum carts phase out, most restaurants will ask you to order from the menu or order sheet, which is presented once you're seated at your table. Although this modern change avoids spontaneous splurges and falling for the marketing tactics of the tenacious dim sum cart ladies, you don't have to wait for the cart to circle the entire restaurant before it gets to you, which means your food generally arrives piping hot and directly from the kitchen.

TEA LOGISTICS

When you're seated, a server will ask what kind of tea you want. You'll generally be provided with two teapots (one with steeped tea and one with hot water). Wait until the tea is fully steeped before serving. The pot of hot water is there to replenish the teapot. When your hot water is low, simply flip the lid over to signal for a refill.

POURING TEA

Serve tea to others before you serve yourself, and always serve the oldest person first because this is highly respectful in Chinese culture. If you're the youngest at the table, it's generally your responsibility to pour tea for everyone else. If someone else pours tea for you, show your appreciation by tapping your index and middle finger on the table twice if you're married, and just your index finger if you're single. Or you can mimic this gesture by bowing.

CHOPSTICK PROTOCOL

Although dim sum is meant for sharing, this doesn't mean that you need to spread your germs. A pair of communal chopsticks, often a different colour, is used for transferring the morsels from the steamer basket to your plate. Use your own pair of chopsticks when eating. When you're done, you can rest your chopsticks on the right side of your plate or on the chopstick rest. Never stand your chopsticks upright! Also, never eat dim sum directly from the communal plate or basket.

TAKE SMALL BITES

To fully enjoy the food—and to prevent injury—take small bites of the morsels rather than eating them whole. Some of the steamed dumplings can be extremely hot or may burst (e.g., xiao long bao, or soup dumplings). Dishes such as spareribs may have loose bones. Discard bones on your plate; you can request a new plate when it's full.

DON'T BE GREEDY

Don't take the last piece, even if you really want to. Offer it to others.

BE GENEROUS

Offer to pay for the meal. This is a gesture that will often result in a wrestling match, as others will also offer to pay. Watch out for the sneaky grannies at the table, they tend to suddenly gain superhuman strength when fighting to pay for the meal.

Running from That Damn School, That Damn Barn

ANDREW STOBO SNIDERMAN AND DOUGLAS SANDERSON (AMO BINASHII)

From Valley of the Birdtail: An Indian Reserve, a White Town, and the Road to Reconciliation *by Andrew Stobo Sniderman and Douglas Sanderson (Amo Binashii). Published by HarperCollins in 2022. Andrew Stobo Sniderman is a writer, lawyer and Rhodes Scholar from Montréal. He has written for* The New York Times, The Globe and Mail *and* Maclean's. *He has also argued before the Supreme Court of Canada, served as the human rights policy advisor to the Canadian minister of foreign affairs, and worked for a judge of South Africa's Constitutional Court. Douglas Sanderson (Amo Binashii) is the Prichard Wilson Chair in Law and Public Policy at the University of Toronto Faculty of Law. He has served as a senior policy advisor to Ontario's attorney general and minister of Indigenous affairs. Douglas Sanderson is Swampy Cree, Beaver clan, of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation.*

On October 9, Clifford ran away from the school when students were let outside to play. Two days later, the RCMP tracked him down in the town of Redvers, Saskatchewan, 150 kilometres southwest of the school and most of the way home. He was taken into custody and dropped off at the Brandon school at three thirty in the morning of October 12.

Three weeks later, Clifford escaped again. This time, he made it all the way home, travelling most of the distance by stowing himself in a boxcar of a freight train. The RCMP eventually located him on his reserve. When apprehended, Clifford was wearing a tweed cap, an air force jacket, and a grey-and-blue shirt with matching overalls. Once again, the officers drove him back to the Brandon school.

In early December, Clifford escaped a third time, along with two other boys from the same reserve, aged nine and eleven. Principal Strapp himself set off in pursuit, driving his car along the highway headed west, asking farmers about errant children. Later that day, Strapp and RCMP officers found Clifford and the other two boys walking along the Canadian Pacific rail line, twelve kilometres west of the school, where they were "successfully apprehended," according to an RCMP report. The boys were then driven back. "Just as we entered the school," Strapp later wrote, "Clifford made an attempt to run away again and put up quite a fight." During the struggle, Clifford managed to land a kick to Strapp's groin—a fact that Strapp himself did not acknowledge, though an RCMP report did. "I was compelled," Strapp said, "to use considerable force to remove him to the dormitory." The principal pinned Clifford to a bed and sent another student to retrieve a strap.

After inflicting corporal punishment, Strapp asked Clifford to give his word that he would not attempt another escape. Clifford refused. Strapp then decided to lock Clifford into a room alone and without clothes. In the days that followed, Clifford remained in confinement, naked, with meals delivered at regular intervals. According to an RCMP report, Clifford "threatens openly that he will leave the minute his clothes are returned to him."

Shortly thereafter, Tommy Douglas once again wrote to the minister of Indian affairs to demand that something be done to remedy the situation. Douglas had heard that "the boy, Clifford, has again run away from the Brandon Residential School and returned home by hitch hiking and on foot. I understand that he travelled through a severe blizzard and returned home ill-clothed and in a weakened condition." And Douglas had heard of others running away, too. "These incidents," he wrote, "have caused grave concerns among the Indians of the district," who worried that "the children in the Brandon Residential School are not properly cared for, that they do not receive sufficient supervision or training, and that the food is inadequate." Douglas urged the minister to reconsider the possibility of "returning these children to their parents" and sending them to a nearby day school.

A copy of the premier's letter found its way to Reverend G. Dorey of the United Church, which was then responsible for administering the school. The reverend joked to a colleague that if Premier Douglas accepted allegations of Indians "at their face value . . . all I can say is that he will have plenty to do looking after the Indians . . . without being able to give much time to his duties as Premier."

On January 6, 1947, Douglas wrote directly to Principal Strapp to emphasize that "neither [Clifford] nor his parents desire that he continue as a student of your school." Douglas added, "I do think that it is improper to coerce a lad of fourteen years into remaining at your school by locking him in his room and depriving him of his clothing. I am certain you will agree with me on this score."

Clifford was allowed to return home three weeks later. When questioned by the RCMP, Strapp blamed Clifford's escapes on encouragement from the boy's parents and relatives. As for the federal minister of Indian affairs, he assured Douglas that the school was well run and providing a "satisfactory" diet. Of course, this wasn't true—not then or long after.

HOW TO HAVE A HOT GIRL SUMMER

From i cut my tongue on a broken country *by Kyo Lee. Published by Arsenal Pulp Press in 2025. Kyo Lee is a queer Korean Canadian high school student living in Waterloo, ON. She is the youngest winner of the CBC Poetry Prize and the youngest finalist for the RBC Bronwen Wallace Award.*

✓ *Die*

your hair blue. Stain the undersides of your nails
in the process. Remember how liquid colour clots
in your grasp, like bruises piling up in forgotten
places. Think about hanging yourself
then forget it. You don't want your dead weight
pulling down the sky.

✓ *Starve*

Imagine your blue hair as a nighttime pool
imitating naturalness in its destruction of the natural.
Imagine your frame a sickly shining skeleton sliced
into shimmerings of the moon on the pool surface. Even
light
mistaking you for what you are not. Oh
isn't it beautiful?

✓ *Forget*

yourself in the time. Watch yourself outside the window
bicycling & faceless. You made this window
from your mirror & cut yourself on it in the process.
Do you see now
how the world is only an echo of yourself?

✓ *Take*

your shirt off. Lean against the cool fridge door
& gulp overripe peaches in the dark.
Remember that you've starved for three days. Lick the
nectar
/ sweat / water / blood running down your forearm.
Sweet god.

✓ *Play*

tag on the playground by yourself. Watch
out—it's your shadow beside you. You feel naked
in the moon's scrutiny, except for your pool-blue hair
bobbing like a lost jellyfish on the swing. At the top
you feel weightless—you might even kill yourself
without anyone noticing, the strange upward
tug of falling beckoning you out of the Earth.
Rust-scented palms & sweat-slick hair, oh
you could set on fire at any moment.

Strapp stayed. More students fled. Bleak reports about the Brandon school continued piling up. In 1951, a visiting nurse observed, "The overall picture of the institution is pretty grim." That same year, a regional supervisor for Indian Affairs wrote, "There is certainly something wrong as children are running away most of the time. . . . The sooner we make a change the better."

One of the runaways was Jim Cote, a boy from Waywayseecappo. Jim was twelve when he arrived at the Brandon school in 1953, having been expelled from the residential school in Birtle for refusing to let a teacher inflict corporal punishment on him. Jim had dared to snatch the strap out of his teacher's hand and chase the teacher around the room with it.

As a student in Brandon, Jim spent half his days doing physical labour, cleaning the barn and milking a cow he nicknamed Elsey. Jim talked to Elsey while he pumped her udders, hoping she didn't kick. "Hey Elsey," he said. "How are you doing today?" He milked her at dawn and dusk. Elsey provided more milk than the other cows, but the school officials didn't know that because Jim was sneaking in a full cup in the barn twice a day, a supplement to the school's otherwise execrable diet.

At night in the dormitory, Jim listened to boys sniffling and crying, talking about their homes. "We suffered humiliation, physical abuse, sexual abuse," he recalls. It wasn't long before he resolved to escape. The fact that the school was 150 kilometres from his home in Waywayseecappo did not deter him. "I didn't tell anyone I was going to run away," he says. "I was afraid of a snitch."

One morning, he ran out of the building and kept running. "I just ran, I was happy, I was headed home to see my mom and dad and that gave me the strength to go. I was running far from that damn school and barn, away from Elsey!"

Jim stayed away from the main roads to avoid capture. When it became too cloudy to orient himself by the sun, he carefully examined trees because he knew moss grows best on the north side of the trunks. At night, he found a quiet spot in a wooded area and sheltered himself from the wind with branches he gathered. As Jim listened to coyotes howl in the dark, he imagined his family's dog, Sparkie, lying in a nearby bush to protect him.

Jim fed himself by sneaking into the gardens of "white folks" and stuffing as many potatoes, beets, carrots, and turnips into his pockets as he could run with. "I ate potatoes like apples," he says. He recalls that one pilfered carrot was a good seven inches long—"I never ate a carrot that tasted so good." He also gorged on dark saskatoon berries and rosy-red chokecherries, which were so tart his lips puckered.

After three days of flight, entirely on foot, Jim finally made it back to Waywayseecappo. He had covered more than the distance of a marathon each day. "I was a tough little bugger," he says. When Jim arrived home—exhausted, triumphant—his mother gave him a big hug. Then she told him to brush his teeth, which were blackened by all the berries.

It wasn't long until his father, Hugh, said, "You know you're going to have to go back, right?" Since truancy remained a federal offence for which Jim's parents could be sent to jail, the family had no meaningful choice. When Waywayseecappo's Indian agent found out that Jim was with his parents, he promptly drove him back to Brandon. Jim's three-day escape was undone by three hours in the back of a flatbed truck.

EAST VAN ELEGY

From Night Moves *by Rodney DeCroo. Published by Anvil Press in 2025. Rodney DeCroo is the author of three books of poetry:* Fishing for Leviathan, Allegheny, BC *and* Next Door to the Butcher Shop. *He is also a playwright and singer-songwriter.* Night Moves *is his first photo-essay book.*

I was standing outside Brother's Pizza
at 3 AM when this guy walked up to me
stuck his face into mine and shouted

GO FUCK YOURSELF!

Why?

YOU'RE A FUCKING ASSHOLE,
THAT'S WHY!

He laughed and gave me the finger
as he careened across the street.

I'd been thinking my old neighbourhood
had nearly disappeared into the pockets
of developers, real estate agents,
young urban professionals
when this guy came along
and made me feel at home again.

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FIRST PRIZE

Alberta Bound

MARK JOHN HIEMSTRA

The jig was up, as they say. Or used to say. Either way, I was fucked.

"I've been looking at the logs here—it says you haven't logged into the backend of our website since July 13."

It was October 22.

I learned to program websites in 1999, hoping to cash in on what was quaintly referred to as the "dot-com craze." My current contract was to build a website where people could purchase "mobility devices." My employer was hoping to cash in on the "boomers-are-aging craze."

"Have I been paying you to do absolutely nothing? Have you taken me for a complete fool?"

He had been. I had. But it was all over now. I don't know what kept me from doing the work. Perhaps a misplaced sense of identity, an inability to reconcile the blue-collar Albertan masquerading as a white-collar Vancouverite.

Rent in Vancouver wasn't cheap, even in 2002. The dot-com bubble had burst, my name was changed to mud, and in order to not lose the farm (read: Yaletown apartment), I would have to return to the one place I vowed never to set foot in again: the oil patch.

It took two phone calls to get hired on as a driller's helper with a seismic drilling operation. I jumped in my black Dodge Ram, sighing at the teal-and-purple stripes painted along its side in the reflection of the building window across the street.

The truck was a remnant from my last stint in the oil patch. A totem representing redneck roots, short fuses, a distaste for speed limits, and an inability to budget properly. In short: a roughneck's dream.

I felt the familiar sense of dread as I crossed the Fraser River, headed east. The city gave way to suburbs, then to overpasses, then to farms, and finally to the mountains. I drove the Coquihalla, gassing up in Kamloops and Jasper, and crossed the Rockies via the Yellowhead. Twelve hours later I was in Nisku, Alberta.

I walked into the office and told the secretary, who introduced herself as Rhonda, who I was.

"Deroverdare," she said, and jerked her thumb back behind her head.

I followed her precise instructions and found thirteen other young men gathered around a crew van. I nodded down at them. They nodded up at me. We got in the van and headed for Nordegg to drill holes and fill them with dynamite that someone would blow up later.

Twenty minutes from the yard, the first beer was cracked. Everyone had beers. Twenty minutes on from that and the conversation was louder, more animated, much more intellectual. They began a contest to see who could hit the most road signs with empties.

At the very back of the van I sighed and held my head in my hands.

"Fuck is your problem?" the fella next to me asked.

I looked up and managed a smile. "Oh, no—nothing. It's just . . . it's just so good to be back in Alberta."

Mark John Hiemstra is a writer, photographer and recovering Albertan who now lives in Montréal, Quebec. He is currently writing his first novel for the fourth time. He is loath to describe himself in the first person, but can be persuaded to do so, from time to time.

SECOND PRIZE

Open Turn

SIMON MARMOREK

Maria, you would have found it so strange. We were stopped at Watrous and I was on the platform getting some night air when a guy crashed through the station doors with a long lump slumped over his shoulder, huffing, *Get him on the train!* A steward walked over and they had words and the guy showed her some documents. The steward scanned them and had another look over the lump and said, *All right but I ain't lifting him*, so I came over and hauled this long, passed-out man onto the train and put him into his bunk with his backpack. As we pulled out of the station into the dark I could see he looked more like a boy.

The long boy didn't show for breakfast the next morning, nor lunch. In the afternoon, I was transposing in the dining car and when I looked up he was standing in the door. I motioned for him to sit down and got him a coffee.

Where are we? He had an accent.

A little past Edson. We'll be in Jasper in an hour or so.

He watched the Alberta foothills pass by, then asked what Jasper was. I described some light geography.

What were you doing in Watrous?

Farming lentils.

Lentils?

I don't like them.

I was full of questions and didn't know what to ask. I tried to think what you'd say to soften the moment. The boy sort of looked like a lentil. Brown face, brown hands.

You're going home now?

The boy shrugged. *I'm going to find my mom if I can.*

He gestured at the sheets I had spread across the table. *What are these?*

I'm arranging a piece of music.

For what?

For a very good friend of mine.

I like music.

I should have told him it was for you. Sorry. You know how I am. "For my dear dead wife" doesn't roll off my tongue.

I was dancing last night, the boy said.

Oh?

In Manitou Beach. They put horsehair under the floor. So it moves with you. When you dance it comes back to you.

Remember when we went to Danceland, Maria? After you survived your practicum with that terrible prof and we drove all night from our old place by Provencher Park to Little Manitou Lake and in the morning we swam and salt got everywhere. That night in the ballroom, you wore your blue dress and the floor moved with us when we danced.

The sun had started to fall in the west and all of a sudden the Rockies were lined up like solid waves.

They make mountains that big? said the lentil boy. *People climb those.*

A family of four rushed through the dining car with their phones out.

Most people just look at them, I said.

The boy cocked his head. *What's a mountain for if you're not going to climb it?* He laughed. *They probably have horsehair up there too.*

Simon Marmorek is a public school teacher and multi-disciplinary artist from Vancouver, BC, currently living in Gimhae, Korea. His work is built around human relationships, balancing unlikely angles, and the process of learning.

THIRD PRIZE

Waterproof

ELIZABETH TEMPLEMAN

Our daughter called from Kingston, Ontario, this one day. It was her first call home from her first trip away, and we'd been waiting for it. I had only to hear my daughter's voice to know that she was having a fine time. Her stories spilled out, one after another: of a roommate from the Maritimes who cried every night, and whose chaperone, a nice woman, Nicole had gotten to know well; of the drama workshop she loved and the tableau they would perform the next day; of the shopping spree during which the skies opened up—blazing heat turning to pouring rain—and prompted a group poncho purchase. This last seemed so funny to Nicole, who described her new poncho as a garbage bag with a hood (this child having lived her life in dry climes).

Her story and her laughter—and my missing her too, no doubt—brought me back to a point in my pregnancy when I travelled to Vancouver with two women friends to run a ten-kilometre road race (my last such run before giving up that sport for the more fluid motion of swimming). My friends and I shared a room in a funky bayside hotel, flipping a coin to determine who got the anteroom with its narrow single bed. That evening, we went walking, looking for a good spot for dinner. We got caught in one of those downpours that come so suddenly on the West Coast: One minute we were strolling along in the warm evening air; the next, we were soaked to the skin. I can remember the tickling sensation of water pouring off the end of my nose. We ducked into a movie theatre and made a rapid decision to stay and watch something. The movie *Nuts* was playing, and I loved it. We laughed and laughed—at our drenched and hungry state as much as at the comedy onscreen.

And now, my daughter's story of rain-soaked adventure having nudged my own, I wonder what is so very funny about getting caught in an unexpected storm. It must be one of the mysteries of human companionship that misery and chilly discomfort become fodder for our laughter. I can't imagine that I'd have been laughing by myself, pregnant, cold, wet and hungry on the streets of a busy city. That first-born girl of mine might not have found her own predicament quite so hilarious without her cohort, either. I doubt the prenatal jousting of her mother's laughter predisposed her to humour as a response to wetness.

Elizabeth Templeman lives, writes and works in the South-Central Interior of BC. She has published two books of essays, Notes from the Interior *and* Out and Back, Family in Motion. *Individual essays and book reviews have appeared in various journals and anthologies. You can find more about her at elizabethtempleman.trubox.ca.*

Villanelle for the Blue Line

DANIEL ALLEN COX

The metro is your lineage. You didn't need to spit into a tube to find that out

You are thirteen, which means it's time to join your dad and grandfather on the cement crew, a bad habit your grandfather picked up in the old country—Sicily, *not* Italy, he insists—and now you spend the summer off school paving sidewalks and finishing walls around bungalows for what barely passes for an allowance, mixing concrete in the wheelbarrow, growing biceps and going without sunscreen. You obsessively count how many cement bags you carry in a day and report the numbers to your dad, who reports them to your grandfather, who takes a drag on the Export A cigarette in the corner of his mouth—his way of reporting them to God.

But your grandfather is done trying to impress. He's already proven himself. Now, he and your dad water down the cement so thin you can see through it. It saves on materials, and because it's lighter, you can speed through the jobs. They laugh about it while simultaneously claiming to give a shit about the result. The trowel detailing hides what they've done. The cement will later crack and the customers will complain, but by then you'll have moved on and can't be traced. In trying to pull fast ones, you destroy the city. You guarantee yourselves a lifetime of work because Montréal is a beast that feeds on concrete and cement can never truly be finished.

Start at Snowdon, the western terminus. Follow the flow of commuters transferring from the Orange line to the Blue line and vice versa, and you'll come upon a well-lit central avenue, glowing globes atop what look like streetlamp posts. This station is one of the quietest in the metro system, perhaps because of the lower-than-usual ceilings. One tunnel wall is spraypainted dayglo green and Monet mauve and is protected behind sheets of glass. In Montréal, we protect graffiti from the public, not the other way around. Nearby, a cutaway gives an intentional glimpse of limestone: a dyke, the sign explains, or a body of rock formed in a pre-existing fracture that cuts across the layers of its surroundings. It's a better description for a subway system than anyone has come up with.

Next stop, Côte-des-Neiges, a smaller station whose most striking feature is the ceiling leading to the exit—exposed and unadorned steel struts, as if a piece of le tour Eiffel had embedded itself under Montréal streets. There are two stained-glass murals by Claude Bettinger, rough-hewn triangles with intersecting lines in grey, black, white, pink and red. The plaque says that the lines represent the many possible "personal paths that cross or separate over time." Put more plainly: It's a ghost map for what the metro could've been.

There was a time early in your career as a Blue line commuter that you discovered its magnetism. You realized that when riding the line with your Walkman, the closing doors sent three static tones shivering through your headset, which you first thought was part of the Kraftwerk song you were playing and later, the signature three-tone ascent of the train taking off. But no, the tones were there even when you turned the music off and stronger when you stood near the doors. A bonus track, if you will. Not all magnetism is friendly. You'd heard a rumour that the third rail could erase a laptop hard drive if you left your backpack on the floor, so you never put it down again.

You could always ask your new cousin about these things, the one who found you on 23andMe, because he's a mechanic on the MR-73 cars, the second generation of rolling stock that still populates the Blue line. You never shared your family tree with him, and now you feel guilty because he has let you spider through all his networks. On top of that, he keeps the trains running for you.

The metro is your lineage. You didn't need to spit into a tube to find that out.

Image: Daniel Allen Cox, Just before the storm, *2020, photo*

At Parc station, wavy, aqueous lines are embedded into the walls, in a mosaic separated by what looks like shark gills, so that you can't follow the lines if you're canted at an angle; the only way to see the artwork is head-on, or even better, from the opposite platform. You're shocked by the condition of the westbound passengers directly across from you. Do you look that lost and zombie-like? They're way too close to the edge.

De Castelnau station expresses a common Montréal sentiment: the joy of unfinished cement surfaces. Engraved figures emerge from the metro walls, carved with a caring hand: someone in a dress and pigtails holding a cornstalk, a tumble of courgettes at their feet. A cat balances on a squash. It turns out that the artwork, by Jean-Charles Charuest, uses travertine—a material of ancestral Italian cities, which gives the place a vaguely funereal air. Maybe the metro is a tomb that we will all fall into one day. Neon lights are built into the hollows under the staircase that leads up and outdoors. Maybe that's how they'll find us.

Your Sicilian grandfather immigrates to Canada with his young wife, your grandmother, and your three-month-old father, under cover of night in 1958 after having pissed off certain powerful military officials, and who knows who else. On a trip to Halifax, you visit the Pier 21 immigration museum and stand on the exact spot where they would've disembarked before being funnelled to Québec. You read the accounts of Italians who brought prosciutto as gifts, just to have them confiscated by immigration authorities only too happy to do it, and to "Canadianize" their names at the same time. The heartbreak. You cry in front of the displays while a friend rubs your back.

Your grandfather takes up work in what he's good at, and what he's *expected* to be good at. He doesn't pour the cement; it's mixed and poured into the wooden moulds for him, and he comes by immediately afterwards with his steel trowel to create edges and to smooth the dimpled surface. (It should be a *bit* rough for a better foot grip.) He drags along a two-by-four to act as a guide for his trowel, and as a level. He throws the wood out at the end of the day because it's caked with hardened cement, but he washes his trowel real clean. It looks like a simple job, but people respect the work as that of a master craftsman. Then he goes home to the undrinkable wine he made in the basement and forces you to taste it while together you watch soccer, wrestling, Pope news and Buster Keaton movies.

The first time he makes a watery brew, he covers over all transgressions with a swipe of his wrist. He never mixes a solid batch of concrete again in his life. Amazingly, he's outdone by a friend from a slightly more corrupt town in Sicily who works at the Olympic construction site and who's even cheaper than your grandfather. He steals seven jackhammers, buries them in an East End front yard to later dig up, and then dies. The stadium opens to fanfare and a visit from the Queen, and no one registers that the inclined tower is unfinished. It just breaks off into the sky.

There's a feature that's common to all stations in the system: water seepage. Limestone and calcite stalactites erupt like teeth out of nearly every tunnel and platform ceiling, coated in a whitish-brown

mineral plaque. You can hear water dripping behind the walls even when it's not raining. This is what happens when you tunnel into bedrock full of natural springs. It's also what happens when a city is built too quickly and without much foresight. Still, you find it beautiful.

At Jean-Talon station, the connection from the Orange to the Blue line is marked by a sequence of fat blue arrows swallowing a successively smaller orange circle until it's completely digested. You traverse colour, not the city. On one enormous wall above a platform, visible from all three levels of the station, is a work by Judith Bricault Klein. The 256 panels in enamelled steel gesture at the head-on arrival of a metro car. You wonder how many people jumped into the tracks at the mural to see for themselves how many metro lines intersect at the centre of the universe.

La ligne bleue is the last to come to life. The first segment to open is between Saint-Michel and De Castelnau in 1986, then it snakes west to connect to Snowdon two years later. There has always been talk of extending it and now they've finally broken ground on five new stations in the east: Pie-IX, Viau, Lacordaire, Langelier, Anjou.

They're saying 2030. But this is Montréal we're talking about, where a plastic orange construction pylon can sit in a pothole for two years. And nobody ever talks about the phantom Line 6 any more, originally proposed to run east–west along the north shore of the island, or the White Line, a series of seven stops that appeared on all official metro maps in the 1980s and 1990s before disappearing, a cruel teaser for how thousands of you could cut your north–south commutes in half instead of having to bus down to the Green.

Pie-IX, Viau, Lacordaire, Langelier, Anjou.

Anjou, Langelier, Lacordaire, Viau, Pie-IX.

Say them enough times, in any sequence, and they just might come true. Give us this station our daily commute and forgive us our metro passes.

One day you decide to check out the construction sites, to see the tunnel-boring machine for yourself. Steel rebar juts out of the ground, hinting at the bones of stations. Workers lay the roofing on bus shelters along the Pie-IX rapid transit line that will connect to the new stations. Signs announce where the secondary metro entrances and egresses will be. It doesn't look like a disaster, and this unexpected feeling of optimism unnerves you so much that you retreat to the safety of old thinking: forgetting promises made to you and learning to take the long way. Soon they'll find more hissing, steaming pipes than can be relocated. The extension will become just another phantom spur.

You Blue liners have always had to wait. You wait futilely for the 92 Jean-Talon bus in the rain and snow and blazing heat, fuming that an Orange line extension now runs off the island to service suburbanites who have no intention of taking the metro. The new trains—sadistically named Azur—are deployed to every line but yours. Tourists rarely take the Blue because it doesn't go to any landmarks. The rank-and-file pack into a shortened train, this crosstown, blue-collar secret that runs from the daycare to the university to the supermarket to a job that hardly pays the bills. For too long, the Blue closes earlier than the rest

of the metro, so you forget what the city looks like at night, or who it sparkles for. It doesn't run anywhere your grandfather needs it to go, so he instead makes all the stops in a GMC pickup. And yet Montréal couldn't function without this vein running deep through city bedrock, rocking its tired riders to sleep.

Le stade olympique, which was inaugurated the year you were born, continues to fall apart. You match each other for fractures, tit for tat. A cement beam crashes on the infield, and you break your middle finger sliding down a snowbank. An interior wall collapses, and your femur snaps in a car accident. You dislocate a shoulder, the same one, repeatedly; the roof tears during a monster truck show, then at a baseball game, then when no one's there, letting in more starlight with every rip. You and the stadium are the same age. You can no longer separate its history from your own, but you're still in better shape.

What will the stadium look like when an ice storm takes the tower down, and it pierces whatever's serving as a roof at the time? Sicilian construction workers never sleep, and neither do rogue jackhammers left for dead in the Montréal mud. There's a non-zero chance that underground, they're still doing their work and will someday rip through the new Blue line tunnels—built to be destroyed.

The concrete at Fabre station is cracking, but you can hardly notice it above the swoops of interlocking form-moulded plastic in blue and green that transmogrify into red and pink farther down the platform. Chrome railings bend like pipe cleaners around large white circles with echoes of coliseum-style seating chiselled into them. You get the feeling that the lines are meant to evoke direction, but they're also pragmatic. You sit on a dip in the chrome wave and hope the rainwater spitting

Image: Daniel Allen Cox, Stained-glass murals by Claude Bettinger 1988, *2020, photo*

from the ceiling doesn't hit the electrified tracks because then they'll shut it down and you'll never get home.

A gate blocks a third of the platform at d'Iberville because your cousin clearly doesn't want you there. The next time you go, the entire station is closed. They've found cracks in the foundation.

The cracking concrete is your lineage. You can see the matching lines in your palm, running off the map of you.

You arrive at Saint-Michel station—the eastern terminus, for now—and the conductor asks all passengers to get off. You find a violinist standing under the sign where buskers play, the sign bearing a harp with four strings: green, blue, orange, yellow. The four lines of the metro. The four strings of the violinist.

You've written a villanelle and want to hear how it sounds, so you hand the violinist a copy and watch them scan the lines for where to slot arpeggi to echo through the tunnels to the farthest platforms in the system.

We are the needle that goes cleanly through
And it hurts. A mischief of rats through a hole in the schist
With a mouth for a drill, our sickness every day new

Our rhythms controlled by those of us who
Forget what a shaken skeleton is, the gaps in the list
We are the needle that goes cleanly through

Counting the cup handles and spurious spurs, we do
Carry on. In case of humid moments missed
With a mouth for a drill, our sickness every day new

The train requires all our love, our flux and flaming centres, too
A diamond of sewer light through a space in the mist
We are the needle that goes cleanly through

Jar the numb ones awake, our bedrock vein blue
Carry the rails without getting cut, that's the gist
With a mouth for a drill, our sickness every day new

The slurry's a slog but without it we'd chew
Into dead ends. We eavesdrop for drill bits, droplets coming through blissed
We are the needle that goes cleanly through
With a mouth for a drill, our sickness every day new.

Daniel Allen Cox is the author of I Felt the End Before It Came, *finalist for the Grand Prix du livre de Montréal. His essays have appeared in* The Guardian *and* The Globe and Mail, *and have been recognized by the National Magazine Awards and reprinted in* Best Canadian Essays.

Road Trip with Wind Chill

JUDY LEBLANC

Isn't apathy dangerously close to hope?

When I'm lucky enough to see the sun rise in our cloud-clasped winters, I imagine how its rays have fallen hours before on that far-away prairie city where my son and his small family have already risen and are getting on with the business of their day. I envision my grandchild, his infant eyes wide open to the unknown.

We met him briefly in September on a quick visit to Winnipeg, Manitoba, when he was a month old. He cried a lot, as newborns do, getting their bearings in this strange place they've landed. We stared in awe, as if he were a multicoloured fish in an aquarium. He fell asleep on my chest and his sour-sweet smell lingered there after we left, as if he'd marked me.

Several months later, on the day of our departure for a seven week stay in Winnipeg, we wake to one of Vancouver Island's rare snowfalls. I can't help but think it must be a harbinger. We drive through a curtain of sloppy, falling snow on the slippery highway to the ferry dock an hour south of our home. The terminal is almost empty, so we chat with the woman at the booth who takes our money. She asks us where we're off to and when I explain that we have a new grandchild, she says a grandchild is the only thing that would get her on a cross-country road trip in winter.

"I want this child to know us," I say. By this I mean our smell, our voices and gestures, so that in the months we aren't in his company, he'll hold our memory and we'll hold his, as if we were present in the flesh.

The numbers that designate the places for cars to line up are buried beneath the snow. According to Google maps, we have 2,479 kilometres and twenty-eight hours of highway driving ahead of us. It's early February. As we move forward onto the ferry that will take us to the mainland, a sickly, heavy feeling grows at my core. I name it dread.

A few short weeks before we set off, in the United States, the new president is inaugurated for the second time. Stories of his latest executive orders and his threats to annex Canada flood the newsfeeds and social media sites. It's hard for B, my husband, to stay off his phone except when he's driving, while I scramble to find audio books. Anything but the news.

A road trip in winter goes against my inclination to be still as is the earth at that time of year, its dormant plants and hibernating animals. Never one for straying far from home in the colder months, I'm more inclined to see the season as a reflective time, a time to curl into myself. As in the child's pose: forehead to the ground, knees drawn to chin, limbs readying for the long stretch. Surely, a trip with so much frenetic surface movement across a latent landscape is an affront. I picture the car tumbling off an icy rock crevasse, a sharp curve on the highway, dying in a fire-ravaged, bone-crunching accident. In the weeks before our departure, I had cleaned out the back of my cupboards so that I wouldn't be leaving a mess for my children should I not return. I hugged a friend and said, "In case I don't see you again." She said, "Don't say that."

If you anticipate disaster, is it more likely to occur, or is it the other way around? Does imagining the worst help us become anaesthetized? Judith Butler calls the imagination "the necessary fiction." She states that "imagining the end of the world is still a form of imagining." I want her to be prescriptive, a Pollyanna who maintains that if one can imagine one thing, one can imagine another, as in a positive outcome. I'm thinking a lot about outcome, destination, the trip, my grandson's future. She doesn't say "think positive" or "manifest good things." She simply

Image: Samuel Garland, Maisonneuve, *2021, digital photography*


CROME
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goes on to argue that the humanities support imagination in the way that authoritarian governments do not. To imagine is to be human.

Bumping off the ferry at Horseshoe Bay, we're met with strands of slushy snow and a busy highway that will take us into Vancouver and out. I receive a video from my daughter-in-law. The baby is curled into the child's pose, then on his knees, then he collapses, shimmies forward on his tummy, grunting and crying in frustration. Frustration that comes before a breakthrough.

We're on our way, I text, and add a happy face emoji.

The server at Ricky's Grill in Hope, the small town at the base of the Coquihalla Pass, calls it "the Coq," pronounced coke. *She knows it, as if it's a creature with a backbone and a mood for every minute of the day.*

The server at Ricky's Grill in Hope, the small town at the base of the Coquihalla Pass, calls it "the Coq," pronounced *coke*. She knows it, as if it's a creature with a backbone and a mood for every minute of the day. She checks with the truckers who've just come off the mountain so she can report to her customers. I imagine her on her days off, zipping over its summit in an older pickup—all she can afford on server's wages—to visit a sister in Merritt, telling herself she's chosen just the right moment for the journey.

The "dangerousroads" website says the Coq is one of the most dangerous mountain crosses in North America because of its sudden heavy snowfalls, blowing snow and fog. Together with the server, we examine the DriveBC site.

"Looks like up to the shed," she says, "you'll have icy patches. After that, going down, it'll be all right."

How can she possibly know, when the weather is always in a state of becoming something else? We decide to make a run for it anyway.

"They drive fast up there," she adds, punching in our payment. "It's not you, it's the other drivers."

How does she know this? As if through flattery, she can manage the speed of those who cross the Coq, and if she learns it, she can contain the weather, hold all the variables steady and she'll have done her part to ward off death.

Contrary to her prediction, on our way up the mountain, the late afternoon sun slices the clouds to touch the glistening mountain peaks. There's only a slight wind gust and the road is more dry than icy. We're pleased with ourselves for having taken the risk because there'd been talk between us about getting a hotel in Hope and leaving the Coq until morning. Near the summit, we enter the sodium-lit tunnel inside the Great Bear avalanche shed where tons of snow slide off the mountain across the shed's roof and out of sight while we drive beneath.

Out the other end, we start our descent into a thickening fog. B's shoulders stiffen, a gesture I know as if it were my own. He hunches and drops them, says little. We've been on the road since early morning. Snow begins to fall, swirls across the highway, forms hard clumps and icy patches. Daylight begins to dim into night.

"Maybe we should have stayed the night in Hope," I say, and it rings futile.

"No."

"You all right?" I ask.

"Yes."

"We could stay in Merritt. It's at the base."

"Kamloops is only an hour from Merritt."

"Right," I say. Then after a minute or two, "You don't have white line fever, do you?"

He ignores me and I don't blame him. He's driving well under the speed limit. He's a cautious driver. We're aging and more careful than ever. We've been married twenty-five years, he's lost most of his hair and I'm losing mine. So much loss: the skin's elasticity, muscle mass. It's all begun for us. Confidence diminishes, too, despite—or maybe because of—the years of living.

The fog mixed with the thick grey light of dusk presses against the window. It has been such a long day, but my nerves are too edgy for me to be sleepy. We can't tell what the road conditions are ahead, but we're alert. In that moment, our thoughts are singular: fog, road, snow, failing light. I tell him what I see, but he already sees it—There's a bend in the road, a car there, a truck I think, see the headlights, behind us now. It soothes me to talk quietly and I believe he depends on it, even if it irritates him. Maybe he's afraid, but I don't ask because I don't want to know any more than he wants me to know. We never really know, do we, the shape of fear in another, no matter how close we are to them.

The ever-changing weather, the dense fog and the trucks like ghosts heaving by us through the snowfall in dusk's vague light. If you consider the near misses that must have occurred without our knowing, the odds were high that something terrible should have happened. But it didn't.

We arrive intact in Kamloops. B pulls into the first hotel we come to, an old auto court, rundown, not all that appealing, with only three cars in the parking lot. I'm too grateful to protest.

In our room, we kick off winter boots and stuff our road food into the tiny fridge. It's dark outside and through the steadily falling snow across an empty parking lot the lights of a strip mall coruscate. B fumbles in his luggage for a bottle of blended Scotch he's brought for such occasions, slips the paper off two water glasses provided by the hotel and pours. Unpacking, reorganizing, I fuss around the stale-smelling room. B sprawls on the bed with his drink and his phone. Mismatched dishes, a coffee machine and packets of sugar are piled haphazardly beside a microwave oven on a metal shelf. It's a space where truckers and people who move along the highways year-round attempt a facsimile of a domestic life. The rug is stained.

With a sigh, I collapse on the bed beside my husband. "First day down. We did good, huh?"

He places his phone on the bedside table, hands me my drink and taps my glass. We recline in silence, enjoying the stillness of the room, the fact that we aren't moving.

I wonder aloud if there might be cockroaches or bedbugs.

"As far as I know, they weren't included with the room price, but I could ask," says B.

This triggers a bout of laughter between us and it's nice lying there, feeling the warmth of the Scotch flood my body, knowing how far we've come.

Before bed, B flips on the news. The CBC journalists are familiar and we welcome them. But it's the squat figure and homely face of the newly elected president, his coarse and bullying voice that fills the room. The icy wind snaps the window glass.

The sky is clear the next morning and the sun spreads over the low, bald hills outside our window. We're feeling optimistic about the day ahead. We agree over a breakfast of dry bagels and Keurig coffee that we'll start every day with a rough destination in mind, we'll err on the side of safety, let good judgement be our guide.

The highway is dry, a small blessing that we've always taken for granted. Traffic is light and the morning sun warms the car through the windshield, though clouds mass together along the hills. B says again he's pleased with our new vehicle, its heft and comfort, how it negotiated the icy roads the day before. We purchased it only months before the trip, a one-year-old SUV. White, because research shows there are fewer accidents in white cars. A plug-in hybrid and B believes we got a deal. It communicates with us through voice and various indicators including beeps, vibrations and flashing lights, as if it might be a superior intelligence, one to whom we can entrust our safety.

A few minutes out of Kamloops, an AI voice from Google Maps—cheery, calm, competent—informs us she knows a faster route. She doesn't explain why it's faster, what we might be avoiding or even how many minutes we would save. She speaks with authority and B glances at me. I shake my head, but I'm unsure and so is he. We briefly discuss what it might be—a road closure involving a long delay, danger of some kind we cannot imagine. The voice directs us to turn and B abruptly swings the car onto the exit. I draw my breath but say nothing.

We immediately pass vast, lonely ranches, their houses tucked between rolling hills skimmed with snow, some forested with singed black trees like an army of phantoms from last summer's many wildfires. Before long, the fog rolls around us, obscuring the blue sky and the AI voice directs us onto a backroad where we wind around fenced pastures. The snow and ice thicken beneath our wheels. Abandoned barns and buildings in various stages of disrepair are sparsely scattered across whited-out fields. We pass fewer and fewer cars until we're alone on a narrow snow-packed country road that curves into a gully through a dense forest. The fog lifts enough to reveal a sky now heavy with clouds.

An AI voice from Google Maps—cheery, calm, competent—informs us she knows a faster route. She doesn't explain why it's faster, what we might be avoiding. She speaks with authority and B glances at me.

It's not as if the folly of our decision isn't dawning on us, but by this time, we're in too deep. We've come too far to turn around.

B breaks the ballooning silence. "Do you remember the story about the couple who listened to their GPS and got lost? It was winter, lots of snow, I don't know where, and they were on some back road."

"Way in the middle of nowhere," I say. "He died."

"No, she did. He walked out, went looking for help and when he got back, she was dead."

"Nice guy. He left her there to die."

"What was he supposed to do? They both would have died."

"But why'd it have to be her? Couldn't they have gone out together?"

"He thought he was going to get help."

"Or maybe he wanted to take her out there and get rid of her."

B glances at me with a grin. I roll my eyes. Then we argue about the details. I say it was up north somewhere, and he says no, it was in the United States.

"I knew we'd get lost. If we'd stayed on the Trans Canada—"

"We're not lost."

"Of course we are." I cross my arms and glance out the passenger's side window, everything covered in snow. "You and technology. I should have never—"

"There had to be a reason for the diversion."

"You expect reason from a GPS? And would you, for Christ's sake, slow down."

"Do you want to drive?"

I ignore that, but I'm about to ask him what he's going to do when we run out of gas. At that moment, we emerge from the trees and enter an intersection that spits us back on the highway.

I drop my head back and sigh, then begin to speculate on all that could have gone wrong. I outline in detail the car overturned in the ditch, the wounds we could have suffered, our isolation, frostbite. With each scenario, bit by bit, my anxiety dissipates.

Finally, likely out of exasperation, B agrees to never take a diversion again. "But," he adds, "We don't know what we were avoiding."

"We'll never know what we were avoiding."

After a few minutes, the big man's partner says, "Would you be hurt if I went back to the room?" The man licks his top lip. His jaw goes rigid. "Yes, I would."

My son sends a photo of the baby sitting hunched over, face scrunched in concentration. All that supports him to sit up are two adult fingers resting lightly on his back. *Almost*, I write back and include an emoji heart. Then I ask for a restaurant recommendation in Banff where he and my daughter-in-law took a vacation last winter. He sends me the name of a brew pub. After checking into our hotel, B and I walk the frigid streets—minus 28, *feels like* minus 32—for four blocks past bundled up skiers. We hear Japanese, Australian, French and other accents we can't identify; the stores are open and the streets lit up despite the cold. In the pub, we're surrounded by young people, are easily the oldest there. Talk of the nearby ski hills swirls around us. The food is warm and tasty, the beer hardy. It might be a stage set for well-off tourists, and for now, it's respite from the road. I feel as if I'm part of something.

Later, back at the hotel, we sit in the hot tub with two men speaking Japanese, deeply engrossed in conversation. The hotel spa is small, the tiles gritty and the water closer to lukewarm than hot. A man and a woman come in. She's dressed in snow boots, tights and a snug sweater. She perches on a stool where she has a full view of the hot tub. He strips down to his swimsuit—a large man with a belly that folds over the waistband of his boxer-style swim trunks. Plastered across his ass is the American flag. When he descends into the hot tub, he creates a wave and the stars and stripes balloon out, briefly appearing on the water's tepid surface. B catches my eye and raises his brows. I'm afraid he might say something, so I look away. No one speaks, and the water bubbles around us.

After a few minutes, the big man's partner says, "Would you be hurt if I went back to the room?"

The man licks his top lip. His jaw goes rigid. "Yes, I would." Not long after, he struggles to his feet and steps out. His skin is splotchy and red. He wraps himself in a towel and she takes his arm as they leave.

The president announces he's ended policies protecting LGBTQ rights. With a stroke of the pen and several executive orders, he jeopardizes trans people's safety, intends to render them invisible. And in a couple weeks' time, after arriving in Winnipeg, we will see the *Love in a Dangerous Time* exhibit at the Human Rights Museum, about the LGBT Purge from the 1950s to the 1990s by the Canadian federal government, a witch hunt rampant with human rights violations. In front of the Contemporary Issues wall, I will wave my hand and images will arise outlining the challenges and progress of the 2SLGBTQI+ community since those days. The trick of the display, however, is that if you avert your attention for too long, the text and images quickly disappear.

The next morning, cocooned against the frigid air outside the car on our way to Calgary, I say to my husband I don't want that man in my life, meaning the president, and he says it's unavoidable. But I've done enough Buddhist practice to know that the world you live in has to do with where you place your attention. I tap my phone until a photo of my grandson appears, his mouth full of his teddy bear's ear. We gaze at one another as the snow thickens with the traffic on the bypass around Calgary.

We've learned to stay well back, out of the way of semis and the commuters in cars. More experienced than us, they cluster in the passing lane alongside the big trucks, disappearing into a funnel of swirling muddied snow only to emerge seconds later.

We leave the storm behind when we finally exit the confusing network of Calgary highways onto a quiet stretch of the Trans Canada. The sky swells to a pastel blue dome above, and below the land flattens into a featureless white canvas, fraught with expectancy.

In a large family restaurant on the side of the highway, we're the only customers. The server is young and chatty, eager to please. She's proud of the homemade soup they serve and after a diet of deep fry the previous few days, I'm pleased and let her know. We're two hours away from Medicine Hat where we might spend the night, or maybe not. We're not sure because, despite the clear sky that stretches east toward the provincial border, Environment Canada warns that heavy snowfall is approaching from Saskatchewan.

Once on our way again, along the highway the sun's rays reflect off the towering grain silos, pumpjacks like giant anteaters dip their narrow necks toward the Earth's surface and snow drifts across the road in a rising wind. Off in the distance, a cloud billows up from the ground.

"A tornado?" I ask, but as we get closer, we see it rising from chimneys attached to an arrangement of domed white buildings amongst metal scaffolding. Similar massive clouds appear along the horizon. We are to discover that according to Google, Medicine Hat sits at the heart of Alberta's petrochemical cluster. And Rudyard Kipling, who was fond of the city, said Medicine Hat has "all hell for a basement."

"Drill, baby, drill," says B, the president's words never far from his mind.

I scan the horizon, the long, low land and say, "Good people are carving out a living in the best way they can, the only way they know." I remind him about the warmth of the server in the restaurant, human kindness everywhere, about hatred and division being the enemy.

We fall silent, then I point out a smattering of windmills. "Why not solar with all this sun?"

He reminds me that the United States has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement on climate change.

I remind him that this is not the United States.

He reminds me that the Liberal government in our country is going to scrap the carbon tax, that Trump promises to annex Canada and that the United States border is a mere 144 kilometres south.

I tell him not to be sanctimonious about the carbon efficiency of our expensive vehicle. Expensive, and therefore not accessible to everyone and in some ways, isn't having the means to protect the environment a privilege. As is being grandparents, and doesn't this privilege come with the expectation that we have faith in the future. When he doesn't respond, I flip on Spotify, something loud and grating from our youth. The Rolling Stones, "Gimme Shelter."

The convention centre hotel in Medicine Hat is perched above the highway, a sprawling edifice seated confidently amidst the thrum of industry. Its size suggests it had hoped for throngs of executives, or perhaps they come at a milder time of the year. Its long wide hallways are empty, as is its restaurant and spa. Our room is on the main floor, sunk partway into the earth. The thick drapes on its basement window conceal the brewing storm outside.

The hotel appears to be managed and/or owned by a South Asian family, which maybe explains why, behind the oversized bar, a large TV screen features a Bollywood movie. It plays loudly to an empty room. We wiggle into a circular booth, big enough to seat ten people. On the wall behind us strings of plastic lights glow. We're happy for the Indian food on offer. A young woman dressed in a bulky sweater that hangs off her thin body brings the menus. Her hair, tied into a ponytail, falls down her back and her dark eyes focus on the pad of paper she draws from the pocket of her apron. Her gaze shifts from the floor, away from mine, and it's clear there's to be no chit-chat. I can't help but wonder if she dreams of all the warmth and colour of India, constructs home in her mind while feeling trapped in this cold and stark land.

We are to discover that according to Google, Medicine Hat sits at the heart of Alberta's petrochemical cluster. And Rudyard Kipling, who was fond of the city, said Medicine Hat has "all hell for a basement."

Early the next morning we find our way to a small windowless room filled with the smell of sausages, toast and coffee, where we help ourselves to breakfast. Half a dozen tables are scattered around, most empty, and one wall is taken up with a large TV screen. I share the toaster with a fleshy-faced, rough-shaven man in work boots and when I smile, he looks away. I'm grateful for not having to engage in small talk. He sits by himself, and at another table a woman in a cashmere sweater gazes at her cell phone. Her grey-streaked hair is folded into a fashionable knot at her neck. She holds her chin up, her back straight, as if she's mustering for a difficult day. Earlier, B noted the hospital nearby, and I wonder if she spends her day sitting at the bedside of someone slipping away from her.

I join my husband at our table. A younger man wearing sweatpants, a T-shirt and big running shoes trailing laces comes in and pauses at the door, his eyes fixed on the TV just as the president's jowly face looms and his rough voice spews forth. The five of us turn to watch him address the National Prayer breakfast at the United States capitol. He will bring religion back, he says. He's like the Antichrist. We in the hotel breakfast room are all strangers, alone and travelling. We watch in silence while outside the snow flies and the land freezes deeper.

As we approach the Saskatchewan border east of Medicine Hat, the snowfall lessens, then stops. The sky expands into a seamless blue, but the road is marked in places with patches of snow. We're not sure exactly when we've crossed the border into Saskatchewan. The temperature is well below minus 25, *feels like* minus 32 with wind chill. The prairie grasses hidden under the snow, the few trees around the lone houses, all at a standstill, holding itself against the wind gusts. In wait.

Everything is in the distance on the prairie and if it's moving, as do the semis, it first appears alive until it becomes bigger and you see it for what it is, a great hulking shape devoid of life coming toward you in the other lane.

After the third day of moving steadily across a winter landscape in which a myriad of things could go wrong, I'm beginning to feel something like numbness. I recall an early essay by Susan Sontag in which she talks about "a strange apathy" that occurs with exposure to disaster films. Apathy interests me as a potential response to threat. Once I arrive in Winnipeg, I'll discover something like it after exposure to the cold. Twenty-five minutes walking along the Red River in minus 25, *feels like* minus 31, I'll get sleepy and drawn by the abundance of sunlight. I will feel as if I could lie down and nap forever on the downy snow. I'll imagine, on some bizarre level, that this might be possible, as if I've fooled myself into believing that I won't freeze to death. In this way, isn't apathy dangerously close to hope? My son and daughter-in-law, formerly political, don't want to talk about the American president now that they're new parents.

Close to Regina, we pass a semi lying on its side with its underside exposed. Afterward, we lose count of the cars that pulled over the night before during the storm, some also on their sides. I imagine the darkness, the fear, am grateful that the night before, we'd left the road long before dusk. *There by the grace of . . .*

The sun shines, and the snow shifts across the highway in 50-kilometre gusts, like two pure-white, sunlit hands, palms down, one above, one below, crisscrossing one another in a rhythmic, unceasing gesture. I'm discovering the hypnotic quality of snow, like a dreaming.

On-the-road life is distilled. In winter especially, the journey is reduced to a weighing of factors, hours of daylight, kilometres and road condition, estimation of arrival, decisions around routes, vehicle performance, weather. It demands a constant assessment of risk, imagining worst and best scenarios. It might be compared to becoming a parent.

What kind of a world do I imagine my grandson into? One I can't know. How can I, when the raw material of imagination is nothing more than a mix of memory and dream? We have so little to go into the future on. I'm old enough now to know the dangers of the road and yet I have less assurance of safety than ever.

Though birth rates are down worldwide, and there's speculation that many countries are moving toward zero-replacement rate, a growing number of young people are choosing not to have children citing fears of climate change and political instability. The antinatalists say that it's unkind to have children because life is suffering. Yet, I wonder what it would mean for humanity to take the work of nurturing a life to maturity out of the world. Is having a child not the ultimate leap of faith, the most courageous gesture of imagination? There's so much at stake. Doesn't it make you feel alive?

We spend our last night on the road in Moosomin, another deserted hotel except for the truckers. We eat the last of the road food in our room. We're four hours from Winnipeg.

The next morning, as we set out on our last stretch, I ask B, "What song? We need a good road song." He wants "Born to Run," but I opt for a new song by Gretchen Peters in which she sings about the road: "Watch It Shine."

"We'll be there by supper," I text my son and daughter-in-law. "The road is dry."

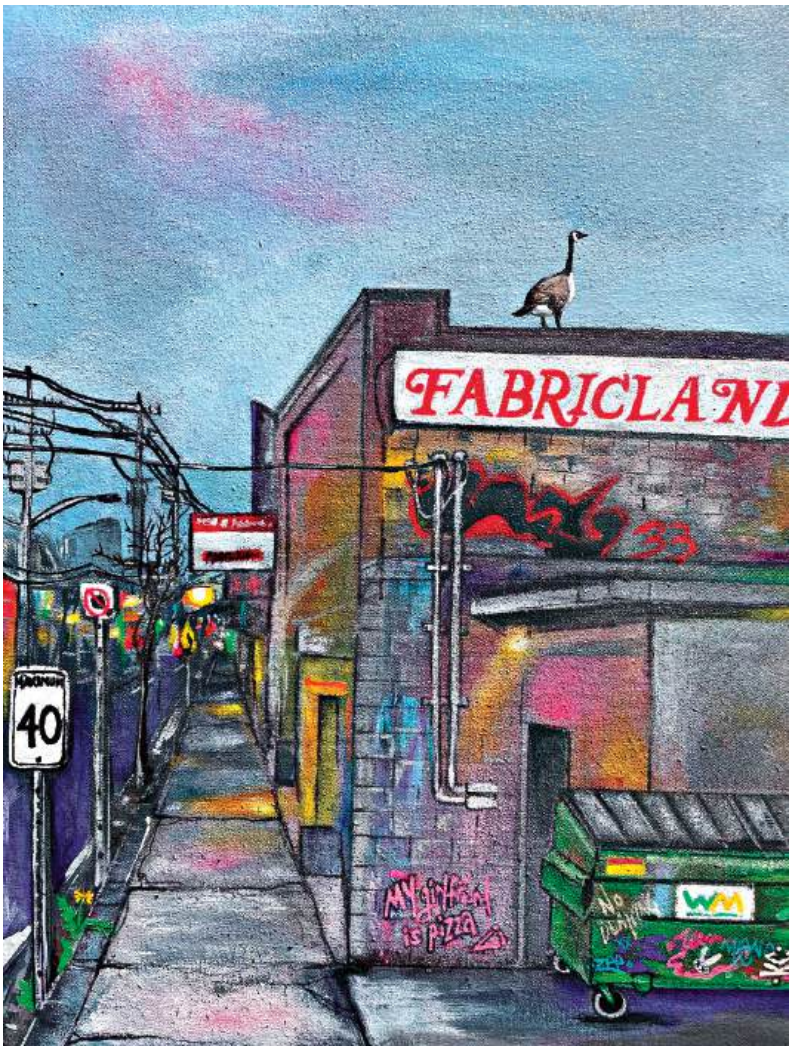
They send a photo of the baby boy, his healthy cheeks puckered into a smile, his face filling my screen. I imagine his breath on me, all his newness.

Judy LeBlanc's stories and essays have appeared in magazines and in the anthology Don't Tell: Family Secrets. The Promise of Water, *a collection of short stories, preceded her novel,* The Broken Heart of Winter. *Her most recent book, a memoir in essays,* Permission to Land, *was published in 2024.*

bric-à-brac

GRACE BOWNESS

A thought trying to unfurl in a cramped space,
unsure how to stretch out, to be



The man was garbage.

From the earth, his sack of flesh was found empty and, mistaking it for an oversized trash bag, a middle-aged couple stuffed it full of discarded crap they saw lying around their casual getaway—a rank bit of lakeshore beside an old container yard, ten minutes from their house.

"People are such shits," his mom said, recalling it.

"Ruining a perfectly good sex spot," his dad added while shuffling a deck of cards.

The three were sitting down to a game of crib at his parents' wobbly kitchen table.

Image: Kim Collins, My Girlfriend Is Pizza, *2024, acrylic and ink on recycled canvas*

"Shut it!" Mom snapped. She swirled a bottle of whiskey to see how much was left and drained it into a glass. "What kid wants to hear their parents say that?" Then, smirking, "Don't look it, but I've got my standards."

Dad nodded.

And that was the story of how he was born.

"An accident—from shoving old junk into a used-up bag of flesh!"

Or so his parents said. Then they laughed and laughed and laughed.

The result: His adult body was full of lumps. His skull. His neck, on the left side. His right cheek. Even his penis. Everywhere, large and small, misshapen and perfectly spherical bumps protruded from his skin. Some could be pushed from one location to the next with a single jab, while others were hard and fixed, impossible to displace. Then there were those that flattened with the slightest bit of pressure from an index finger until—*POP!*—back out they came. His right eye was squished partially closed from an inconveniently placed bulge that he couldn't do anything about.

"Could've done a better packing job, Mom," Dad chuckled.

"I said, shut it!" Mom raised her hand of playing cards, threatening her husband. Then she glanced over at their son, whose clear blue eyes matched her own. "But damn, you're not wrong." She tossed two cards into the pile.

On his way to bed that evening, he found Dad, slight and short, leaning heavily against the wall in the hallway, shoulder forcing an empty picture frame askew. He reached out to help.

"I'm fine." Dad waved him away and limped into the living room, easing himself onto the old striped sofa, its fabric arms shredded by a cat his parents had never owned.

Mom, getting up to make room, left for the kitchen.

"My hip," Dad said. "An old job injury."

"Job?" he asked.

Dad laughed at his son's frown. "It's nothing."

Returning with an ice-filled plastic baggy wrapped in a wet dishrag, Mom snorted. "Nothing? Maybe if you had let it heal before getting into it with Chris."

Dad made a face.

"Chris?" he asked.

For a while, no one said anything, then Dad cleared his throat. Told him how, a long time ago, prior to his lakeside conception, there was Chris, his parents' now-would-be-young-adult son. "Never liked kids, until we had one."

"The old natural way, mind you," Mom added, lighting up a cigarette. But the kid was real garbage. Didn't care an ounce about anyone, especially his parents. Left without a word. Might be dead. "Not like you. Such a good kid. Exactly the type of man I've needed in my life."

"Hey!" Dad said.

Mom gave Dad a look.

"The type of man we've needed," Dad corrected.

Mom laughed.

A strange, hot prickling started up behind his eyes. He rubbed at them until the sensation stopped. "I have a brother?"

"Drop it," Mom said.

So he did.

A busted window in the living room sealed with tape and plastic. The small TV in the kitchen, unusable from a shattered screen. A loose piece of plywood laid across a foot-sized hole in a stair that led to the basement bedroom. He noticed these things

around his parents' house over the next day. Kept thinking about them overnight, then into the next morning.

"Do I have a job?" he asked as soon as he entered the kitchen.

His parents were sitting at the table, Dad with a chipped mug of black coffee, Mom a whiskey on the rocks.

"Of course you don't," Mom said.

"Why?" Dad asked. "You want one or something?"

He nodded.

His parents exchanged a look.

The next day, he started his first job as a garbage man. Dad used to work for sanitation services and an old co-worker owed him big, even promised to get his son the night shift—"We'll put him on a nice quiet route. One where nobody'll catch sight of his ugly."

And there he worked with a couple of guys who didn't talk much.

Immediately upon awakening, he had been fluent and well-spoken. No questions. He simply knew how to form words, how to move. He even seemed to know how the world worked.

"'I appear to be naked'—honest to God, those were your first words, you high and mighty prick," Dad said, rummaging through the kitchen cabinets for something to eat. "Sent Mom running in a hurry. None of my stuff fit you, so she had to pull Chris's things out of storage . . ." Dad trailed off as he grabbed something out of the fridge, slamming the door closed with his bad hip. "Want some scrambled eggs and tomatoes?" Dad's favourite.

After their egg and tomato dinner, he went to his bedroom in the basement to get ready for his second week of work. Closing the door behind him, he sat in front of the ornately carved and grossly cracked oval mirror leaning against the wall and stared at his reflection. A ritual—every night before his shift. There, in the quiet of the basement, he would allow himself to sit with things he had seen, revisiting recent moments that had passed.

The memory he most often replayed was his earliest, from several weeks back, when he first awoke—sweaty and naked, splayed out on a creaky old box spring lying crooked on the floor, blinking up at a corner of brown blotchy ceiling. Stained taupe sheets tangled around his feet. A frayed crochet blanket, full of holes, tossed over his chest. A bucket of water to his side. Something dripping down his temple, a lukewarm cloth slipping off his forehead. A woman—Mom—wearing silk pyjamas, her head a halo of tawny curls, sitting on a wooden chair, looking down, lipstick-pressed cigarette in hand. "Christ alive, you're ugly." Sipping a whiskey on the rocks.

On occasion, a sudden word or image surfaced as he stared at the mirror. Things he had no conscious memory of, but somehow knew. Recognized. Dreams? Memories of a real past? They were nothing special. Banana pudding and cartoons. See-saws and Band-Aids. Small, insatiable cravings for something more that he kept to himself.

On his way to work, walking the path his parents taught him to follow to the waste depot, he took a wrong turn.

This new street was narrow, pressed in on either side by a line of attached, short brick buildings with darkened windows. At first, the street seemed clean, neat, but as he continued, he noticed fast-food wrappers along the curbs of the barely-sidewalks. A torn magazine and discarded black shirt sat squashed in the middle of the road. Stepping over an old vomit-splatter stain, he stopped where the wall of apartments suddenly split wide, making way for a small parkette with a bench tagged in white graffiti. On either side of

the bench, two leafy trees created an awning of translucent green, lit from below by a squat streetlamp, its glass globe mottled black with dead bugs.

He stepped off the sidewalk and stood at the parkette's edge. While he stared, entranced, a snuffling sound snuck up on him and then something touched the back of his pant leg. Turning, he found a speckled brown boxer terrier sniffing at his feet, the dark fur around the dog's muzzle going grey.

"Don't mind old Jacob." An elderly woman crouched on the sidewalk, gazing at the boxer terrier with open affection. A vibrant streak of violet in her short white hair. She beckoned for the dog to come.

Jacob lumbered over to her, his tail wagging, slow and rhythmic. Behind the dog's shoulder blade, a large mass bulged unnaturally.

"He may be big, but he's friendly," the woman said, rising to her feet. She leaned over to stroke the dog. From under the collar of her shirt, a small cross on a delicate gold chain slipped out, glinting in the lowlight. "You can pat him, if you'd like." She looked up, her brown eyes bright behind thick black glasses, and paused. "Your face . . ."

Stepping forward, the woman reached for him, but before she could cup his cheeks, he jerked his head away. Took a step back.

The woman lowered her hands. Gave a gentle smile. "I'll pray for you."

By the time he finally reached work, he was late.

"If this happens again, we're leaving without you," his coworker said, opening the door to the truck.

"There was a woman . . ." But he stopped, unsure what to share.

His coworker shrugged—"You meet all sorts out here"—then climbed into the driver's seat and shut the door.

The next night, as he sat at his mirror, a full thought formed.

Perhaps he wasn't made of garbage. Perhaps, just maybe, his parents, lonely and deserted by their own flesh and blood, had been a little too drunk when they discovered him lying naked in the water, a near-dead body drifting amongst the pieces of garbage. An attempted suicide? A second chance at a son?

Then a word came to him that he couldn't keep to himself.

Tumours? Where'd you hear that?"

Mom and Dad were playing crib at the kitchen table, an ashtray smouldering between them. Dangling from the ceiling, dead centre, a single incandescent bulb caked with dust attracted a moth. It flittered around, dancing shadows across the table, their faces. Mom, sipping on whiskey, kept her eyes on him.

"Maybe I should see a doctor?"

"A doctor? Why? Needles and experiments. Is that what you want?" Dad laughed.

"What if I'm sick . . ."

Mom frowned and squinted at their son. Putting down her drink, she gently fanned out her cards on the table and picked up her cigarette. "Did those boys at work say something to you?" The tip of her cigarette crumbled, scattering ash.

"No, it's just—what if I'm . . . real . . . What if I'm really sick . . ."

Mom looked to Dad, who scratched his cheek. Standing up from the table, Dad pushed the chair back with the crooks of his spider-veined legs and limped over. Put a hand on his son's shoulder. Gave it a pat. "Don't worry about being sick. All you are is garbage—"

"What the hell is wrong with you?" Mom said. "Who says that to their kid?"

"What? It's true though, isn't it—"

Mom held up a finger, silencing her husband. Turned to their son. "You're not sick, you're just . . . different."

He frowned, felt an unusual pressure building up between his eyes and scratched at a particularly large bump under his collarbone. “Can’t I be both?”

Mom slammed a palm on the table. “You’re not sick!” Her nostrils flared. “You don’t have tumours! You’re fine as you are and you’ll keep being fine so long as you don’t talk to anyone. Got it?” She tried to make eye contact with her son, who stared fixedly at his feet. “Got it?”

Inside her glass, the ice clinked as it melted, shifted position.

“How about I make us some scrambled eggs and tomatoes when you get back? Hm? Mom and I’ll wait up for you. We’ll have a nice breakfast together,” Dad said. He sat down and reached out to pat his wife’s hand.

On his way to work, his mind churned.

Tumours and sickness and garbage.

Something itched inside him, uncomfortable. A thought trying to unfurl in a cramped space, unsure how to stretch out, to be. It nettled him on his usual route to the waste depot, down back alleyways hissing with sewage smoke.

Most often, he would walk this path without passing a soul. Sometimes, there’d be a few people here or there, sitting on cracked concrete steps or curled up on pieces of cardboard next to a dumpster. No one trying to take notice. No one looking to be seen.

He doubled back, turned down a side street he had just passed—the wrong one, where he had met the elderly woman, her lumpy dog. He touched his fingertips to his cheek.

Through the haze, a shadow was walking toward him. A sudden lightness lifted him straighter. A warmth grew within his chest—he was being approached.

But then the shadow solidified, transforming into a skinny, filthy youth clutching a knife in trembling hands. “Please . . . give me your money.”

Having nothing of value, he held out his hands, open and low. “I’m sorry.”

“Please,” the youth said.

Behind a greasy tangle of tawny hair, he caught the youth’s eye for a moment and, in the dim light, saw clear blue.

Or so it seemed.

“Please, I need money, I need—” The youth took a step toward him and, foot snagging on uneven pavement, stumbled forward—tripped.

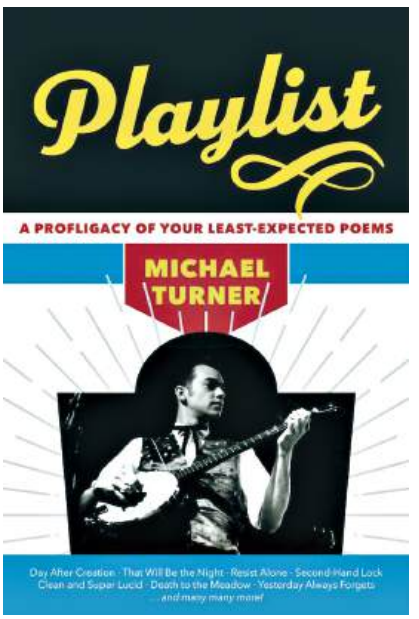
Falling into arms held wide, the two embraced, the youth’s knife slipping smoothly into his stomach.

As they pushed apart, the knife withdrawing from his body, he felt hot pain and looked down. Looked at his fingers slowly collapsing in on themselves and his limbs shrivelling up like deflating balloons, accumulating more and more creases. He felt his skin sag as his insides spewed out the gaping hole in his belly—crushed tinfoil hats, bloody Band-Aids and floss, syringes, mouldy pudding cups, rotten scrambled eggs and tomatoes—and cried. Never had he given much thought to dying, but now, never had he wanted so badly to die seeing his insides moist, warm, and throbbing with his parents’ blood. Looking up at his assailant, he reached out, but the youth gagged and screamed for some God to forgive them as they turned and ran. The garbage man knew of no God or why his parents had made him. A partially full, half-crumpled-up can of Mountain Dew tumbled down between his legs and pissed itself across a sewer grate blossoming weeds.

Grace Bowness is a writer from Treaty One territory (Winnipeg) who now lives in Tiohtià:ke (Montréal). Her work has appeared in Broken Pencil *and* juice*, and received an honourable mention in the CRAFT 2024 Dialogue Challenge.*

A PROFLIGACY

At last year's Vancouver Writers Festival, I saw Michael Turner read from his latest book, **Playlist: A Profligacy of Your Least-Expected Poems** (Anvil). Beating at the heart of *Playlist* is the popular song—the ones we listened to endlessly while growing up as they insinuated their tendrils into our selves. Each poem in *Playlist* is connected, in some fashion, to a specific song; how clear those connections are will depend on how closely your musical biography overlaps with Turner's. Each poem or two is set up by a brief prose introduction. Taken together, these introductions form a compact (auto)biography of the author, who grew up in Vancouver in what he describes as a "musical household." Turner discusses *Playlist* in a podcast episode hosted by Am Johal; the transcript of their conversation is at sfu.ca/vancity-office-community-engagement/below-the-radar-podcast/transcripts/262-michael-turner.html. *Playlist* began as a writing exercise for a poetry workshop Turner hosted in 2020. "[I asked people to] bring in song lyrics that kind of drove them crazy, . . . generally having a negative relationship . . . to the poem or . . . the song lyrics. And from that we would make poems. . . . Through my method, we would eliminate the source, . . .



and as such, kind of act as a critique of the lyric that finds itself as a poem." Thus, Lennon/McCartney's "Yesterday" becomes Turner's "Tomorrow"; Hendrix's "Purple Haze" is mirrored in "Yellow Clarity." Turner mentions a 1961 Pete Seeger songbook, in which each song is preceded by an introduction. "So I thought what I would do is I would use that dual writing system to make a book with these poems." *Playlist* offers a fascinating glimpse into the poetic process—and the life—of a working poet. "That's what most of us want, isn't it? A life, not a story." Yes, it is. —*Michael Hayward*

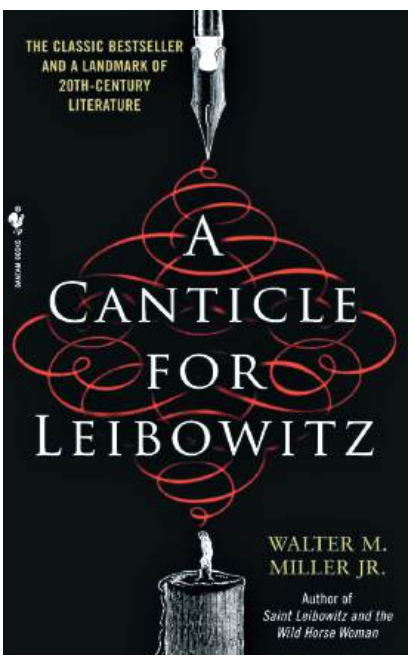
BANKSY: A NON-ENDNOTE

Unsure exactly what to expect, I nevertheless decided to attend the touring exhibit **The Art of Banksy Without Limits** when it reached Vancouver. And after viewing it, I have to say that Banksy just ascended to the heights of Leonora Carrington in my estimation, which is another way of saying that I loved it. The work is powerful, it's funny and it's full of fury against authoritarianism. But I discovered afterwards that the exhibit isn't authorized by the artist himself. Which on the one hand, makes sense: Why would it be? And while some of the pieces (on paper) are unquestionably originals, I couldn't help wondering: How could the *other* pieces be—unless walls had been torn off buildings? As with all great art, my perceptions shifted after my viewing of the work. Had I known beforehand that the exhibit wasn't authorized, I wouldn't have attended. But since I *hadn't* known, I went. Hence my dilemma: If I wrote an Endnote about the travelling *Without Limits* exhibit, would I be supporting and condoning an undertaking that Banksy himself (possibly) opposed? A surreal conundrum, which is so Banksy. In the end, though, I decided not to write an Endnote. And this isn't it.

—*Peggy Thompson*

CANTICLES AND CORONAS

After noticing definite signs of the end times approaching (earthquakes, wars, food insecurity, a false Messiah), I decided to read more post-apocalyptic literature in preparation. I'd never read Walter M. Miller Jr.'s **A Canticle for Leibowitz** (Spectra), so pulled it from a dusty shelf. Miller began writing short science fiction after World War II. *Canticle*, first published in 1959, grew out of one of these stories. The novel is divided into three sections, "Fiat Homo," "Fiat Lux," and "Fiat Voluntas Tua," set six centuries apart. Following a nuclear event, horror at the extent of the disaster creates a fear of advanced technology and a return to religion and unsophisticated values. Isaac Leibowitz, a former engineer, founds a monastic order called the Albertian Order of Leibowitz, in New Mexico. The novel's first section, "Fiat Homo," takes place six hundred years after Leibowitz's death. Ephemera from his era have become religious relics. The monks study ancient notes and laundry lists, hoping to discern deeper meanings. Mutants, the result of nuclear fallout, wander between scattered settlements.



In "Fiat Lux," some technical progress has been made: an electrical generator provides light. There are political alliances; there is a break between church and state. In "Fiat Voluntas Tua," the nuclear threat has returned. A privileged group of monks prepares to depart on a spaceship heading off-planet to the New Rome colony, hoping to ensure the survival of humankind and the preservation of history should the planet be destroyed. The overall pattern mirrors that of the rise and fall of individual civilizations, but on a global scale: We begin in simplicity and develop in increasingly sophisticated ways, but everything leads inevitably to destruction. I will continue to scan my dusty shelves for other predictive works and thus ready myself for the looming catastrophe. If I'm spared, I'll read Ian McEwan's *What We Can Know*, to be published this September. The publisher calls it "genre-bending." Apparently, a mystery is added to the story of a nuclear accident. The book reportedly begins with the reading of a poem titled "A Corona for Vivien." I find this echo of Miller's title pleasing.
—*Angela Runnals*

FOUND IN TRANSLATION

I was pondering AI prospects to aid in literary translation and stumbled upon Eliot Weinberger's very short provocation on the difficulties of moving from one language to another, **19 Ways of Looking at Wang Wei** (New Directions). Wang Wei (699–761) was "known in his lifetime as a wealthy Buddhist painter and calligrapher, and to later generations, a master poet in an age of masters, the Tang Dynasty." About four hundred of his poems have survived. Wang Wei's most famous poem is a four-line effort, the title of which is most often rendered as "The Deer Park" (or "Enclosure" or "Fence"). It is first

presented to the reader in the original Chinese:

鹿柴

空山不見人,
但聞人語響.
返景入深林,
復照青苔上

To give you a sense of the poem in English, here is one translation by Soame Jenyns, published in 1944, which Weinberger describes as "dull, but fairly direct." "*The Deer Park* // An empty hill, and no one in sight / But I hear the echo of voices. / The slanting sun at evening penetrates the deep woods / And shines reflected on the blue lichens." Weinberger examines nineteen different translations of Wang Wei's poem (and, in postscripts to the original text, another eighteen versions). The first is from 1919, by W.J.B. Fletcher; the most recent is J.P. Seaton's 2006 re-translation. For each, Weinberger offers a brief and often stinging critique ("a classic example of the translator attempting to 'improve' the original"; "for a jolt to the system, try reading this aloud"; "this sounds like Gerard Manley Hopkins on LSD.") As you proceed through the variations, you become aware that this is only in part a book about a single Chinese poet and a single Chinese poem. It is more an exploration of the challenges of translation—the brevity of this single poem only magnifies the challenge. Among Weinberger's sharp observations on the task—and the art—of translation: "In its way a spiritual exercise, translation is dependent on the dissolution of the translator's ego: an absolute humility toward the text"; "Translation is always dependent on the smallest words"; and "With its infinite number of possible combinations, a translation is never finished."
—Thad McIlroy

MONTRÉAL MOMENTS

In an effort to support Canadian content, my spouse and I cancelled our streaming services and started borrowing movies from the local library. Because we still have a DVD player, I've been enjoying the easy vibes of the early aughts, browsing movies without fear of an algorithm pushing me into a Nordic noir vortex, and without the irritation of ads. That's how I ended up watching **Ville-Marie** (2015) by Québécois director Guy Édoin, a drama set in Montréal, with Pascale Bussières, Monica Bellucci and Aliocha Schneider. The story opens with Schneider's character, Thomas, witnessing a suicide while waiting for the bus. Instead of picking up his mother, a French actor, at the airport, he spends the evening holding the dead woman's baby. This sets off a series of events connecting Thomas's fate to that of the paramedic, the emergency nurse, and to the film his mother is shooting, which turns out to be a meta-drama detailing the mystery of his paternity. The premise and some of the shots are positively Almodóvarian (think *All About My Mother*) but with little of Almodóvar's humour or flair. Even though the actors give poignant performances, the characters don't fully develop to their potential. I would argue that Montréal is the strongest character in this movie. The title, *Ville-Marie*, refers to the downtown borough where most of the drama takes place, and it's apt because the Montréal snapshots, like an ambulance being blocked by construction cones, are the parts that really shine.
—Cornelia Mars

FOUND IN A LITTLE FREE LIBRARY: TEXAS TROUBLE

I always check out the Little Free Libraries, those bookshelves-on-a-post which offer books on a "take one, leave one" basis. My latest find was **A Heap of Texas Trouble** (Sourcebooks) by Carolyn Brown. Now, I *try* to stay up to date on the latest literary trends, so how on earth could I have overlooked Ms. Brown's entire oeuvre? She's been *incredibly* industrious—there's her Spikes & Spurs series: *Love Drunk Cowboy*; *Just a Cowboy and His Baby*; *Red's Hot Cowboy*; *Cowboy Seeks Bride*, etc., etc. Plus, her Honky Tonk series: *I Love This Bar*; *Hell, Yeah*; *My Give a Damn's Busted*, etc. Judging by the cover blurbs, I've missed out on a Texas-sized amount of fun ("Fun, fun, and more fun"—RT Book Reviews), as well as a good dose of sass ("Humorous, heartwarming, and full of sass and spunk"—RT Book Reviews again). *A Heap of Texas Trouble* tells of Carlene Lovelle's attempt to get revenge on her "no-good, deadbeat, cheatin' ass, soon-to-be-ex-husband," by besting him in the annual chili cook-off. Carlene assembles her gal pals into a vengeance-seeking, chili-making supergroup, the Red-Hot Bloomers, and man, do they work well together: "Carlene pulled the tab on a can of beer and slowly poured it into the chili, stirring the whole time. Gigi put in a half a cup of Worcestershire sauce and four tablespoons of liquid smoke. Tansy added two cans of chili beans

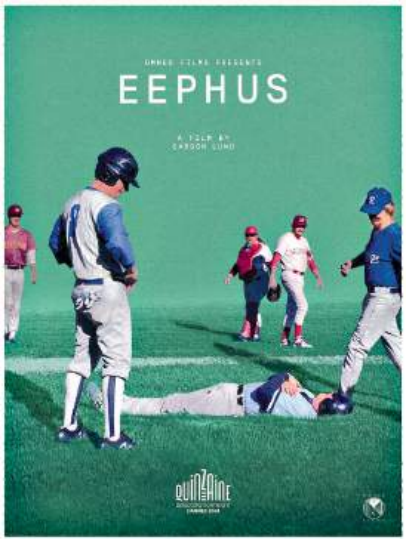
and Patrice donated eight ounces of chopped jalapeño peppers. Alma Grace spooned six teaspoons each of chili powder and Cajun seasoning. Josie opened up a gallon bag of cooked hamburger meat and dumped it in the pot." Would it shock you to learn that the Red-Hot Bloomers' chili recipe proves to be the winner? I thought not. Back in the Little Free Library this will go.
—Lascia Tagen

FOLLOW THE SIGNS

The **2025 BMO Marathon** drew a record 25,000 runners to Vancouver, a huge increase from its inaugural 1972 race with 46 runners. I recently turned forty, which seemed like a good age to run a half marathon: mid-life, mid-distance. The day was all sunshine and baby blue as I waited with the throng of runners on Midlothian Avenue across from Queen Elizabeth Park. Then the start horn blasted and I schlepped across 29th Avenue and down Cambie. Even at 7 a.m., pockets of supporters were out, coffee in one hand, ringing a bell with the other. Near the Park Theatre, a spectator waved a sign: "All this for a free banana." I smirked. At kilometre five, my muscles uncoiled and some kick entered my legs. In front of Science World, another spectator, another sign: "If Justin can keep running, so can you." Not the best timing. By kilometre seven I was grooving, sheened with sweat. A sign bopped near Chinatown's Millennium Gate: "You could've chosen therapy." I nodded; couldn't we all. I downed an energy gel at Sunset Beach (kilometre ten), snatched a cup of water from a volunteer, and peeped another sign: "Due to inflation this race will now be 25.5 kilometres." Nailed it! Along Beach Avenue, I sped up, trying to run the back half faster, or, in running lingo, achieve a negative split. A runner in neon orange beside me pointed to a piece of cardboard pasted with an image of Miss Casey from the TV show *Severance*, a speech bubble floating from her mouth: "Please try to enjoy each kilometre equally." Many laughed; I laughed; someone screamed (spoiler alert), "Justice for Gemma!" At Lost Lagoon—kilometre fourteen and a half—my legs became sloths. Around me, runners were dragging. They snacked, they hydrated, they huffed. I was moved by the collective spirit as we reached our bodies' limits together, then read, "You're 69% done. Nice!" Juvenile, yes; mathematically accurate, also yes. At kilometre seventeen—"Keep chafing your dreams"—I pumped my arms. Who doesn't like a pun? I crossed the finish line, legs obliterated. Negative split obtained. I received my medal and saw the final—and least humorous but unequivocally best—sign: "Aid Station." I hobbled over, and a lovely volunteer said, "Good job!" and handed me a banana. I unpeeled it and chomped. So soft. So sweet. So worth it. *—Paul Dhillon*

OF TIME AND BASEBALL

In Carson Lund's first feature film, time slips out of its ordinary progression and holds the audience for the length of a baseball game, a town's past, and the hour-and-forty-minute run time of **Eephus** (2024). The film's structure follows the decline of daylight during the last rec game played on a baseball diamond scheduled for demolition, traversing themes of history, nostalgia, and fragile, masculine friendships held together by circumstance. The players persist in finishing this final game, despite baseball's capacity to extend endlessly, inning after inning. When night arrives, the players use car headlights for illumination, creating sharp outlines and smooth patches of darkness on the screen. Though this movie is most easily viewed as unhurried realism, I was captivated by the moments when reality and temporality shift



slightly, asking us to consider baseball as a means of interrogating time. This shift is most visible in a sequence where one player explains the titular eephus pitch, in which the ball appears to move sluggishly and eternally. The film departs from its own linear narrative to show the slow pitch arcing in evening light—the anticipated darkness already surrounding the ghostly ball, which occupies a future and the present. Other moments fray reality, too: A ball hit straight up appears to vanish permanently into the grey sky at dusk. In *Eephus*, the baseball field becomes a gently magical place, a fairyland where you might find, when you finally return home, that a hundred years has passed.

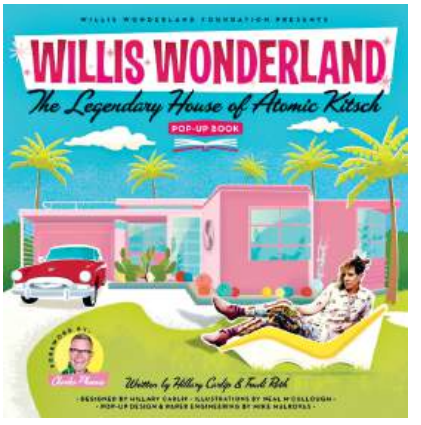
—Morgan Maclaren Beck

BETWEEN WILD WALLS

You will find Emmanuel Osahor's exhibit **Sylvia's Garden, Version II** tucked into a narrow hall at Toronto's Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery. A floor-to-ceiling photographic wallpaper mural, *Sylvia's Garden* was created in conjunction with the gallery's primary draw: Osahor's installation *To dream of other places*. The latter is beautiful and stark, a reminder of artist and critic Hito Steyerl's exposition of "museum as factory," apparent in the installation's rusted steel I-beams displayed against the backdrop of a lush night garden. But that's not why we're here, is it? *Sylvia's Garden* is almost a response to *To dream of other places*; where *To dream* places the gallery's origins as a power plant within a facsimile of natural space, walking through *Sylvia's Garden* you are overwhelmed by giant grasses and flowers wilding the walls with vibrant immersion. Is this not what it means to be in a garden? Plants tower over you, a corridor of green before the light; sunlight filters through the skylights as if it could pierce the image. I remember being a child in wild spaces such as this, craning my head up and up to see what was above me. There was so much to explore, and the idea that the world could be bounded felt completely foreign. The expansive feeling evoked by Osahor's wall mural is in opposition to the claustrophobia of the long narrow hallway in which it had been placed. From the exhibition hall, I watched as teenagers on a school trip filmed videos of each other, while sharply dressed visitors strode straight through to the end of the hall and out the doors, ignoring both the exhibit and the sign that said EMERGENCY EXIT ONLY. What else has the power to captivate some, yet be trampled through by others? Oh yeah: a garden. *—Malaika Mitra*

ALLEE WILLIS AND THE BREAKFAST CLUB

The Los Angeles Breakfast Club was started one hundred years ago by a group of businessmen who wanted to ride their horses early in the morning and then eat breakfast. Soon they were getting together to ride in Griffith Park, and then eat breakfast at an old chuck wagon rigged up to accommodate the frying of what became their signature dish, ham and eggs. The Club still meets every Wednesday morning, but now there are no live horses involved and the club assembles in the Friendship Auditorium, a large hall with a stage, an industrial kitchen, ample washroom facilities, and a big parking lot. At 7 a.m. on a recent Wednesday, my daughter and I were welcomed as guests by friendly people who wore nametag pendants around their necks. The buffet breakfast was so-so, but ham and eggs were present both on our plates and in the entertainment that followed. After some opening remarks, the piano player onstage played a chord, we all sang along to "America the Beautiful," "Ham and Eggs" (for which a large screen on the stage displayed a faded black-and-white image of a *Looney Tunes*-style rooster pointing a conductor's baton at the lyrics), "Home on the Range" and finally, "Sea, Sea, Sea" (for which we all held hands and swayed about). The piano player accompanied us when we stood, while a long-time member led us in some YMCA-like calisthenics. Next, two new members were initiated in a ceremony that included a blindfold, a brightly-painted sawhorse, a runny egg, and the recitation of a personalized oath. For the final participatory event, we formed a line (called the Grand Salute Procession) and filed past the head table to greet and shake hands with each of the club's friendly board members. On this Wednesday, Hillary Carlip, one of the featured guests, launched her book **Willis Wonderland: The Legendary House of Atomic Kitsch**, a pop-up book that shows each room in the house of her



late friend, Allee Willis, who, in 1980, purchased a bright pink Streamline Moderne house in North Hollywood, filled it with mid-century modern furniture and one of the world's largest collections of kitsch, and threw the best parties. Carlip filled us in on the life and times of the "Queen of Kitsch" and showed slides on how to put together a pop-up book. The second featured guest was the gregarious Charles Phoenix, another of Willis's close friends, who narrated a slideshow of all the rooms in Willis's house and every piece of art in these rooms. After the applause, and worn out from having fun, we left the ultra-bright colours of the Willis house for the ultra-bright sunlight of an LA morning, where it was only 9 a.m. —*Patty Osborne*

A RITUAL REMEMBERING

Solange Knowles's **When I Get Home** (Columbia) is not just an album, it's more dreamlike collage, floating through consciousness like a ritual remembering. Paying homage to Knowles's upbringing in Houston, Texas, *When I Get Home* is an elusive, defiantly unhurried and unapologetically abstract meditation on Black womanhood, Southern culture and the meaning of home. Listening, you drift through spoken-word interludes, minimalistic R&B loops, ambient textures and chopped-and-screwed ornamentations. Songs like "Stay Flo," "Sound of Rain," "Jerrod" and "Binz" fold everyday moments into sonic reflections on memory, rootedness and ancestral knowledge. Instead of building toward conventional climaxes or relying on catchy hooks, the album leans into atmosphere and fragmentation. On the surface, it doesn't seem to follow a narrative (though I'd argue there are undercurrents of one) and is contained within Knowles's conception of an Afrofuturistic world. Listeners hoping for a straightforward follow-up to her third album, *A Seat at the Table*, might feel frustrated; *When I Get Home* is not about catharsis or resolution. It operates in subtler, slower frequencies where music functions less as performance and more as space-making; it's an exercise in self-definition, ancestral return and spiritual grounding. The album resists explanation, and is better *experienced*: felt, lived with, or returned to when words don't quite suffice. The resonances linger long afterwards—the line "My skin, my logo" reverberates throughout with a quiet confidence. This is an album to be absorbed rather than merely consumed. *When I Get Home* is one of the most intimate, formally daring portraits of contemporary Black interiority in recent memory. Since its release six years ago, I've returned to the album countless times. Each time feels slightly different, like memory itself: familiar, yet always shifting.
—*Ranveer Joshua Jadhav*

KNITTING REBELLION

Elizabeth Zimmermann (1910–1999) was an American knitting designer and educator who revolutionized modern knitting by encouraging knitters to think for themselves, adjust patterns to fit their own bodies, design their own knitwear, and improvise whenever they felt like it. I first learned about Elizabeth Zimmermann (fondly known as "EZ") from the knitting podcast **Yarns at Yin Hoo**, in a series of eight interviews with Dr. Lilly Marsh, whose doctoral thesis, *Knitting Rebellion: Elizabeth Zimmermann, identity, and craftsmanship in post war America* dives deep into the life and times of EZ and her influence on the knitting world. The enthusiasm that both Sara, the host, and Dr. Lilly have for the often-irreverent EZ made me laugh out loud. In the 1940s, when Zimmermann began her knitting revolution, knitting patterns were published solely to sell yarn, and knitters were

expected to use the specified needles and yarn and to knit patterns exactly as written. EZ railed against these constraints, instead creating sweaters and other custom-designed knitwear using her own patterns. She won all the awards at the county fair and many of her designs were published in popular women's magazines (usually without accreditation). Wanting more control over her work, she began importing and selling wool yarns by mail order; later, she started her own newsletter. These days, thanks in part to EZ, an experienced knitter will take one look at a pattern and immediately begin planning yarn substitutions and design changes that will result in a finished object (known as an FO) that suits their needs. As a new fan of EZ, it's no wonder I got excited when recently, in a store that sells recycled craft supplies, I came across four of her knitting books: *Knitting Without Tears* (1971), *Elizabeth Zimmermann's Knitting Workshop* (1981), *Knitting Around* (1989)—all of which include instructions, patterns and hand-drawn illustrations—and *The Opinionated Knitter* (2005), a collection of her handwritten newsletters. Of course, I bought them all.
—*Patty Osborne*

CIRCULAR LANDSCAPES

Nothing Will Be Different (Dundurn Press) by Tara McGowan-Ross is a funny and poignant memoir about young adulthood, compulsion and grief. The story is told in a loop, beginning and closing with a moment in the recent past, right before the pandemic, when McGowan-Ross discovers a lump in her breast. The narrator rewinds, covering the young narrator's late teens and twenties, intermittently punching through with flashbacks to childhood, the loss of her mother to cancer, and occasional meditations on history and economics. The circular narrative cleverly underscores the sentiment of the title, but also the confusion of youth and mental health disorder. From a punk squat in Halifax to the mosquito-infested woods of Northern BC, McGowan-Ross traces her peaks and valleys across the map. The lyrical depictions of the Canadian landscape quickly became one of my favourite parts about this memoir, and like any good road trip, it comes with a great soundtrack (each chapter heading is a song title). Alongside the humour, wit and poetry, however, is real pathos. Reading this book made me reflect on how progress is hard to come by, even amid constant change.
—*Cornelia Mars*

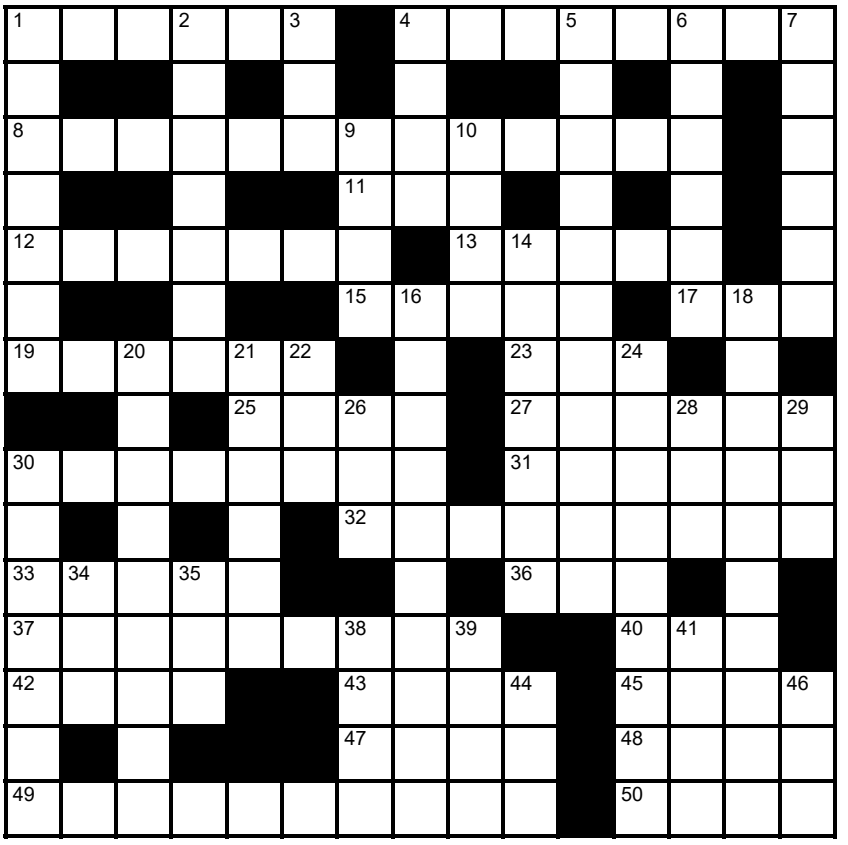
The GEIST Cryptic Crossword

Prepared by Meandricus

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

Puzzle #130 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 There seems to be an infinite number of your ex's in that group
4 I'm confused, will the prize be warmed at 1? (2)
8 My duty provost should be able to sort out that chaotic state
11 Peg started the game with a kickoff
12 It's too bad you're looking at me that way (2)
13 Did that publisher claw their way into being?
15 The Americans say that the upstairs of my house has a spelling error
17 That imitator is a real card (abbrev)
19 All those affirmations make my nose run
23 I wonder if admiration is too often exaggerated for some
25 Sweet! Let's obsess on my favourite hobby
27 Look at their faces! Can't you see that they're married?
30 That froggy high-tailed it off to go a-courtin' (2)
31 She says she's ready, but where are her ducks? (3)
32 When the bats clack, stay off their path (2)
33 He was such a brat in Morocco!
36 We had the best rhythm in Moncton and in Puerto Rico (abbrev)
37 In the mall, my wok turned out to be a real albatross
40 The chairman was not a great long-jumper
42 In the desert, one girl loved his headband
43 Down in the valleys I wore a sari and almost drowned
45 Please help me draw this circuit! (abbrev)
47 I'm keen on entering
48 At yoga it's either one or the other
49 When the cat stops sleeping, she'll see that gull
50 When it comes in he'll stay afloat

DOWN

1 Was Shirley stoned when she wrote that story?
2 Don't dis me with those
3 In Cornerbrook it is not the normal hour for summer
4 What a muck up!
5 To play this little game you need to close your eye and flip
6 Were they the key to those French books?
7 They agreed to make a beaded belt
9 Can you pick up my vehicles in Melbourne?
10 Don't vote to block Bill
14 Can the CIA bar that shrub or are they just full of beans?
16 At 5 I'll play with just one disk
18 When she presents, she needs help because she's as dumb as a piece of wood (2)
20 Homer sang that explosive song all alone (2)
21 Netty, I keep telling you I'm my own person!
22 It's best to start the car when you find that the traffic is free (abbrev)
24 Do you remember when a cent meant what it was portrayed as?
26 To start with, Miriam's teacher loved the beats but the lyrics made him sad. (abbrev)
28 When our fingers explore our connection, it's rad! (abbrev)
29 I love snoozing to the sound of the ocean (abbrev)
30 Did you catch that guy who covered his face when he drank? (2)
34 Oh my gosh, here comes the gang! (abbrev)
35 Sounds like that hole punch is the total package
38 When I gave Ira a cue, he sang
39 I wish she'd kissed me in the Yukon!
41 Who gave the CIA that superfood?
44 Help! I can't tell the dots from the dashes
46 Hey mister! Why must you always stand up?

Solution to Puzzle 129

There was no winner for 129. Honourable mention to Jim Lowe and Brian Goth. (Total: 56/57, 98%)

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

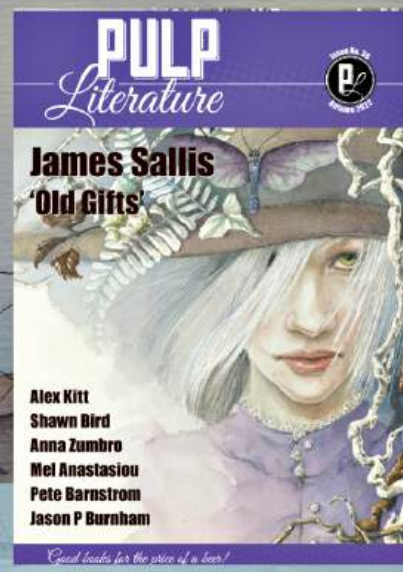
Deadline: 30 September
Prize: $300

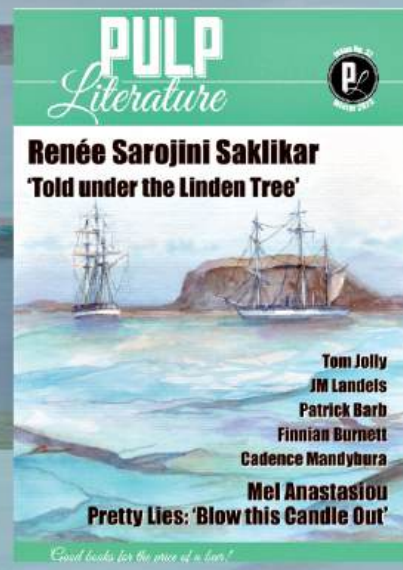
The Raven Short Story Contest

Deadline: 15 October
Prize: $300

The Kingfisher Poetry Prize

Deadline: 15 November
Prize: $300





pulpliterature.com/contests