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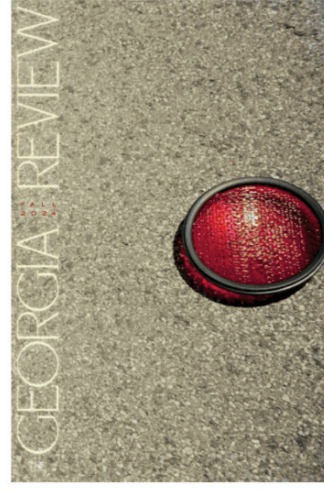
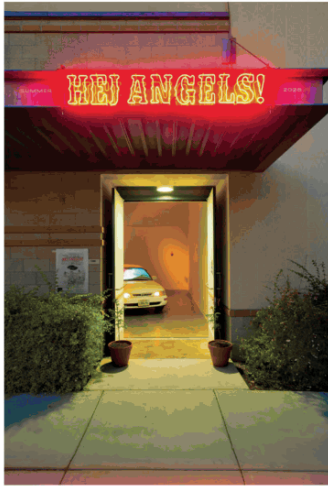
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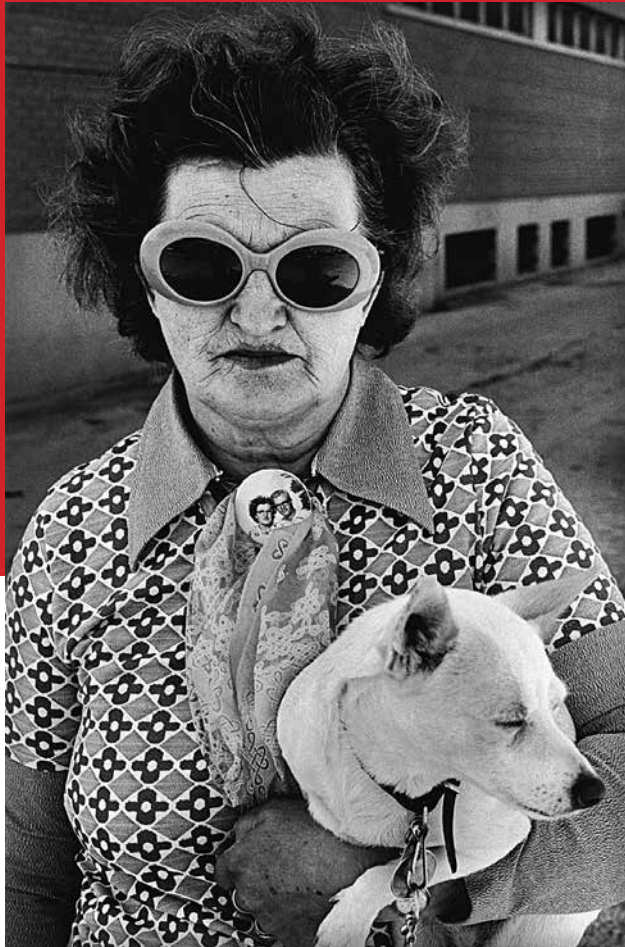
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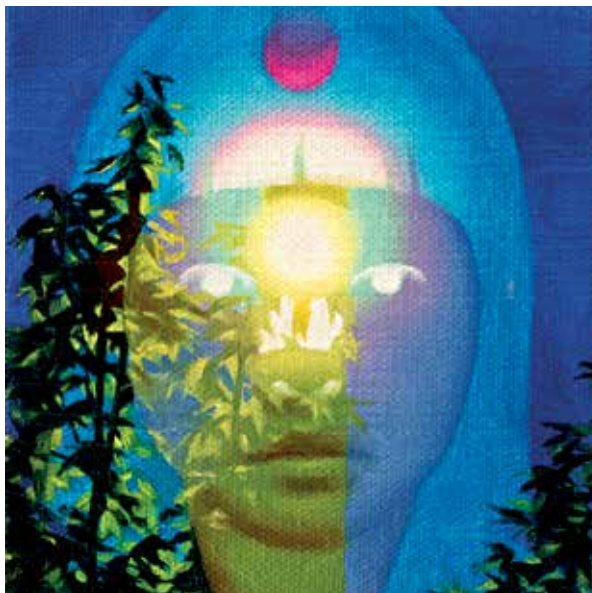
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COVER: *Cornucopia no.2, 2023*, woven collage by Rachelle Wunderink. Wunderink's series, "When Men Were Men and Women Were Rugs," examines her own experience of matrescence, and the loss of self that often accompanies mothering. Wunderink created hundreds of woven collages in her early years of mothering, which gave her a playful way of grappling with the sense that everything in her life had become permeable and unstable, while her cis-male partner's daily routine remained largely the same. The collages illustrate her experience of disappearance: women become hybrid furniture-object-doormats, poised within the collages, coiffed, at attention, yet woven into their surroundings.

GEIST

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MISCELLANY



Not one, but two issues of Geist—130 and 131—getting some primo real estate on Gabriola Island, BC. Anson Ching, Geist board member and occasional correspondent, came across this literary display at The Loose Leaf Tea and Papery, a post office and shop selling tea, cards, stationery and art. Thanks, Anson!

BETTER CHURCHES, KINDER PEOPLE

As a new subscriber, I've enjoyed reading through the website as I look forward to receiving issue 132. The feature essay, "The Dead Viking My Birthmother Gave Me" by Jerome Stueart (No. 126), really connected with me. Now in university with some modicum of freedom, I'm just discovering "better churches, kinder people, more affirming friends," as he puts it. If you have more essays that stand at the intersection of queerness and spirituality I'd love to know. I wish I had gotten to read stuff like this growing up. If it weren't for my creative writing classes and magazines like yours, I would have missed out on the works of so many interesting people. May your grants grow, expenses decrease, and both sides of your pillow be cold.

—Jed

Thank you, Jed! We share your sentiments. May we suggest the short story, "Rejoice in His Name" by Finnian Burnett, and the poetry feature, "Someone Else's Lavish Cake" by Misha Solomon, both published in No. 129.

—The Editors

EDITED FOR LENGTH & CLARITY

Last January, we reached out to the community with a few questions about their relationship to Geist, including a couple of our board members. We shared their responses during our fundraising campaign. As often is the case for writing we love, it must be edited for length and clarity. Gold hit the cutting room floor, so we want to share some of those nuggets here.

—The Editors

My favourite section in the magazine is Notes & Dispatches, because not only does it embody Geist's ethos but it offers refreshing testaments to what storytelling is all about. Getting published in that section is a great way for new and seasoned writers alike to test the most basic skill of their craft: how to tell your story well. That is, how to string words together to communicate or recount something that happened to you.

I think Walter Benjamin's ideas on storytelling are as relevant today as they were in the last century. I hope Geist will play a big role in reminding us of the relevance of creative non-fiction in the context

of headline onslaughts and hallucinatory (AI) fact overload. *Geist* is about facts just as much as it is about fiction, yes, but the creative non-fiction we're interested in is not the same as the ingestion of processed, sugary facts. I want *Geist* to be stubbornly unswipeable, to keep providing slow, deliberate consumption of facts through storytelling.

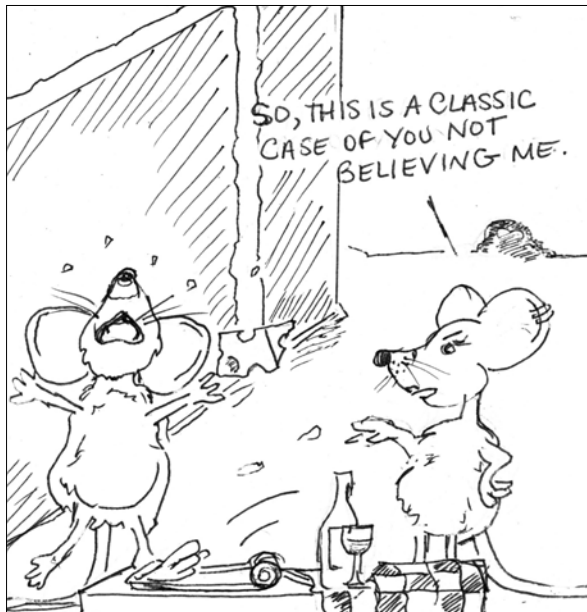
—Anson Ching, Secretary,
Geist Board of Directors

The same advice that [*Geist* co-founder] Stephen Osborne gave me in 2012 I'm now giving to young writers who ask me how they can be a better writer. The advice was, generally: Write economically; use powerful verbs and you won't have to use as many of them; get your point across as simply as possible.

—Roni Simunovic, President,
Geist Board of Directors

OVERHEARD

Send us the best one-liners you've overheard—on the bus, in line for ice cream, at the art gallery—and you might see them in our next issue. Find out more at geist.com/overheard.



Comic by Denise Da Costa. Overheard in the Temple Bar District, Dublin, Ireland, in June 2026. Find more of Denise's work in *Geist* 130, or online at denisedacostaauthor.com.

WRITE TO GEIST

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

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Jan Michalsk

Sonny Assu is an interdisciplinary artist whose diverse practice is informed by Kwakwaka'wakw and Western principles of art making. His work has been accepted into the National Gallery of Canada, the Vancouver Art Gallery and other public and private collections across Canada, the United States, the UK and Australia.

Daria Beer is a collage artist originally from Poland, now based in Toronto, ON. She completed her art education at the Ontario College of Art & Design. Her intuitive mixed-media collages explore memory, history and identity by blending vintage imagery with contemporary elements. Inspired by travel, surrealism and nature, Beer's work celebrates the strength, resilience and beauty of women.

Apoorva Bisht is a textile artist based in New Delhi, India. She has a keen interest in illustrations and is currently exploring illustrations through hand embroidery. You can find more of her work on Instagram @apoorvabisht.

Hayley Chiu searches for "home" through fables and fantasy, using surreal depictions of the body and its environments to explore feelings of in-betweenness and desire. Expressed from the culture she was never fully a part of, her paintings are not representations of reality but of the mythologies we create to find charm in mundanity. Find her work at hayley-chiu.format.com, or @hay.chiu on Instagram.

Laurent Gascon is a Montréal artist, mosaicist and muralist whose large-scale public artworks celebrate Québec's cultural heritage. Since co-founding the mural collective l'Escouade de la Muralité in 1971, he has remained committed to bringing art to the street, while developing a distinctive ceramic mosaic practice. In collaboration with the Société pour Promouvoir les Arts Gigantesques, Gascon has created a series of ceramic mosaic murals that honour cultural figures who have shaped the identity of Québec.

Eiblin Koch is a collage artist and printmaker living and working in Unama'ki (Cape Breton Island, NS) where she runs a small studio shop/gallery with her mother. You can find her at eiblinkoch.com.

Ishiuchi Miyako was born in Gunma Prefecture, Japan, and grew up in the city of Yokosuka in Kanagawa Prefecture. She represented Japan at the Venice Biennale in 2005 with her series *Mother's*, for which she photographed items inherited from her late mother. In 2007, Ishiuchi began photographing belongings of atom bomb victims for her internationally renowned series ひろしま/*hiroshima*. In 2014, she received the Hasselblad Award.

Angela Schmold, or Schmold-faced Lies, is a traditional, stylized 2D illustrator living in New Westminster, BC. She loves to ideate and connect in the company of her cockatiel. A miscellany of found and unfounded things bridge thoughts during her daily dilly-dallying. Her comics are detailed with coincidence and the consecutive consequences of wandering attention. Find her at angelaschmold.com.

Trevor Sloan is an analog collage artist from Toronto, ON, whose work has appeared in *Contemporary Collage Magazine*, *Collé*, *The Weird Show* and elsewhere. Using vintage magazines and books, Sloan explores a balance between natural and abstract elements, creating pieces he sees as magical paths, revealing mysterious symbols and fragmented memories. Find him @trevorjsloan on Instagram.

Rachelle Wunderink is a queer settler artist based on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples of Onguiaahra (Niagara Falls, ON). She holds a Master of Fine Arts from York University, where she was awarded the Joseph Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship (SSHRC) in support of her thesis exhibition.

How to Befriend Grief

JILL BOETTGER

A shape, a smell, the curl of her hair



After my daughter moves away to attend university in another city I call a friend and tell her she's gone. My friend says, "I'm so happy for her, and I'm so sorry for you. When my daughter moved away I looked for a word to describe the

kind of crying I was doing—ferocious, relentless. I discovered it's called 'keening.'"

Crying? I think. *I'm not crying.* But the next day a torrent of tears comes and is joined by a wail, a sound that courses through my body with the

weight and velocity of a train, a sound I've never made before, a new sound for a new pain. Now I understand the need for a new word, and my friend has given me a place to start.

Keening, I learn, is a Gaelic tradition, a vocal lamentation performed by women at a wake or graveside. From *The Keening Wake*, an online research project associated with the School of Scottish Studies, I read: "Keens are said to have contained raw unearthly emotion, spontaneous words, repeated motifs, crying and elements of song."

Crying, chanting, wailing, moaning: women would deliver the deceased into the afterlife, channelling the collective grief of a community and expressing it audibly. Professional keeners were often elder women, paid to perform this service for the families of loved ones who'd departed. They were respected members of their community.

I read this and wonder if it's a word I can use. I grapple with two facts. One: My daughter didn't die. I am not delivering her to the afterlife, but to the beginning of her adult life. Two: Keeners channel the emotional current of a whole community. No wonder they were respected, to weather such a force. But I feel no *self respect* in this grieving. In fact, I am deeply embarrassed. My daughter left to pursue an independent life. This is the very thing I've been working toward for eighteen years, this launching of a capable human into the world. By all accounts, it means I have realized my greatest hope: her capacity to care for herself. My pain feels misplaced, selfish.

I try not to
pay too much
attention to the pain.
I accept it
like a stranger or
an unwanted house
guest. I look it in the
eye but don't feed it.
Knot in shoulder,
clenched teeth, a thumb
sliced while chopping lettuce.
I accumulate wreckage
in my body. It forms
a familiar path, a well
worn track. It settles in
the grooves and tricks
me into mistaking
it for myself.

I start wearing her T-shirts to bed. It helps. Like a skin she's shed, I put them on and imagine her closeness. Do you think I'm crazy? A woman who has revolved her identity around her child and now, in the grown child's absence, is a shell of herself, leftover, discarded, without substance? (Am I talking to myself?)

This feeling is layered. First, there is the pain of her absence. Then, the shame of the pain of her absence. Underneath, a chasm. Or the appearance of a chasm. It is dark and unknown. Last night, while I was reading *The Dispossessed*, Ursula K. Le Guin told me to "make a friendship with water, darkness and earth." How to befriend something that terrifies you?

Last summer I walked onto a bridge with my son, climbed over the rail, hung on, leaned forward and looked into the dark water below. We counted down from three. On *one* he jumped and I tightened my grip on the railing, watched him fall. He came up splashing and laughing and looking up at me. "What happened? Mom! Why didn't you jump?" He climbed back up and met me, dripping, on the bridge. I said I would do it this time, I would jump, and I did. We fell through the air together, and just when I thought I would slip out of

my body and become a bird or a fish and my woman-shape would sink like a rock, we hit the water and I returned to my body, buoyant and nauseous.

I hate that feeling: my body separating from my psyche. This has been the experience of my daughter's absence: I know that she is away, that she is well, thriving even, I understand. But my body only senses her absence. Something is not there that has always been there. A shape, a smell, the curl of her hair, gone.

Your body is grieving her as though she's dead," the counsellor says. "Don't deny yourself the physical reassurance that she is still alive. Spend time in her room, set her a place at the table, carry out the gestures you would if she were here, if only to communicate to your nervous system that *she* is *still here*. Alive."

I do this. I buy her favourite foods at the grocery store. I read in her bed. I fill her favourite yellow glass with water and place it on the kitchen counter. I set the table for four. This last one requires some explaining to my husband and my son. "You know she's not *here*," my son says, cautiously. "Yes, yes, I know," I reassure him. "It's just that my nervous system thinks she's gone for good, and I'm sending it a different message." He nods thoughtfully. "And you know she isn't *dead*," he says, meeting my eyes. "Yes. I know."

At night I admit to my husband the depth of the loss I feel, and also my bafflement at the depth of the loss I feel. I tell him what my friend said, I tell him about *keening*, and he nods, knowingly. "When I worked on a ranch," he says, "and the cowboys separated the cows from their calves, they would wail all night. The cowboys called it keening, too." Rather than being insulted by this comparison to a cow, I feel deeply reassured. The cows lament the separation from their calves. I am an animal, I

have been separated from my child, and this lamentation is a perfectly normal animal response. I wipe away my tears.

The word *keening* describes an expression of loss. It is a portal through pain. It is a clear pool of water. In it I can see my reflection and, at the same time, see all the way through to the bottom, perceive its third, its fourth dimension, feel the roundness of the water holding me, open my eyes. I'm submerged and little living things are swimming everywhere. How does language do this? It lifts us out of the impression our pain is our own. To name something is to see it within a tradition, and to be part of a tradition is to be relieved of the full weight of the suffering. The word disperses the weight. It's carried by many.

Last summer my daughter and I drove out to the West Coast to visit the university she now attends. We stayed in a hotel across from the ocean. To reach the beach we had to climb through blackberry bushes and cross train tracks. The brambles snag everything they touch, hold you back until you gingerly release their sharp fingers from your clothing, mash giant sweet oozing berries into your mouth and suck tracks of blood from your exposed skin. Climb over the creosote-soaked railroad ties and down a berm of jagged rocks that give way to beach stones covered in barnacles and soggy strands of kelp, pick and slip through the muck to get to sand, take off your shoes, the sand is cold and wet and black and solid underfoot, the tide is out, you pad past baby crabs, sand dollars and plastic pails, tide pools and seagulls, and into salt water that stings your scraped legs but it feels so good now to be submerged and you have to walk so far before the water reaches above your knees, your hips, finally you're swimming, and you don't feel pain,

your feet are floating, the water is heavy and holds you and washes away the black juice and the blood and it doesn't hurt anymore. It doesn't hurt.

Jill Boettger lives with her family in Calgary, AB, where she writes, knits, quilts, cooks, hikes, skis and dreams. She teaches in

the Department of English, Languages and Cultures at Mount Royal University. You can read more of her writing at Geist.com. The above quotation from Ursula K. Le Guin originally appeared in Le Guin's essay "Utopiyn, Utopiyang," and was reprinted in an introduction to the 50th anniversary edition of The Dispossessed.

A Return to Fanfreluche

DEBORAH OSTROVSKY

Playing a character that soothes the psychic injuries of childhood



Her name is Kim Yaroshevskaya. But if you live in Québec and were a French-speaking child born between 1960 and, say, last month, you know her—or might soon know her—as Fanfreluche, the *poupée vivante* (living doll) Yaroshevskaya created, scripted and acted on her Radio-Canada TV show of the same name. In each episode of *Fanfreluche*, Yaroshevskaya wears a crinoline dress, two red circles painted on her cheeks, and ringlets in her hair as she reads from a giant storybook, inserting herself into the plot whenever she becomes dissatisfied with the conventional fairy tale ending. She magically jumps through the book's pages,

entering scenes with the villains and protagonists, altering the storyline in favour of a more just outcome.

Reruns of all forty-six episodes of the show, which ended in 1971, were on Radio-Canada until the eighties and have been watched by generations of Québec children since. Teachers still sometimes use *Fanfreluche* in classrooms, which is why I've heard kids in my quartier singing the show's theme song while skipping along the sidewalk. Because I grew up in English Canada, I had no clue who Fanfreluche was until 2017, when she became a member of the *Compagne de l'Ordre des arts et des lettres du Québec*. It was then that

I recognized her as the actor who played the beloved grand-mère on Québec's legendary *Passe-Partout*, a show my generation watched as kids to learn French. When *Passe-Partout* began in 1977, Yaroshevskaya was in her mid-fifties, but her mien so youthful, her aura so pixie-like, that her shawl and grey-powdered wig only compounded the impression of a younger person trying to pass herself off as an older one.

Yaroshevskaya died at the age of 101 on January 12, 2025. Since her death I try to come here, to her mural on the corner of Wurtele and Ontario streets, whenever I can. Composed of ceramic mosaic tiles, it was created by the artist Laurent Gascon to celebrate Yaroshevskaya's hundredth birthday, and is situated between his murals of other Québec artists like Janette Bertrand and Renée Claude on adjacent streets. I visit this mosaic image of Yaroshevskaya in character to pay homage to an artist, an orphaned child, an immigrant who was briefly detained before entering Canada, an actor who became a household name in Québec and a *Commandeure*, the highest rank of L'Ordre de Montréal, two years before she died. Today, I stomp my rain boots to keep my toes warm and take a selfie with Fanfreluche, searching our faces for similarities. Reading about her life, I've sometimes wondered if we could be distantly related. Our noses are not the same; her almond-shaped eyes are like others in my family, but not mine. I'm paler, my hair a greying chestnut to her eternal dark brown. But on my paternal side there are two unrelated ancestors with the "Yar" root in their last name, married into the family. In her memoir, Yaroshevskaya includes a photo of her paternal grandmother who looks like she could be my great-grandmother's sister—at least the way she looks in the only photo I have. Their faces are severe, with laugh lines devoid of any laughter, aquiline noses, the same forehead and hairline.

It's possible, isn't it? I think to myself as I snap selfies with her. Fanfreluche, my great-great-aunt, or a second cousin twice or thrice removed. The chunky, ceramic tiles depicting her face are so vivid, a mosaic of shiny blue, white, yellow and red shards, her cheeks even rosier than they are on screen. It feels as though she might burst from this mural tucked behind the corner of Vitrerie Nationale glassworks, like a magical scene from her storybook, excited to tell me I'm right.

In one of my favourite *Fanfreluche* episodes, “Au pays de Cendrillon et ailleurs” (In the land of Cinderella and elsewhere), Fanfreluche looks directly at the camera and declares that the story is in “very bad shape.” Then she enters her giant book, arriving in a ballroom to warn Cinderella she must leave when the clock strikes midnight. Fanfreluche picks up Cinderella's slipper just as she drops it, trying to help her return home before the carriage turns into a pumpkin. Prince Charming scans the ballroom to see if she's left anything behind he can use as an excuse to see her again. He ends up on an Odyssean quest to reunite with Cinderella and gets lost on the streets of London—as does Fanfreluche, who runs after him to set him straight.

In Fanfreluche's version of the Québec and Acadian legend Rose Latulippe, a young Rose dances with the devil, disguised as a handsome stranger on Mardi Gras. Fanfreluche opens her storybook to find the Latulippe family inside, crying uncontrollably because Rose has fallen prey to the devil's charms. Fanfreluche jumps into her storybook and takes on the part of Rose. She, too, dances with Lucifer, but confronts him about his horns and rescues herself by midnight. It is the show's theme song playing softly in the distance that breaks the devil's spell. Fanfreluche returns to Rose's family—saving them, and us, from a much bleaker ending.

Ballad of the Green Beginning

DANIEL NAAWENKANGUA ABUKURI

In my cradle, soft harbour, milk-slick mist,
 I dreamt the sea was a green lung breathing.
 A city rose beside it, salt-veined & tender,
 a whisper that said, *begin again*. Ships slept
 beneath gull cries & oilskin dawn, where
 the first protest unfurled like a sail of pollen.
 I watched men fold hope into paper signs,
 watched women stitch oceans into their coats,
 their eyes bright as flares above the tide.
 They said, *call this peace a seed, call this anger bloom*.
 Somewhere, daffodils broke through rainlight,
 yellow mouths naming the wind home again.
 Each petal was a promise not to drown.
 And I, born of their salt & noise, carried the vow
 in my ribs like an oar. The whales hummed low
 in the bay, echoing the prayers of green things.
 When the storm came, it did not take us,
 only our stillness. And that too, we offered.

Daniel Naawenkangua Abukuri (he/him) is a Black poet from Ghana. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in North American Review, the Malahat Review, Chestnut Review, Colorado Review, Orion, and elsewhere. He won the 2025 African Writers Award (Poetry) and was runner-up for the 2026 Cambridge Poetry Prize.

Kim Yaroshevskaya was born in Moscow, USSR, in 1923 to an anarchist mother and a Trotskyist father. “Kim” (Ким), a name commonly given to boys during the era, was an acronym for the Young Communist International (Kommunisticheskiy Internatsional Molodyozhi), the youth wing of the Soviet Comintern. In her books and interviews, Yaroshevskaya explains that her parents refused to give her a poupée, a doll, for ideological reasons. Instead, they gave her a toy gun.

Yaroshevskaya's parents had briefly lived in the United States before her birth, where her father worked in a Pittsburgh steel mill and attended university, bypassing the Jewish quota in Russian schools. During a strike at the mill, her parents became committed

socialists, and her mother gave political speeches that resulted in her being sent to prison. Deportation from the US followed; the couple's return to Russia coincided with the advent of the revolution.

In her 1998 picture book *La Petite Kim*, Yaroshevskaya writes that her parents, enthralled by the promise of the new USSR, believed that giving a doll to their daughter would make her less courageous, less strong. In *La Petite Kim* she begs them for one, first cradling the toy gun, then a soup ladle she names Natasha, as makeshift dolls. On the book's final pages, she sits happily at a table clutching a real doll, framed by smiling parents who have finally conceded to her demand.

In real life, things ended, well, differently. In a 1994 television interview for Radio-Canada's *En toute liberté*, Yaroshevskaya shares that her mother died by suicide a month after giving her her first real doll, suffering from shock and disappointment that the political ideals she'd fought so hard for had turned into Stalin's reign of terror. Yaroshevskaya hedges as she attempts to answer the interviewer's requests for granular details about the deaths of her parents, and about the disillusionment they felt as communism turned into a nightmare. *Why is a television actor from a popular kids' show being asked to relive the suicide of her mother?* I ask myself as the interviewer presses her to continue.

While writing this essay, I found a description of the psychological landscape of the Soviet terror that, despite appearing in a work of fiction, shed light, for me, on what Yaroshevskaya's mother must have gone through. In his short story, "Elgena," Polish-born writer Henryk Grynberg describes the climate of antisemitism, paranoia and persecution that led even the most loyal communist party members to their deaths by suicide under Stalin:

First they sought out the cosmopolitans who were mainly to be found among the artists and writers—usually with Jewish surnames. And even if they had Russian ones, Jewish names were added in brackets. They were agents of enemy ideology, and if not agents, then carriers . . . Directors, professors, engineers were also removed . . . People cracked, especially if they had a slight faith in communism—leaders of industry, people from newspapers. Some, young mainly, took their own lives. That wasn't written about. A young engineer hanged himself in the stadium so that everybody would know. In January, we

heard that freight trains were standing ready, people bought suitcases and ropes.

Roundups, show trials, denunciations against intellectuals and party faithfuls. No doubt Yaroshevskaya's parents witnessed these or experienced them firsthand—it's impossible they were spared. My own great-grandfather's story is similarly vague but harrowing. A denunciation. Political suspicions. Dragged away from a train station. I've heard different versions. Then, the firing squad, an escape, dead not long after. I can only piece his fate together from reading around him—about other, more prominent people's lives. Suitcases and ropes. I'll probably never know, just as Yaroshevskaya never quite figured out why her mother changed her mind about the doll. Perhaps being fiercely committed to one ideology opens the door to changing your mind just as fiercely, when feeling sufficiently betrayed. "It was that sacred fire," Yaroshevskaya said in an interview with *Le Devoir* newspaper in 1998, "that moved them toward communism, but the leaders stole it, turning it into something odious. And as for me, I am merely the inheritor of that sacred fire."

My great-grandfather was anything but a revolutionary—apolitical from what I've gleaned. Far from the capital, he was most likely caught in the flames of other people's fires, from which only a few sentences survive about his ending.

The ending for Yaroshevskaya's father was a disappearance. In the *En toute liberté* interview, Yaroshevskaya recounts what she was told of his death: that he'd fallen out of a chaloupe (a small boat) that had capsized. He drowned while "en exile." The cause of death was never confirmed. But by the age of seven, Stalin had made Kim an orphan.

In Yaroshevskaya's memoir, *Mon voyage en Amérique*, she describes being sent to a dietski dom (an orphanage), then to live in Moscow with her paternal grandmother, a pogrom survivor from Ukraine (like my great-grandmother), who became ill with cancer. Somehow her grandmother was able to send word to relatives overseas that Kim needed to leave the USSR. In 1934, at the age of ten, Kim arrived in Québec via London with the help of family in New York, who paid for her exit visa, and from her Aunt Sonia, a doctor in Montréal, and Uncle Leon, who travelled to Moscow to get her. Uncle Leon accompanied Kim by train to Leningrad, blocking the windows of their compartment with suitcases so that Kim couldn't see the platform, where her grandmother had collapsed from the sight of her leaving. They took a ship to Liverpool, then on to London where Uncle Leon taught Kim to say *I am Russian and I don't speak English* and how to order *cold meat*. There she had several linguistic mishaps with other guests at their hotel before leaving on the *Laurentic* steamship for Canada.

In "Cendrillon," Fanfreluche stands on a London street corner with an umbrella in the pouring rain, asking passersby if they know where *prince charmant* is. A stranger tells Fanfreluche that she just bumped into him, and that the prince is very *sweet*. Fanfreluche doesn't understand the Brit's accent, and hears *Suisse*, Switzerland, instead. So she sets off for the Alps, and the story goes even further off course. Rewatching this episode makes me wonder if Yaroshevskaya viewed her life as going off course, in a new language, after London's *cold meat*.

When Kim first arrived in Montréal, French schools were still run by the Catholic Church and closed to non-Catholic immigrants, especially Jews—and the offspring of anarchists and Trotskyists even more so. She enrolled in an English school



instead, her education marked by a long absence after she developed tuberculosis at fifteen. After two years in a sanatorium, she briefly attended art school before taking dance classes with the choreographer Elizabeth Leese, a decision she initially kept from her family because of their concerns about her fragile health. She later became a dance teacher, joining L'Ordre du Bon Temps, a small folk troupe led by Guy Messier. There, she was introduced to acting and jeu théâtral, all the while improving her French—something she often wryly credited in interviews to having a francophone boyfriend.

The idea for *Fanfreluche*—a playful name meaning a trifle, or the frilly, flouncy bit of trim on a dress—was conjured up while dining with her fellow actors at a booth in a small restaurant on Saint Denis Street, not far from my apartment. “I put myself in the place of the child I once was. What character would I play on the stage? Suddenly, I knew. I wanted to see myself as a doll,” she writes in *Mon voyage en Amérique*. She would go on to act in plays by Chekhov and Beckett, first developing *Fanfreluche* for children’s theatre, then as an act on one of Radio-Canada’s early kids’ shows, *La boîte à surprise*. She would later appear in films by Léa Pool. But it is her own TV show for which she will stay firmly anchored in Québec’s cultural memory.

As I read more about her life beyond the screen, searching for clues that we are long lost relatives, I revisit old *Fanfreluche* episodes, seeing them in a whole new way. In “Le souhait de Noël” (A Christmas Wish), Fanfreluche goes gift shopping for the children on her list—a long scroll she rolls out in front of the camera. She visits the Shop of Fantastic Objects where a shopkeeper named Napoléon shows her a lamp that only lights up when you’re sad. Then he presents her with

strings of bells that ring, but only when you lie. Napoléon invites her for a cup of tea at a table under a portrait of his deceased maman, whose spirit, played by an actress, is trapped inside the gilded frame. Maman has strong opinions, her hands moving beyond the frame as she talks and gesticulates, complaining incessantly about how things should be done. Then, for three dollars, Fanfreluche purchases magical glass spheres that grant wishes, shattering once they’ve come true.

After watching this episode a dozen times, I’ve come to think of all this as a perfect metaphor for how art is made. Melancholy lighting the lamp of creative genius. The lively soundtrack of a ghostly mother, ideologically driven and speaking to you from beyond the grave, inserting herself in your script as you embody the doll she was once reluctant to give you. Bells that ring, but only when you lie. Or perhaps when you make-believe, playing a character who soothes the psychic injuries of childhood, helping generations of Québec children grow up happier in the knowledge that fairy tales can be changed by whom-ever holds the storybook.

And those shattering glass spheres—there’s always a cost to the survivor, isn’t there? A mother’s suicide. A father unjustly condemned, drowning after his chaloupe capsizes. A grandmother collapsing from heartbreak on the platform of a train station. Exile. *Cold meat*.

I’m still baffled by how the orphan immortalized in this mural, the daughter of an anarchist and a Trotskyist, barred from enrolling at French school, became a national treasure for generations of children in Catholic Québec. Brewing nationalism, social unrest, and calls for sovereignty were mounting outside the studio where she recorded tales of getting lost in London,

Baba Yaga, and the Fisherman and the Golden Fish for francophone toddlers. It’s funny, if not a miracle—the cost of which I try to calculate as I stare at the colourful mosaic tiles. Yaroshevskaya’s eyes, mouth, chin—I must be realistic now—are likely the features of a total stranger, no matter how much I want to convince myself this isn’t true. Nevertheless, watching *Fanfreluche* gives me a fleeting glimpse of a Québec childhood I never had. I can access a small but special part of the region’s cultural memory because of her, and therefore have a sense of belonging. At least she has offered me that fantasy—as lovely and improbable as me being her kin.

Perhaps I keep returning here because I want some of her *sacred fire*. Maybe I suspect that behind the public story of Yaroshevskaya’s family—the fragments of which I hold onto in the clumsy hope they could explain

something of my own—there are secrets, lacunae, more unbearable loss. Yet off she went with her ringlets, her flouncy dress, an expert at rewriting endings. It’s a life’s work: 101 years’ worth, to be precise.

I look up at Yaroshevskaya as she looks at a dove composed of white and blue tiles, her face slightly lifted toward the clouds. Since her death, friends of mine in their forties and fifties have told me that *Fanfreluche* injected a bit of magic into their childhoods. What it asked of her to play a once-forbidden childhood doll is difficult to fathom from down here on the sidewalk, on this side of the wall. But she transformed an object her parents feared would make her too soft into an artist, a rebel, a pint-sized heroine able to reinvent the narratives passed down to her. And the joy this gave everyone, which I must believe included Yaroshevskaya herself, is clear.



In the final scene of “Le souhait de Noël,” Fanfreluche and Napoléon the shopkeeper start singing together as they think of ways to use the last glass ball to grant one final wish: that everyone, everywhere, have a Merry Christmas.

The song ends, and Fanfreluche holds the glass ball up to the camera, shattered.

“Et c’est exaucé.” *And the wish is granted*, she says with wonder, her eyes widening, her face beaming.

Then the lights dim, and the credit roll.

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La Ciudad

SADIQA DE MEIJER

Cities are a concentration of the life of the surrounding land



From an airplane seat—shoes squirmed off, elbows held close—one view can hold the plastic wreckage of a pallid breakfast and a jade river with big hairpin loops. The river has branches shaped like antlers, inscribed across a landscape geometrically patchworked with farms. There’s a sand

beach bright as the crescent moon—the thin line of the road doesn’t reach it, and I imagine the locals following a hidden trail through the woods. The urge to see that pocket of the riverside, to deploy a magical parachute. A friend once told me that in the Dutch army, during his conscription days,

they trained for parachuting by jumping from the backs of moving trucks. Below the plane a herd of clouds drifts north above their earthly shadows, as if coaxing their dark calves along. When the Atlantic enters in a glitter ribbon all along the left, I have a sudden notion of that phrase, *the disappeared*. The news of them on television when I was a child—that people were discarded by their government, that their mothers kept a stubborn vigil in the square. Love is like that; you enlist and do not know what will be asked of you. A wide brown estuary now, one ferry unzipping the water. The wing tilts and here is my first impression of Buenos Aires, vast and low-rise, dense with plaster, glowing in soft pastels.

Leaving the airport, I spot two horses grazing unfenced but tethered to posts beside the highway. Trees that are tall and sinewy, the occasional firework of a palm. And what bird was that? The driver points out a row of stadium lights past the greenery: the practice grounds for the national team. I don’t mention the fierce grudge I still hold from when they defeated my own team, the one from my first language country, in that drawn-out match with a record number of yellow cards. Then we’re passing crumbling concrete tenements, rubble spanned with laundry lines, little kitchen gardens among the ruins. Those are the migrant neighbourhoods, he says, and waves them off. A roadside barbecue, tall mural of Messi, carcass of a car. There are people sleeping on the median, as there are at home. My own bed is downtown in a hotel. I open the blinds; the view is of a complicated corner of six streets. My phone needs charging. In my birth country, electrical sockets looked like the wide-eyed face of a baby with one lock of hair. Where I live, they appear unpleasantly surprised. And here they are sad and singing. Some things you notice only while they’re new, others only with familiarity. Like how to read the human faces for their origins, as the

driver claimed he could—who is Bolivian, or Panamanian, or Venezuelan, and then to grasp what that might mean.

In the morning, I cross what the driver called the widest avenue in the world. It cannot be done all at once. Past islands anchored with flowering trees, the endless traffic streams: large, expensive cars with darkened windows, low ones from the prior century, city buses hand-lettered in elegant fonts, one with a painting of a bee. Later a bookseller tells me the Río de la Plata is also the widest river in the world, but my phone says, *if considered a river*. I pass vendors selling bracelets of colourful thread, compact discs, leather belts, avocados in a pyramid-shaped pile. A shop that sells only football jerseys and cartons of eggs. Pastries crowned with whipped cream line the bakery shelves, restaurants display the hanging ribcages of cows roasting over slow fires. Cities are a concentration of the life of the surrounding land; in these glass storefronts, the endless farms culminate. The beef in this country is so good, one waiter says, that it needs only salt and pepper and a flame. We are always in a hurry, another resident tells me, except with the cooking of the meat. It feels warm outside to me, but people are wearing their coats. The plane I came on, like a needle, pierced the curtain that divides the autumn from the spring, and I don't know how. Because the earth is on a tilt, I do know that—but I'm enchanted by the physics made so real: at home a greenish haze was on the naked trees, and here the first brown leaves are swirling around my shoes.

I'm working with translators in a school whose courtyard is stone terraces and massive trees. Classroom windows open creakily to the windows of another wing, and hummingbirds dart through the space between. During breaks, the resident calico cat is

stroked by dozens of hands. The public half of the school, where the children are, has trouble affording toilet paper. Floors of creviced concrete, walls of peeling plaster. The translators are ferrying my words into their language. Speaking in English, we negotiate the possibilities, attempting to make ourselves clear on dimensions of meaning. During the public lectures they assign me an interpreter. She is a gentle presence at my shoulder, and I am astonished at how fluidly she functions as my ears and voice, as if my being refracts through hers. For a few moments afterwards, direct speech seems too confrontational, an undignified mistake. I ask her later whether it is ever hard to be inhabited by someone else's voice, and she mentions a tribunal where she had to speak, as if it had happened to her, the testimony of a man who had been tortured. That she needed to take a long walk by the ocean. I was in a beginner Spanish class before coming here. The teacher taught us her own mnemonics: a fork is called a *tenedor*, she said, so picture a fork with ten doors in it. For *cuchillo*, imagine that a table



knife is made of a cue stick with cheese around it! I sat at her living room table and thought, I have underestimated the differences between minds. Because the class was for travellers, it emphasized how to ask for what we wanted in restaurants. *I would like an apple on the salad. I have my ham sandwich but I also want a tomato. Excuse me, I need a spoon.* We made basic conversation, speaking in the present tense alone. I had the impression I was doing well. Now that I'm here, the language is an incomprehensible torrent, bringing back the sensation of how English once sounded to me. Like a wall, a liquid wall. The translators and I talk about how their language is a superficial layer on this land that houses other, older, rooted languages. I've flown far enough to turn the seasons upside down and the

story still sounds like the one at home: the Europeans invaded and carried out a genocide. But different Europeans, I am absorbing that—ones whose signage says *estacionamiento* instead of parking lot.

The lack of toilet paper is a fact of the student bathrooms, but the currency is an abstraction I can't grasp. The currency is falling like the leaves. It can be sold for American dollars to traders on street corners. The mascara at the drugstore costs more than a night at the hotel. A cup of coffee goes for what it does at home, but is made to more exacting standards. When paying I count my money like a child—or, like a certain kind of child. At dinner in a restaurant, a small boy wearing a large football shirt comes in and quietly drops a pack of tissues on each table, then returns to collect them again, until he has a customer. When I pay him he gives an almost imperceptible nod, accepting cash but not concern—how achingly mature he is in that transaction. Then he hurries to the kitchen door, where a woman kneels to greet him and hands over a bag of buns. A few minutes later, the next boy comes through, selling gum. He also gets the buns. I know this aproned kindness is the invisible currency of the world; I wish my fork could hold ten kitchen doors, each of them opening. I don't really use the Spanish of my lessons, because the meals in all the restaurants are past reproach. We did not practice saying to a boy, where do you sleep?

The language sounds impossible, a voluble current striking staccato notes of emphasis, and only when I ask people to slow it down—no, even slower please—does it disassemble into words. This city speaks the idiom of the thieves, the translators tell me. There are codes of switching syllables around. I make very gradual progress. In my first taxi, I can name my hotel and the street, but I can't verbalize the number, and I

have to show the driver on my phone instead. In subsequent ones, I manage the phrase, *I would like to go to*, or *near the obelisk*, or *the cross street is Diagonal*. Then they ask a five-word question and I'm lost. One driver seems to say the zoo has a lone giraffe, another says the giraffe has died. A third has the radio on and the windows down to the evening breeze as he speeds along the narrow avenidas, angling swiftly down sudden lanes, and we are both humming along to "Young Folks." The evening after that, the driver seems as old as the city, his flecked hand trembling on the gearshift. He gestures back into the night and mutters, *el congreso*. I look over my shoulder, see a huge cloud that has taken the form of a building, and when I gasp he shrugs and repeats, *el congreso*. I take the taxis often because the sun sets early behind the walls of buildings and then there is an abrupt sense of menace on the streets. Outside the hotel window, at three in the morning, people are rummaging through garbage. Someone is sprinting past the empty bus. The kiosk sign glares: open 25 hours a day. I hear a scream and even its intonation sounds foreign.

Each day I feel the city soaking into me: the weathered beauty of its ornate cast-iron railings against walls of flaking concrete, the gelato, the expansive trees. I wear cloth flats, reading the pavements through my tired feet: sidewalks of small tiles like the squares of chocolate bars, and every ten or twenty steps a section lies broken as if for sharing. Caged apartment balconies that trellis flowering vines. One night, I hear a harmonic, melancholy music emerge from a street-level window. Through its dark grime I see eight or so women singing in a circle, and one smiles and gets up to crank the window open so that I can hear. Some sections of the city seem to have a bookstore on each block. I overhear a seller and his customer read poetry out loud. If considered a river, the Spanish of this city runs in rapids, bursts with feeling, has

a sweeping, oxide-coloured undertow. It will declare its love. English, where I live, is placid and evasive, emotionally reticent. Here, almost everyone I ask says they could never leave. I too feel the pull, and it activates a sort of muscle memory of immigration: I know how to make a place my own. I could learn to be articulate, to flow along the crowded streets, to speak a language that is unafraid of what is beautiful and dangerous. Then I recall an exchange with a woman at home who is my age, which is the age your bleeding starts to break its rhythm, stains your thighs down to your knees. She was pregnant, and when she announced this, for a spell the idea of beginning again what I had deemed no longer possible seemed terribly appealing. It is the same wish—repeating a renewal of the self, loving a great unknown again, enlisting in that risk—I want it and I don't. The city feels so right I might be dreaming it into being, and then my disorientation looms large again. The police look too young, their guns too big. I don't recognize the plants. The bathroom in the crowded diner doesn't lock, and I have no means of asking the women at the nearest table to please not let anyone in.

Palabras I can locate in the streams of conversation now are *día*, *chica*, *mañana*, *como*, *problema*. The clearest word I hear is *claro*. On the page, I can decipher more. I have a dictionary at my side. The niece of someone who was disappeared has written a book of poetry about him and gives me a copy. Today I am you, is how I interpret one of her phrases, but in her language it is a charged, symmetric, three-word rhyme. Near the end of my trip, she invites people over to watch the game. All week I've heard the street talk of this match between rival neighbourhood teams. You cannot go, someone has told me—the fans might be unsafe. The apartment

is in a building with a lagging elevator. On the stove is a pot of fragrant *guiso de lentejas*. The interpreter is there as well. In English I tell this group how I feel about their national team. Oh, come the answers with opened hands, oh, but you should have been here when we won the World Cup—you don't know how important that was for our spirits—every single person, it really didn't matter whom, everyone was celebrating in the streets,

and it was an outpouring, an unforgettable exuberance, a celebration as if life had been restored—have you ever had the chance to witness collective joy like that? I picture it. I insert the jubilation into all the public squares: the grandmothers still in the Plaza de Mayo,

the ancient taxi driver, the translators, professors, waitresses, children on rusted school buses, the man who asked for the half-eaten dessert on my plate—all cheering, singing, laughing. I let their elation pass through me as if it were my own. Okay, I concede, I am pleased for you. Then we eat. The conversation at the tidal edges of our tongues moves through malls, ombú trees, national elections, methods of protest, yerba mate, the dignity of adequate public pensions: we gesture, speak in swirling eddies, floods that swell and dissipate—we find the words. The game starts and on this particular television it streams on a slight delay. This means that at the moment when the striker turns toward the net, the ceiling and the walls erupt in a quaking of cheers. In that breathless interval before we see the shot, we all know the future and it's good.

Sadiqa de Meijer's latest books are Qaf's People (Véhicule Press, 2026) and In the Field (Palimpsest Press, 2025). Her book alfabet/alphabet won the Governor General's Award for Non-Fiction. She is the current Poet Laureate of Katarokwi/Kingston.



FINDINGS

Hollow Apologies Will Be Televised, 2022, acrylic ink, pencil, Residential School Apology on rag paper, and Landlines #4, 2020, acrylic ink on Stonehenge archival paper, by Sonny Assu.

Inspired by “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised” by Gil Scott-Heron and “21st Century Living” by Matthew Good, Hollow Apologies Will Be Televised reframes Canada’s Residential School Apology into a commentary on how reconciliation became a catchphrase over action.

Landlines is a series that uses marine navigation charts to reference Assu’s time spent on a commercial fishing boat as a kid while also investigating the arbitrary borders created by colonization that have removed Indigenous peoples from, and limited access to, their territories.



Yangbans of the Canadian Prairies

JANE PARK

From Inheritance by Jane Park. Published by House of Anansi in 2026. Jane Park is a second-generation Korean Canadian writer. She is a MacDowell Fellow, and participated in the Banff Centre’s Writing Studio and Diaspora Dialogues. She was born in Edmonton, AB, lived in New York City for over a decade, and now lives in Calgary, AB. She is currently pursuing an MFA at the University of British Columbia. Inheritance is her debut novel.

When my parents go to a shopping mall or take a neighbourhood stroll, they take note of the Asian families and speculate on that couple’s

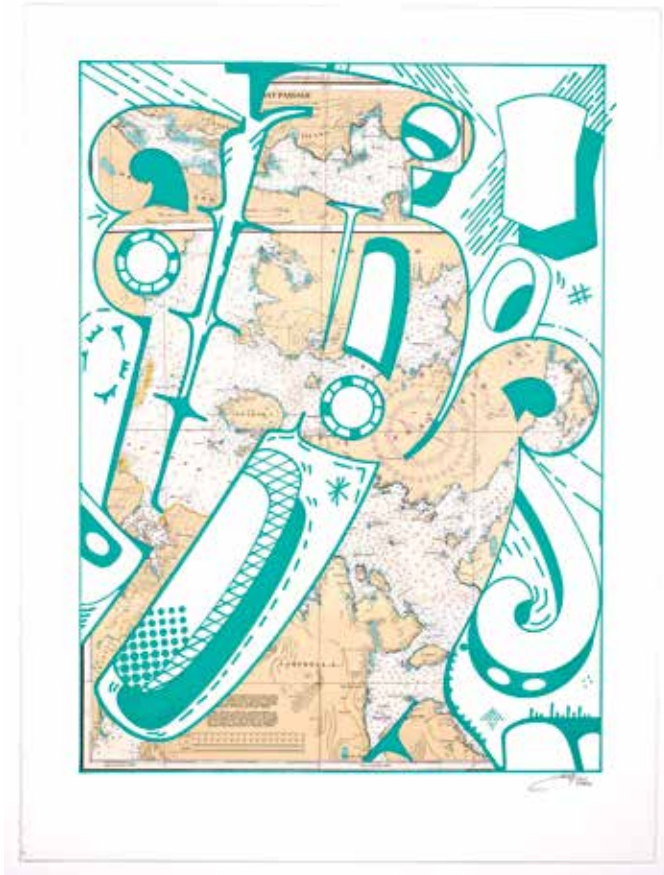
ethnicity—are they Chinese? Japanese? Or, maybe, even, Korean? If they believe the couple is Korean, my father—usually a reserved man—walks up to them, introduces himself, and asks where they are from. This is embarrassing. Charles and I walk faster or slower while this is happening, hoping to dissociate ourselves from our parents. In one of these instances, my father introduces himself to the Yoons, and the conversation accelerates.

“We are Korean.”

“We are also Korean.”

The language then crosses into Korean, a very personal territory. When did you come? Which part of Korea did you come from? What do you do?

They have one daughter named Yura, who is two years older than me, and stares at us cautiously. “You have a new friend,” the adults say, turning to me, smiling, when in fact they are speaking of themselves.



When we first visit the Yoons, Yura opens the door. She wears a pale pink dress with a glittering headband. She welcomes us in perfectly enunciated Korean and moves every lithe limb with dignity and deliberation as she graciously bows to my parents. My mother, delighted, remarks on what a pretty daughter Mrs. Yoon has. I silently take note that this comment is not reciprocated. I study Mrs. Yoon's powdered face, marvelling at how perfectly coloured her eyes, cheeks, and lips are.

Mr. Yoon used to weld, but now he owns a dry-cleaning business in Glenora, an affluent neighbourhood in Edmonton. Like my father, he comes from Seoul, although he is three years younger. They both graduated from Seoul National University, the most prestigious school there, the "Harvard of Korea" my father says whenever he explains his alma mater to anyone not from Korea. At university, Mr. Yoon studied literature and published a book of poetry, which he presents to my

parents as a gift. He is a thin man with delicate hands and a quiet voice. When he offers me dried persimmons, I immediately like him. He eagerly tells my father about the alumni chapter he is starting with other immigrants he has met. After some chatting, it's revealed they have a mutual connection: My father's classmate and friend, Mr. Hong, is Mr. Yoon's cousin. The conversation becomes livelier as my father proudly announces that before leaving Korea he gave his job as an electronics engineer to Mr. Hong, and Mr. Yoon says his cousin plans to visit Canada in the near future. Mr. Yoon pours whisky into a crystal glass and with both hands offers it to my father. Mrs. Yoon brings a bowl of fruit, which my mother insists on helping her peel. My mother takes a knife, and together they begin filling a plate with apple and orange slices.

Charles and I sit in the living room with Yura. We listen as the adults roar with laughter next

door. Charles turns on the television and rotates the dial in search of a cartoon show.

"Do you like our table?" Yura asks in Korean, pointing to the coffee table. The coffee table matches the credenza. The furniture is black, lacquered with an elaborate, inlaid, mother-of-pearl design of cranes and clouds. The room smells of dried fish.

"It's pretty," I reply in Korean.

"My mom brought this over when they came here. She also brought over all her fancy clothes. Would you like to see them?"

I nod, and Yura leads me down the hallway, into her parents' bedroom. She opens a closet full of pastel pinks, swirls of peaches and creams. The fabrics are fine to the touch, with silks and delicate wools. There is a stack of brightly patterned silk scarves; I want to examine each piece individually and study its intricate details. She kneels and brings out a wooden box with the same crane-and-cloud design from the living room furniture.

"This is her jewellery," she says, opening the box and taking out strands of pearls, rings of gold. "My grandfather was a *yangban*. Do you know what that is?"

"No."

"Yangbans were the rulers of Korea."

This is not true, since it is our family who would have ruled Korea had things been different, but since I do not want to damage our potential friendship, I stay silent.

"Does she still wear these fancy clothes?" I ask, noticing the clothes are too light and delicate for the harsh winters.

"Only on Sundays for church or when we have guests over. When she married my father, she thought he was rich, so her family bought these clothes for her new life in Canada."

Mrs. Yoon calls for Yura. She hastily puts the jewellery back into the box, shuts the closet door, and walks out of the bedroom.

"Yes, Mom?" she says in a high-pitched voice.

"Come into the kitchen," Mrs. Yoon says in Korean.

Yura's back becomes erect. When we go into the kitchen, the adults, all in a merry mood, turn around and look at Yura.

"Show us what you are practising for the Christmas recital," Mrs. Yoon says.

"Yes," Yura says softly, then bows obediently. This sudden shift into formality makes me uncomfortable: Do I also need to act like this in front of Mrs. Yoon?

"Just let the girls play," Mr. Yoon says, irritated.

"Go to your room and change into your dress,"

Mrs. Yoon says.

Yura nods, then disappears down the hallway to her room. Mr. Yoon reluctantly leads the adults into the living room, turns off the television, and clears an area to make space for her performance. I hear Mrs. Yoon instructing Yura to redo her ponytail, readjust her stockings, straighten her crown. Finally, Mrs. Yoon enters the living room, clasping her fingers together, hands pressed against her chest. The scene, Mrs. Yoon explains, is from *The Nutcracker*, in which Yura was selected to be the Sugar Plum Fairy for her ballet school's Christmas production. It was the first time someone who wasn't white was selected for a lead role, Mrs. Yoon adds. She drops the needle onto the record player, and the music plays.

Yura walks in with a tiara, a frothy skirt, and satin ballet shoes. She takes tiny steps, tips and teeters, leaps and lunges her delicate limbs. I am spellbound: I have never seen a performance like this, nor witnessed such artistry. When the dance is over, the adults burst into applause. Yura bows gracefully.

"Such a fine performance. She is so tall for her age," my mother says.

"She is the tallest in her class," Mrs. Yoon answers. "The teachers don't know what to make of her. Even though she is only in Grade 5, she is taller than some of the girls in Grade 6, and smarter too. At the last parent-teacher interview, her teacher said she could skip a grade. But our Yura is so popular with her classmates that she begged to remain in her class."

Yura takes my hand, and we exit the living room and go to her bedroom. "When I grow up, I'm going to move to New York and become a dancer," she says. "I want to dance in front of presidents and kings, just like Karen Kain."

"I also want to live in New York," I say, trying to sound just as certain, although this thought has never occurred to me until now.

"Then we will go together," she says matter-of-factly.

"Really?" I'm thrilled that she has chosen me to be a part of her brilliant future.

"Sure, we will be roommates."

"Have you ever been there?" I ask.

"No, but I have an uncle who lives there. He owns a jewellery store and promised to send me hairpins from New York."

"Are the hairpins nice?"

"Eun-ah, they're from New York."

I have never seen hairpins from New York, but I imagine sapphire crystals, jet beads, and plumed peacock feathers. I have seen *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, so I know that the people in New York are more beautiful, better styled, and more genteel than the people of Edmonton.

On the ride home, my parents speak in light, mirthful voices. My mother speaks about the coincidence of it all: of how Mr. Yoon and my father grew up in the same city, attended the same school, and yet they meet here of all places, in a mall in the middle of the Canadian prairies. Whereas in Korea, because my father was poor and Mr. Yoon rich, they would never socialize together, here they can, even be considered

equals. My father nods while my mother says this. He turns around and asks what Charles and I did tonight.

"Watched television," Charles answers in English, chipping the frost off the car window with his fingernails.

"Looked at the living room furniture. It's from Korea," I say. I do not mention viewing Mrs. Yoon's fancy clothes or fine jewellery.

My parents stay silent, enjoying the afterglow of this new friendship, until my mother softly remarks in Korean, "The furniture was out of place in that house. It must have cost them a fortune to bring all that from Korea. They should have known better and left it behind."



Four months in four days

LEAH LAKSHMI PIEPZNA-SAMARASINHA

From The Way Disabled People Love Each Other by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha. Published by Arsenal Pulp Press in 2026. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (they/them) is the author or co-editor of eleven books including The Future Is Disabled: Prophecies, Love Notes, and Mourning Songs; Tonguebreaker; Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice (all Arsenal Pulp Press); and Beyond Survival: Stories and Strategies from the Transformative Justice Movement (AK Press), co-edited with Ejeris Dixon.

We remember you in small ceremonies:

one of your oppas and I touch knuckles through
a screen
while they discuss your work in their DS 101 class

I'm blasting air purifiers, text reminding our friend
it's ok that they're not you
as they coord the resiliency centers
you came up with and found the money for
as the forests we love burn up into a toxic night

there's so many moments before I find sleep
where I'm grateful
you're not alive trying to breathe through this

you breathe through us everywhere,
in the angry email snapping at a comrade I
don't send
in the accessible home you find me on the
other side
of the continent where I make sense
and can walk to the river and write you poems on
my porch—

you my morning coffee,
my last kiss goodnight

the first week after you passed I ran a million
miles a second
into a wall,
slid down to lay on the couch for two months:

grief is a long goodbye, a long hello
with a question mark in it.

:::::

Grief is a long goodbye, a long hello
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There's so many moments before I find sleep
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We remember you in small ceremonies.



Empty Fountain, Unfound Smoke

ZEENAT NAGREE

From My Summer Vacation by Zeenat Nagree. Published by Véhicule Press in 2026. Zeenat Nagree is an independent writer and curator who grew up in Bombay and now divides her time between India and Canada. Having studied art history in Chicago, she writes on contemporary art and curates exhibitions. My Summer Vacation is her first book.

Nothing could have turned out different today. When I woke up, I checked if the cigarette was still in the geometry box where I had hidden it. It was not. I did not understand where it could have gone. If someone had found it in my box they would have asked me how I had got a cigarette and what I was going to do with it. Did someone steal it for themselves? I wanted my cigarette back because it was I who found it and it should have remained with me for the future. I looked at everyone around. Who was hiding the cigarette? I took all the money I had left from Eid after buying Dove body wash and rat poison. I told Mummy that I needed to go to buy Whisper Ultra as there were no pads left at home and she asked me to buy curd too. I walked to the chemist on Clare Road who usually has Whisper Ultra in stock and when I went in, I saw so many things on the shelves that it was hard to even say the words, Whisper Ultra—

I could not say anything. A saleswoman behind the counter had red veins in her eyes. Looking at them, counting them, I pointed to the place where they keep their pads. She took a stick and poked a packet of Stayfree stored up high, trying to shake it loose from the pile and catching it as it fell down. She wrapped it in a newspaper and gave it to me and I did not know how to say no so I took it. I gave her the one hundred rupee note I had. She returned notes and coins that filled my hand. My other hand already held the wrapped packet. I could feel its perfume enter my skin. I did not know what to do with all of this so I stood outside the chemist thinking. There was a buzzing as if a swarm had covered the sky. Other people were waiting for a bus. A single-decker bus arrived. I could read all the numbers and the names written on the plate in front. I could not understand what they said. Everyone was in a rush and climbed in one after another. Something inside forced me to follow them. I saw an empty window seat. If there is an empty window seat in a bus you have to run and take it. I did not realize how and when the road started moving and the shops started moving. The bus conductor came and I put forward my hand holding money. He took a note and gave me a ticket. I was counting all the tree trunks passing by. Some had rings of white paint around them. No accidents at night. No crushed heads. But the paint must hinder the trees from breathing in carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen for all our lungs. I wanted to put my arm out of the window and touch the trunks and say sorry. But I could not because in one hand I was holding a packet of pads wrapped in newspaper and in the other hand

I was holding money and a bus ticket. My hands were becoming heavier and it became harder to get up and leave the bus to return home. The bus stopped many times. I could have disembarked but I did not know whether to jump off at one stop or to wait for another. Bombay kept moving. From the window I caught a glimpse of a fountain with a woman on top. Looking at her I realized that I had come very far. I stood up and walked to the door. I was about to fall so I told myself I had roots. I had roots that grew through the land into the sea. The bus stopped at the signal. I ran to the fountain. No water in it but many brown leaves and two wrappers of Parle-G. I wanted to bend down and pick up the garbage and make this city cleaner than it has ever been but my arms were not long enough and there were so many things that I was still holding. Even the ticket that I no longer needed. I threw the ticket in the fountain. I did not want to. It was the opposite of what I wanted to do but I had no choice. The weight was unbearable. I felt all the women of the fountain turning their heads and looking at me and asking me why I had littered when I wanted a clean and green planet. I had to leave and get on the footpath. Where was Madanpura? There were so many stalls selling T-shirts and socks here. Photos of women in bikinis. Strange torches that do not even have lightbulbs. I remembered that I had seen such a torch in Mummy and Papa's cupboard a long time ago. There were radios. I could hear Mummy's voice telling me to buy two-hundred-and-fifty grams of curd. I had forgotten that she wanted me to buy curd. I walked ahead looking for a dairy shop but there were none. There were restaurants that had many shining jugs of water. I stopped to watch a man wash grease off his hands. The water turned black and flowed off the footpath into the grill of the gutter but his hands were not getting any cleaner. His clothes looked like they had never been washed at all. All of him was the same colour as the insides of the pump he was repairing. If I took just one piece away, the pump would never work. When he looked at me looking at him, I left. I did not know where to go. The sun was louder than all the vehicles. I saw a bus but I did not recognize it. A beggar came to me and began touching my arm so I gave him the packet of sanitary napkins instead of money. Wasn't I supposed to get my period today? There was a clock in a shop selling spectacles. The calendar was fluttering. The big sign of spectacles blinked red and blacked out

UNPARLIAMENTARY LANGUAGE:

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

A selection of words and phrases deemed inappropriate for use by members of legislative bodies while parliament is in session. Generally enforced by the speaker of the house, unparliamentary language may include, but is not limited to, profanity, insults, abuse or suggestions of dishonesty. Updated from a previous compilation specific to the Canadian House of Commons published in Geist 71, the Winter 2008 issue and compiled by Mary Leighton, the revised list below contains unfavourable terms the world over. From Wikipedia. Compiled by Kelsea O'Connor.

a bag of wind (Canada, 1878)
 inspired by forty-rod whisky (Canada, 1881)
 blatherskite (Canada, 1890)
 idle vapourings of a mind diseased (New Zealand, 1946)
 his brains could revolve inside a peanut shell for a thousand years without touching the sides (New Zealand, 1949)
 a dim-witted saboteur (Canada, 1956)
 member not fit to lick the shoes of the Prime Minister (New Zealand, 1959)
 trained seal (Canada, 1961)
 energy of a tired snail returning home from a funeral (New Zealand, 1963)
 fuddle duddle (Canada, 1971)
 could go down the Mount Eden sewer and come up cleaner than he went in (New Zealand, 1974)
 intestinal fortitude (New Zealand, 1974)
 sleazebag (Canada, 1984)
 臭器出臭草 ("foul grass grows out of a foul ditch," Hong Kong, 1996)
 squirt (UK, 2006)
 weathervane (Canada, 2007)
 highway bandit (Norway, 2009)
 仆街 ("stumble on street," loosely translated as "go to hell," Hong Kong, 2009)
 guttersnipe (Ireland, 2011)
 slander machine (Ireland, 2011)
 gurrier (Ireland, 2011)
 bandicoot (India, 2012)
 Maggot! (Australia, 2015)
 treated us all like mushrooms—kept us all in the dark and fed us crap (Australia, 2017)
 You goose! (Australia, 2018)
 COVID spreader (India, 2022)
 Snoopgate (India, 2022)
 fudge (India, 2022)
 wacko (Canada, 2024)
 meow (Costa Rica, 2025)



From Pastimes by Pascal Girard. Published by Pow Pow Press in 2025. Pascal Girard is a part-time cartoonist and part-time social worker. He is the award-winning author of several

and blinked red and blacked out and blinked red and it was not lunchtime anymore—

Mummy must have finished cooking without the curd. I must return home. I found a taxi driver and tried to say Madanpura but instead I said Mummy. He looked at me and opened the door. I sat inside. I realized that he did not know where I wanted to go but was getting ready to go somewhere. I looked at him through the mirror and shook my head, leapt up, and ran for a long time. Sometimes one of my hands felt heavy so I took a

turn on that side and sometimes the other hand felt heavier so I took a turn on the other side. I thought that sooner or later I would find my school which is not so far from the fountain. I could not find my school even when I was out of breath. I stood at the signal to rest. I let the others walk while I thought about where to go. On the opposite side of the road, I saw the man who sells coconuts outside the school. He crossed and came closer. I started following the tattered pockets on his pants until I reached a familiar world. An empty bus with the



graphic novels, including *Nicolas*, *Petty Theft* and the forthcoming *Foul Ball*. He lives in Montréal with his family.

number I had memorized years ago was waiting for me. The conductor and the driver were not there yet but the man who smiles was there. I looked ahead and began counting to one hundred and before I finished, the bus started moving. He had already left. I knew the names of all the stops that came one after another. I got off as we always do opposite the cinema with the billboard with swollen pink and green heroes and heroines on it. I did not have to tell my legs where to go. They took me home. When I climbed the stairs and reached our

door, I saw that it was open and the whole building was there and all the women had covered their heads to pray for me. At that very moment I felt my underwear get wet. I had got my period but I had no pads. I went into the bathroom. When I came out everyone had left. They had been crying. Papa asked me what happened. It would take too long to tell him the whole story so I said that I was looking for something and I got lost.



Inside the Storm

DANIEL ZOMPARELLI

From Super Castle Fun Park by Daniel Zomparelli. Published by Arsenal Pulp Press in 2026. Daniel Zomparelli is the author of several poetry collections, most recently Jump Scare, and the short story collection Everything Is Awful and You're a Terrible Person. He co-edited Queer Little Nightmares. Super Castle Fun Park is his first novel.

"What makes you think you might be a fit for the pattern assessment?"

"I was told that maybe I have it. I didn't really see myself as having it. I just haven't felt mentally well for a while and was hoping for some answers. Maybe you can put me in the right direction."

"Well, what makes you think you might have the pattern?"

"I guess I have trouble leaving the house. And it's not like I'm a germophobe or anything, but there's all these versions of my dead body lying about?"

"Can you explain?"

"Sure. Like, I need to get groceries today to make dinner, but the thought of the grocery store is overwhelming, and then my body turns into a body outside of my body and then it just dies."

"Hmm. What is overwhelming?"

"The people, the lights. The choices. Just aisles and aisles of the same products in different bright packaging—how do you choose the right ones? And if I do choose something, is that thing good for me, how far did it travel to get here, is it ruining the environment, did the CEO fund a crooked politician, you know, things like that?"

She smiles, or he thinks she smiles; it's hard to tell from her terrible video connection.

"I'd say this assessment might be helpful for you. And it will rule it out whether you have the pattern so that you won't be questioning it."

"Right. Okay."



People have called Jeremy weird his entire life. He's felt as if he were wearing a giant *W* on his shirt, like a scarlet letter but for weirdos, and never understood why. His behaviour feels normal to him. At camp the kids used to come up to him and say that everyone called him weird behind his back, which wasn't really true; they said

it to his face as well. They would say, "Do something weird." He didn't understand, so he would just stare at them quietly until they left, each time them saying, "Yup, weirdo."

He knows being stuck in your home with a bunch of dead bodies of yourself is weird. But he's not broadcasting that. He watches as his body separates from him again; the neck slices open and blood gurgles out onto his shirt and all over the ground. The body drops right on top of the remote control. "Fuck, not the remote!" Jeremy pushes against the body as hard as he can, but it's too heavy, and the remote control stays buried under the dead weight.

When the zombified version of his third grade teacher shows up, that's when he feels everything is a little different than before. She comes in through the door and barks at the dead body in front of it, who steps out of the way before returning to his place. She walks over to the couch and says hello, then pulls out her needles and yarn and begins knitting. She sits quietly for a while until Jeremy begins fidgeting.

"Don't make me tie up your hands again, boy," she says.

Jeremy holds his hands still.

"That's better."

She continues knitting.

Jeremy sits quietly as if he's in school again. When he was in her class, there was another kid she always tied down with rope. The boy would always get out of his desk without permission; he suffered from the storm. He was constantly interrupting and getting into trouble. Jeremy didn't talk much at all, but he would fidget and need to move his body. She found it distracting, so she'd tie his hands to his desk. He never told his mother about this. Somehow it felt embarrassing. Or like it was what needed to happen. Like it was his own fault.

Jeremy can't sleep, still shaken by the appearance of his third grade teacher. He stares at his phone in the dark: 1 a.m. He tries playing a game on it to get himself to sleep, but nothing works. He puts his phone down and closes his eyes, but then the body next to him starts to cough.

"I just want to sleep."

"Same here."

"Shut up, just let me sleep."

"You shut up and let me sleep. You keep turning on your phone, and I can hear your annoying thoughts. It doesn't matter about the

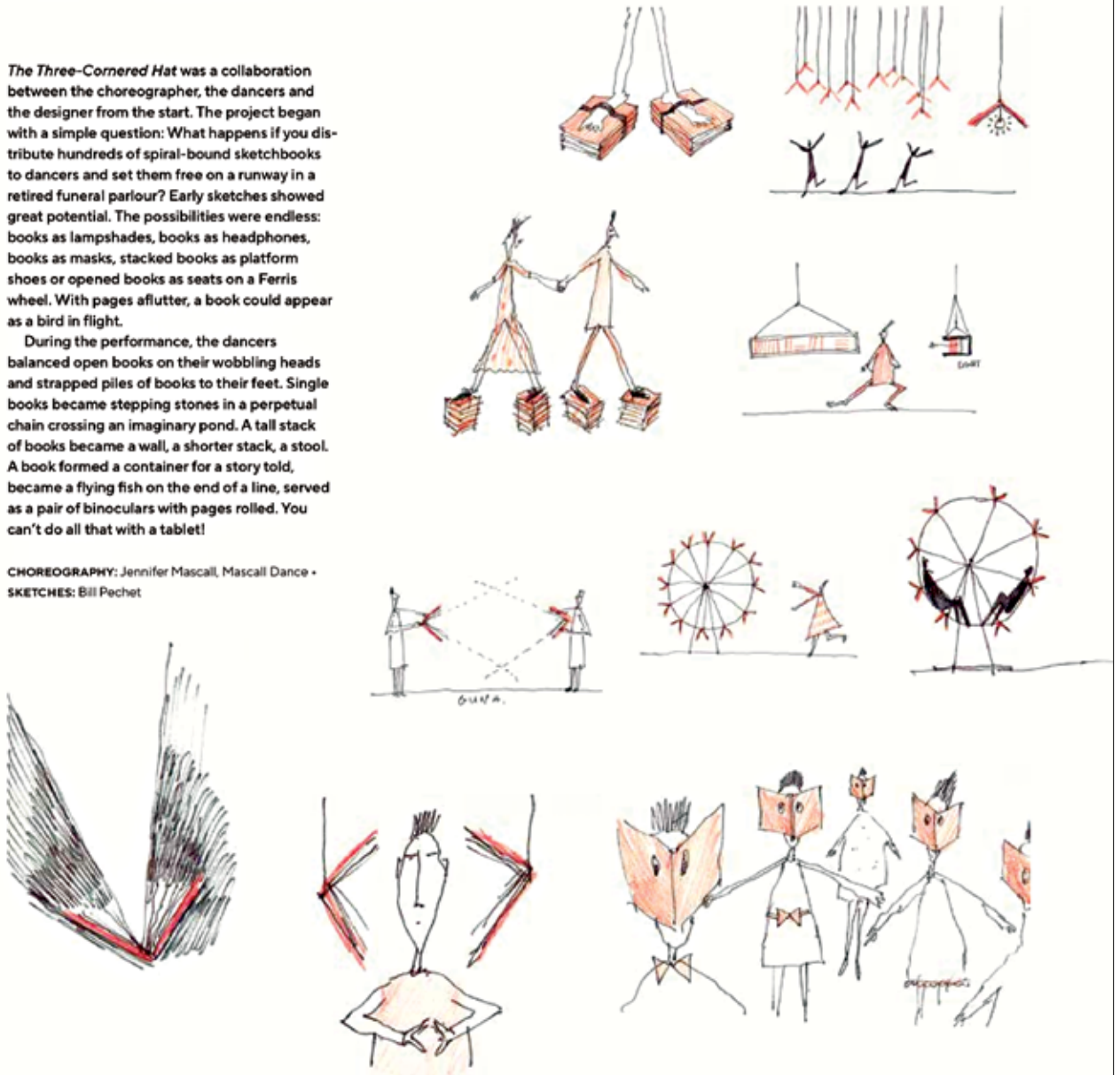
The Three-Cornered Hat

CHAPEL ARTS + SCOTIABANK DANCE CENTRE, VANCOUVER, BC • 2015

The Three-Cornered Hat was a collaboration between the choreographer, the dancers and the designer from the start. The project began with a simple question: What happens if you distribute hundreds of spiral-bound sketchbooks to dancers and set them free on a runway in a retired funeral parlour? Early sketches showed great potential. The possibilities were endless: books as lampshades, books as headphones, books as masks, stacked books as platform shoes or opened books as seats on a Ferris wheel. With pages aflutter, a book could appear as a bird in flight.

During the performance, the dancers balanced open books on their wobbling heads and strapped piles of books to their feet. Single books became stepping stones in a perpetual chain crossing an imaginary pond. A tall stack of books became a wall, a shorter stack, a stool. A book formed a container for a story told, became a flying fish on the end of a line, served as a pair of binoculars with pages rolled. You can't do all that with a tablet!

CHOREOGRAPHY: Jennifer Mascall, Mascall Dance •
SKETCHES: Bill Pechet



From updn: 88 Spins with Bill Pechet by Leslie Van Duzer. Published by ORO Editions in 2025. Leslie Van Duzer, professor at the University of British Columbia, has held academic positions in architecture schools across the world. She has published numerous monographs on modern architecture and was lead editor of the book series, West Coast Modern Houses.

shit that embarrassed you in elementary school, literally no one remembers that but you. You're not that memorable."

"I can't stop those thoughts, okay?"

"Great, now you're thinking about your meal plans for the day?"

"I want to decide what I should eat tomorrow."

"Can't you just jerk off and fall asleep like a normal person?"

Too irritated to stay in bed, Jeremy gets up. He closes the bedroom door behind him and hears the dead body in bed say thank you. When he walks into the living room, there's a chorus of groans from the rest of his dead bodies in there.

He stands over the body lying on the remote control.

"Can you move so I can watch some TV?"

"No, then we won't be able to sleep."

He sighs, sits in his chair, and flicks on his phone. He opens the app that shows him the atrocities of the world over and over again, wars and bombings and killings and laws to limit care that his friends need to exist and book bans and more death and shootings and cancer and toxins and chemical pollution and plastics that never decompose and heat waves and floods and kidnappings and border closings and earthquakes and global warming and two hours pass, and he looks out the window at the storm. He wants to take another pill, but it's five hours from when he takes his daily dosage, so he watches the storm and the storm watches him. He takes deep, calming breaths.

"Does meditating work?" a body pipes up.

"Shut up."

"Remember when you were in high school and you farted so loud the entire class heard?"

"Stop."

"It was so loud! Everyone knew it was you. You turned stark white, and the teacher asked if you were okay, but you were already running to the bathroom. Hilarious. And that time you were on a date, but you hate public washrooms so you left early, but you didn't make it home in time. Can't believe you were wearing white pants for that."

Jeremy opens contacts on his phone.

"Jer? It's 3 a.m."

"Sorry, Silvia, it's just . . ."

"It's okay, I couldn't sleep either. You doing all right?"

"Yeah, just mind racing for no reason."

"Abuelita had that all the time. Did you try meditating?"

"Yeah. No luck."

"Remember how Abuelita would sleepwalk? We'd always find her doing the laundry in her underwear and bra at this time of night."

Jeremy laughs. This story has been retold by his sister more times than he can remember. When he was younger and they shared a bedroom, she would always tell stories to help him fall asleep. He looks outside to see the storm calming. His sister yawns.

"Go to sleep."

"You got it."

Jeremy hangs up and taps open THE GAME.



Monstrous Bodies

EMMA CLEARY

Excerpt from Afterbirth: A Novel by Emma Cleary ©2026. Published by HarperCollins Publishers Ltd. All rights reserved. Emma Cleary is a writer from Liverpool who lives in Vancouver, BC, where she serves as editor-in-chief of Geist. Her short fiction and essays have appeared in Best British Short Stories, James Baldwin Review, Canadian Literature, and elsewhere. She holds a PhD in literature, and an MFA in creative writing from the University of British Columbia. Afterbirth is her first novel.

What I learned at the Board of Education was that the most important people in the room sat farthest from the door. If you finished before your co-workers, you had to say goodbye before you left for the day: 'osaki ni shitsureishimasu.' Excuse me for leaving before you. I loved these formal phrases and used to write them down in the pocket diary the teaching program had given us to organize our days. My favourite was 'yoroshiku onegaishimasu,' which Tanaka-san had prompted me to say when I first met the Japanese teachers I would be working with. It was an expression that couldn't be captured in English, falling, in this context, somewhere between 'I'll do my best through the future' and 'please be kind to me.'

The program ran social events for the teachers, and that's how I met Cecelia, in a beer hall in Gifu that served cheap booze. The beer hall was long and narrow, with bench tables for social seating and a bar at the far end. An older woman issuing orders from behind the bar was the only person I ever heard speaking Japanese in the beer hall – the staff answered her in English. As I chatted awkwardly among the other foreigners, I tried to sift through their voices, the words crashing up against each other as they swore and laughed and asserted.

What I noticed first about Cecelia was her voice. Not just her accent – Glaswegian, familiar and lovely – but something else, a pitch that was inviting and challenging at the same time, as if she was lifting her chin at everyone around the table. When she said something funny, she'd screw up her snub nose. She was already in the thrust of a conversation about horror movies, a drink in her hand, sitting next to Rivkah, who looked bored. Cecelia hadn't noticed me yet.

‘There’s so much period blood in that film.’ Cecelia held forth about *Carrie*. ‘I mean, a full-on close-up between Sissy Spacek’s thighs in the changing-room shower. A gush of fake period blood. Then the gym teacher has it on her shorts and the principal can’t stop staring at it with this grossed-out look on his face. Of course, the whole thing is that Carrie thinks she’s *dying* – her mum’s never had the talk, or whatever.’ Cecelia scrunched her nose, then sipped her drink. ‘The camera lingers on all these “pubescent” bodies – they cast all these skinny young-looking girls and put them in schoolgirl outfits. It’s pervy as fuck.’ I could tell she was enjoying herself.

‘The lens is so male,’ I agreed, drawn in. Cecelia looked at me for the first time. *Carrie* was one of the few horror movies I’d seen back then, intrigued because it had terrified my mother – the prayer closet stirring veiled memories from her Catholic schooling.

Under Cecelia’s gaze, I pressed on: ‘I mean, the way the camera pans through the girls’ locker room, how they’re slapping each other with towels? Sissy Spacek *massaging* her soapy boobs?’

The table fell quiet. *Soapy boobs* had swallowed all sound, and I blushed. Cecelia seemed amused by my answer; the lull it created gave her licence to go on. Her voice felt like a kindness, redirecting the attention away from me.

She told us that during the prom scene, when they turned the fire hose on Norma – wearing her red cap even with her chiffon party dress – the force of the water burst the actor’s eardrum. When she cries out in pain, her reaction is genuine. ‘She was only meant to have a bit part,’ Cecelia elaborated. ‘But the director loved her red cap. She wore it to her first audition because she wanted to look like a tomboy. She didn’t want to compete with all the other gorgeous actresses. He told her to keep wearing it.’

‘Little Red Cap,’ I said in a quieter voice than before. ‘Like the fairy tale. Little Red Riding Hood?’

I felt Cecelia weighing me up across the table, something fizzing deliciously between us. Before long, she was visiting my apartment in the heat of summer, lying down with me on the futon in her underwear to listen to the air circulate around us, her defined body close to mine, fine blonde hairs stippling her forearms. She’d sometimes bring thoughtful presents – sticker sheets, an air plant, little onigiri triangles to eat.

My favourite gift was a red sandalwood stamp of my name in katakana: the characters ブルック for Brooke, or in Japanese, Burukku. The Board of Education had given us simple versions of these hanko seals, which we used whenever we had to sign a document or collect a parcel. But Cee’s gift was shiny and chunky, the cherry-coloured wood so dense it felt like a stone in my hand, and it came with a tiny round pad of red ink, like lip gloss. ‘It’s gorgeous,’ I’d said, a little guiltily – I was bad at reciprocating the gifts, overthinking what Cecelia would like. ‘It might be the nicest thing anyone’s ever given me.’ She’d beamed, then shrugged it off as something small. I wish I’d been able to keep it.

‘I’m sorry for what I said about the girls in *Carrie*,’ she said one afternoon on the futon, uncharacteristically earnest, her eyes not on my face but somewhere around my solar plexus.

‘What did you say?’ Scary movies were far from my mind; I was lying there in a kind of afterglow, hypnotized by the rumble of the air conditioner, my heart still racing a little. I felt very alive.

‘About their bodies. Like, their little girl bodies. I didn’t mean to make you self-conscious.’ A dubious look crossed her face, and she touched my arm. ‘I’m not your first, am I?’

‘Oh.’ My face felt instantly aflame. ‘No . . . no, you’re not.’ Those words hadn’t come out of her mouth before, *little girl body*, not until she’d lain next to me in my flower-print underwear. ‘I’m sorry if I was . . .’ I searched for a word to gloss over my shame. ‘Inhibited.’ I was three years older than Cecelia, and this word was the opposite of what I’d felt with her.

She kissed my forehead, then my burning cheek, then my collarbone. ‘I’m sorry,’ she said again. ‘You don’t have to be so shy with me.’

I didn’t know what to do with that information. I thought of Norma in her red cap, pointing and laughing at Carrie on stage, the real pain of her burst eardrum. ‘Do you know what the final line of “Little Red Cap” is?’ I asked, to change the subject. Bravely, I pulled her into my arms, ran a hand through her staticky hair. ‘The Grimm version? “And Little Red Cap returned home happily, and no one harmed her.” Isn’t that just the best ending?’

She kissed my nose. ‘You’re cute,’ she said, then got up from the mattress.



PolterGeist

WRITING CONTEST

*Winners of the 2026
PolterGeist
Writing Contest*

*Inspired by the word
“geist,” which can be
translated to “spirit,”
“wit” or “ghost,” these
stories orbit fact and
fiction, capturing
haunted moments and
the strange and sublime
of the everyday.*

FIRST PRIZE

Night Drive

JACOB LEE BACHINGER

As I drove through that forest late at night, midway, midlife, ghastly fate appeared in a deer’s guise, rising before the car like a drive-in movie screen, bright silver flaring in the headlights. At that moment, my entire world became one focussed contemplation—the wall of the deer’s gleaming flank, an unscalable purgatory.

Let me assure you, eternity can pass in less than a breath. While I felt certain the car touched the deer, that’s all it was—just a grazing, just enough to flake a few hairs from its hind.

When I slid to a curling halt on the icy road and stepped from the car, my legs were shaking and my hands were trembling. But I found nothing: no deer, no tracks in the snow, only the empty road bookended by midnight fore and aft. There were no other cars, just rags of snow flapping wildly like leaves torn from a book.

Jacob Lee Bachinger lives in southern Alberta and teaches at University of Lethbridge. His poetry collection Earth-cool, and Dirty was published by Radiant Press in 2021. His work has also been published in Riddle Fence, the Malahat Review, Prairie Fire, and other Canadian print and online journals.

SECOND PRIZE

Angela

EMILY HORTON

I can't get rid of Angela. I used to think that our relationship was reciprocal. This was the bond between tenant and landlord. She had needs, and I had means of meeting them. We started watching *Love Island* together. She was the size of a grain of rice, back then. We got through about four seasons before I found out she'd binged the rest without me. That was fine. It was better if I didn't watch reality TV, anyway.

I was careless with the food I provided for her. I let her have all of my work drama, even the juicy bits. I didn't think I'd need the old receipts and rubber bands she gorged herself on for months. When I ran out of dry pens and she sat there, drooling clots of ink onto my carpet, panic set in. I had to get creative.

Cultural fetishes could keep her full for a while. She loved artisanal amethyst jewellery and trampled Tim's cups. We could spend hours talking about the weather while she pigged out on cigarette butts, never quite saying the words "climate change." Angela isn't one for moderation. In the end, it only took two weeks for her to swallow the city.

She tore through my least favourite novels, and then the ones I supposed I could bear to part with. I thought about getting rid of her, but how? She was so much larger than me. I hadn't been able to fit her inside my apartment since she picked the last of my ex-boyfriend from between her teeth. Worse still, I wasn't even sure I wanted her gone. I'd gotten used to the nausea that ripped through my body when I woke in the morning and saw her wide, translucent eye staring through my window, wider than a wishing well. Hadn't she eaten all 10,727 of the cockroaches in my apartment complex for me? Hadn't she devoured the cashier at the No Frills who was prettier than I was? I put off her hypothetical removal. I became careless again. My naïveté was swallowed by a dull and greyish nihilism.

Note this: The moment I started to consider it, it was already too late. I have nothing left to give to Angela. She has eaten up my empties, my last relationship, and a half-dozen wet-in-the-middle hopes and dreams. I've been reduced to feeding bills into her mouth, five, ten dollars at a time. She doesn't take small change.

Emily Horton is a writer and printmaker from Thunder Bay, ON, currently living in and trying to escape Southern Ontario. She loves creature features, science fiction, swimming and listening to the lake. This is her first publication.

THIRD PRIZE

As I wait for the TTC in High Park

YSH CABANA

sometimes, standing by the concourse
I get the feeling of the dampness in the air,
a faint, ferrous phantom on the tongue.
as if the bedrock remembers its own sweat,
and the tunnel, in its ceasing dark,
still dreams of its past as a mineral bath
with the grumble of the subterranean car
the slow dissolve of dolomite and shale.
this plateau, they call it—a tableland of clay
pressed hard by glaciers, left here to drain
down the Wendigo, half-human, half-spirit,
the water that won't be told where to go,
now exists within a long pipe to Ontario.
We stand, hips aching, staring at phones,
unaware of the tributary of stone that cups
the ceiling, bead by bead. to walk with
a second sight: every escalator's a waterfall
in retreat, every puddle pooling on the night
is a memory returning, a seepage of proof.
as I hear the PA speakers play the record,
If you see something, say something, I recall
this station isn't built over the land; it's built
within it, a temporary hand in a lasting palm.

Ysh Cabana is a Philippine-born visual artist and writer living in Toronto, ON. His articles have been published in Canadian Dimension and Spring Magazine. His poems have appeared in KM64 Collective (Philippines), Pilipinx Radical Imagination Reader (US), and Akdaan Literary Anthology (Canada). He works in construction management.

Deep Fake

JEN CURRIN

A word that asks, is it really you?

The first indication was dust. There was an unusual amount of dust in the poems, something they'd never noticed before. "Tasting dust" was a phrase used by several students. One poem took place in the catacombs of Paris, where the speaker was quick to observe, "I could taste the dust on my tongue, dry and bitter." Reading this, Jude pondered the taste of dust. Bitter? They had been teaching for a long time and had not yet fallen prey to that professional liability which plagued so many of their colleagues—it was a point of pride for them, their relative lack of cynicism. Would this be the thing to finally turn them? Having to grade poems written by robots?

The week before they had received a series of red messages in their inbox: "Only 9 more days left to complete training!" "Only 6 more days!" When there was only one day left they clicked the link and watched the videos. Some were the same old reminders not to click links from unknown senders, to always pay attention, no matter how hungry or tired one was. One video made much of the fact that a hypothetical woman office worker was so consumed by thoughts of the downstairs deli's minestrone soup that she distractedly clicked an unsecured link, unleashing ransomware upon her entire organization.

The training was tiresome, but Jude did learn a few things. Such as: when watching a video, one should pay special attention to the skin on people's cheeks and foreheads, to see if it is too wrinkled or too smooth, or not appropriate for their age. They should notice the skin around the eyes—were there no shadows where shadows should be? And the teeth and lips—were they the right size for the face? They were cautioned to make note if the person's speech seemed unnatural, halting, or lacking in emotion. Was the emotion shown inappropriate for the occasion? Careful attention must also be paid to each person's movements—were they unnatural, were certain areas blurred or pixelated?

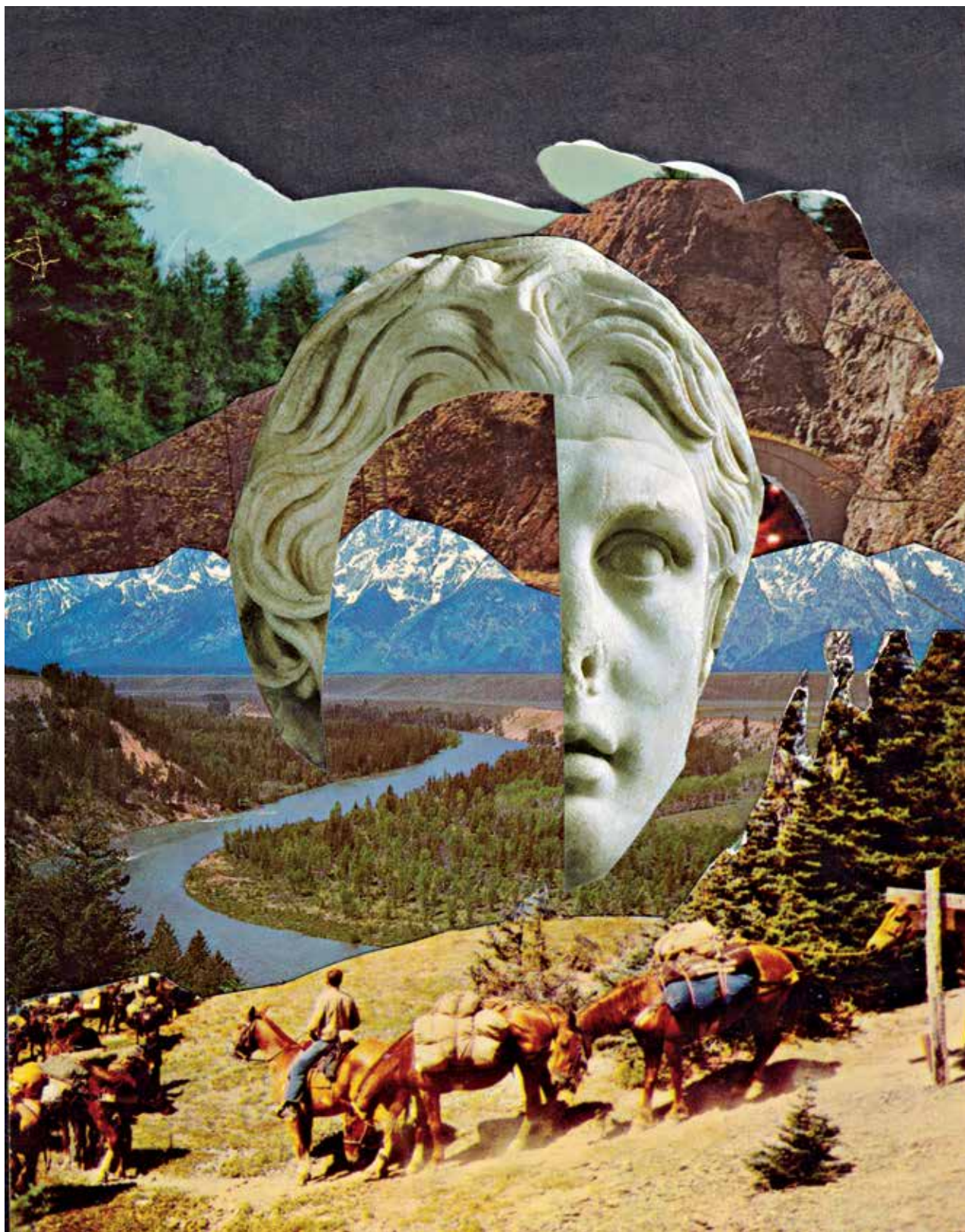
The training encouraged employees to adopt a "zero trust" approach, to assume that any video, image, or audio recording could be fake. In particular, they should always regard with utmost suspicion emotional or urgent appeals of any kind. The training suggested that they agree on a

code word with important people, so that they could ask for this code word when talking to the person to be sure that they were real.

As Jude was listening to a real-life scenario about a CEO who'd been phished into a Zoom call with his board—who were in reality face-swapped AI simulations—and tricked into transferring millions of dollars to a foreign bank account, a call came in. Their lover Violet, teary.

The night before, Violet had run into her grandmother at a grocery store in a dream. Her grandmother, who had been bedridden for weeks, was walking, and Violet was so happy to see this that she ran up the aisle and gave her a hug, telling her that she loved her. Her grandmother gave the little half-smile she used when she hadn't heard something but wanted to appear like she had. This smile was not unfamiliar—her grandmother would often forget to turn her hearing aid back on after a night's sleep. So Violet said it again, louder this time. I love you, Grandma. And this time she heard it. Violet was certain. Her grandmother gave a small nod, or some small gesture—she'd heard it. Violet woke up with this certainty.

Now Violet's strained voice was saying that she was swamped at work, and could Jude book their tickets to Toronto. Jude agreed while mentally tallying the hours of grading that stretched in front of them. Could they get out of it, could they send her to the service alone? Jude was sad that Violet was sad, but they weren't that sad, really, and not because it wasn't their grandmother. Violet's grandmother—also named Violet, Violeta to be precise—had lived a long and storied life. She was barely a teenager when at the end of the Great Depression she and her hungry siblings abandoned their farm in Manitoba and drove through the snow to Ontario, where they started again. How they got the first parcel of land, and the second, was never shared in the family tales, but Violet did know that her grandmother married young, a neighbour boy who turned out to be a drunk and whose heart sputtered out at forty, leaving her with five children. She raised them on her own, cutting hair and cashiering at a grocery store to pay the bills. She'd had a dozen grandchildren and too many great-grandchildren to count. Even



when Jude and Violet had visited just a year ago, at ninety-eight Violeta was still knitting tiny white tights for the newborns and baking Viennese pastries for the entire family. She died at home, peacefully on morphine, holding the hand of one of her daughters while her other children held vigil in

the living room. We should all be so lucky. Jude knew that the appropriate emotion was sympathy and the appropriate action was to accompany Violet, to comfort her and offer condolences to the extended family, but even thinking about packing a weekend bag made them feel exhausted.

The ping of the laptop meant more student emails. One student, upset about a grade, said that the tone of his story sounded different because he'd worked extra hard on it, and that he found it extremely offensive that Jude thought they knew anything about his life. Jude knew they knew very little about his life but didn't understand why he'd put "my life" in quotes. Did he not believe he had a life, or did he not believe in the idea of having a life? Or was he referring to Jude's comment that they couldn't recognize the student's voice in his work?

It had been a rough semester. Jude had been trying hard not to adopt a "zero trust" policy with students but it was difficult, given how many of their assignments sounded exactly the same. The same bland but competent tone. The same scenarios. A couple getting to know each other in a foggy-windowed coffee shop. A lawyer at his desk late at night, trying to crack that hard case. A race car driver in competition with his best friend. Of course the robots could write any sort of scene, but these were the ones the students favoured. And the poems full of dust, the poems of dying twilight. It went far beyond anything Jude had ever encountered and made them almost nostalgic for the good old days of simple cut-and-paste plagiarism.

AI writing had at this point a few distinguishable stylistic tendencies. Its metaphors were smooth and a bit flowery—if not outright clichés, bending that way. It tended to describe things in pairs or lists of three. His car smelled of metal and regret. Her kitchen smelled of lemons, coffee, and betrayal. Jude wasn't sure if this was simply the result of the students' prompts, but the robot often used the sense of smell, even describing places in terms of smell before anything else. Historically, students had struggled to describe anything in terms of smell or taste, but now their poems and stories teemed with scents of this and that.

Jude was halfway through responding to the angry student when they remembered they'd forgotten to book the tickets. Or ticket. Violet usually flew WestJet but Jude didn't know the password for her rewards program, so figured it was fine to just book the cheapest flight. As they searched for available seats, they thought about code words. Would it really come to that, having code words with every trusted person in your life? They already had one that they used for certain kinds of sex, but it would be depressing, deeply unerotic actually, to use it in the way that the training recommended. This was a completely different type of safeword. A word that asked, is it really you? A word that answered, yes, it's me, it's really me, my dear.

A couple of weeks earlier, Jude had received a message from a woman who said her name was Laurie and that she worked at Cedar Creek Community College. She was calling about a reading Jude had done at the college a few days earlier. There was an issue with issuing a cheque because

there were two birthdates, Laurie said. The one in the system, and the one she'd been given by the organizer of the reading. She just needed Jude to call her back and let her know the correct birthdate. "I know it's December 1980," she said. "I just don't know the day. The date inputted isn't matching up with the social insurance number." At the mention of their SIN number Jude became suspicious. They played the message for Violet and together the two of them puzzled over it. The month and year of their birth were probably not that hard to find out, but how did the woman know the date they'd read at the college? Was the voice robotic, or just the polished tone of a well-seasoned professional? Were Laurie's pauses and repetitions created to make the voice sound realistic, or was she actually just a woman speaking as she naturally did? And why did she mention having confidential voicemail? Was this part of the scam, to assuage Jude's fears about sharing personal information? In the end Jude called the college directly and found out that there was indeed a woman named Laurie working in accounts payable and, feeling slightly embarrassed, they left her a voicemail.

Things were moving so quickly and the universities were doing their best to catch up. At the start of the semester, Jude took part in a faculty training led by an educational tech specialist, a pot-bellied fellow in a space-themed black T-shirt. It was a small training, the ten of them crammed into their shared office, a little box of tepid coffee and not enough paper cups. The tech guy plodded through an earnest PowerPoint, stopping for questions or to crack awkward jokes. He kept slipping and calling them Judy because their colleagues kept slipping and calling them Judy, even though they'd gone by Jude for years. He gave tips on how to help their students collaborate with AI. They could use it for brainstorming and outlining and revising, but not for writing, he explained. One of Jude's colleagues pointed out that brainstorming and outlining and revising *are* writing. Another colleague shared that her three novels had been fed into the dataset without her consent and that she was planning on joining the lawsuit although she would likely only get a few hundred dollars out of it. The trainer hurried on to the next slide, the final one, which included a meme of Lady Gaga dancing with an enormous tube of red lipstick while beside her Elon Musk crouched on the ground and sobbed. He liked to end with a little humour, he said, adding that he always said *please* and *thank you* when asking ChatGPT to do anything. "You want to stay on its good side," he said, closing his laptop and standing up to go.

Against their better judgement, Jude told the upset student that he could come to their in-person class on Monday to rewrite his story. Over the semester they'd made this offer to several students, and only a few had

taken them up on it. Perhaps it was faulty pedagogy—perhaps they should just give them all zeros, their own zero trust policy. But they couldn't do it. If a student would take the time to come in person, if they could look each other in the face, if the student was willing to hand over their phone and take the proffered sheaf of blank papers, the university-purchased pen—then they still had a chance of passing the class. But only the most obvious offenders were given this opportunity; the cannier ones just got Bs.

Jude closed their laptop and turned to the stack of stories for Monday. These were upper-level fiction students who actually wrote their own work, although a couple had admitted in conferences that they worried AI would one day replace them. This anxiety animated the stories—there'd been two just the week before about "the machines" taking over, although thankfully only one of them ended with the complete annihilation of the human race. There was one student who had long COVID and hadn't been able to get out of bed for most of the semester. Another had missed the last three weeks because their brother had OD'd. The most diligent student had just emailed to say he'd be gone on Monday—he needed to update both his visa and his ADHD meds. Another student wrote from the hospital—she'd just been admitted again, psych ward. She'd sent her story though, and hers was the one Jude turned to first.

The last video Jude watched had been titled "Deep Fakes in the Future." It explained that with better software and increased computing power, deep faked videos and images would rapidly become more realistic and much easier to produce. Bots would be able to use deep fakes to carry out disinformation campaigns about past or current events. The boundaries between real and fake would become even more blurred.

It was getting dark in the small room, and a little cold, so Jude clicked on the desk lamp and turned up the thermostat. Violet would be home soon. It was almost time to order the margherita pizza they'd promised, her favourite. Maybe fix a salad to go with it, pick up some rosé. Behind them Jude could feel the tall bookshelf rising up, almost a presence. All those books. Stacked on the bottom shelf were years of notebooks, countless lines that would never make it into any poems, a few that would. So much dust. Their dust. They could almost taste it.

*Jen Currin has published two collections of stories, *Hider/Seeker* (Anvil, 2018), a Globe and Mail Best Book, and *Disembark* (House of Anansi, 2024), winner of the 2025 Fred Kerner Book Award. They have also published five collections of poetry, most recently *Trinity Street* (House of Anansi, 2023).*

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S. A. T.

Standardized Asian Testing: The Chinese/North American Subject Test

CYNTHIA LIU

You have your lifetime to complete this test

Select the best answer from the choices offered. In some cases, diagramming your family tree, either graphically or linguistically, will aid you in solving the problem. You may use scratch paper to assist you in your calculations; you need not turn in this work with your answers. Mark the bubble corresponding to the numbered question on your answer sheet with a sharpened No. 2 pencil.

Be sure to fill in the bubble cleanly, without overlapping the lines, or the machine-scanned form used by the reader will not be able to decipher your responses.

Do not open your test booklet until instructed to do so. You have your lifetime to complete this test. You may set aside your pencil at any time, but when you are done with the exam, close your booklet and lay your body down.

1. When you were born
 - a. an invisible red string around your ankle knotted you to your true love
 - b. your parents weren't done trying for a son
 - c. the woman you knew as your grandmother came halfway around the globe to care for you
 - d. all of the above
 - e. none of the above
2. You are
 - a. Oriental
 - b. just like everyone else—in fact, you identify most with those “green, purple, whatever” people who are always listed after “black” and “white”
 - c. Chinese
 - d. Chinese American/Canadian
 - e. Han Chinese but really (also?) Taiwanese, thank you

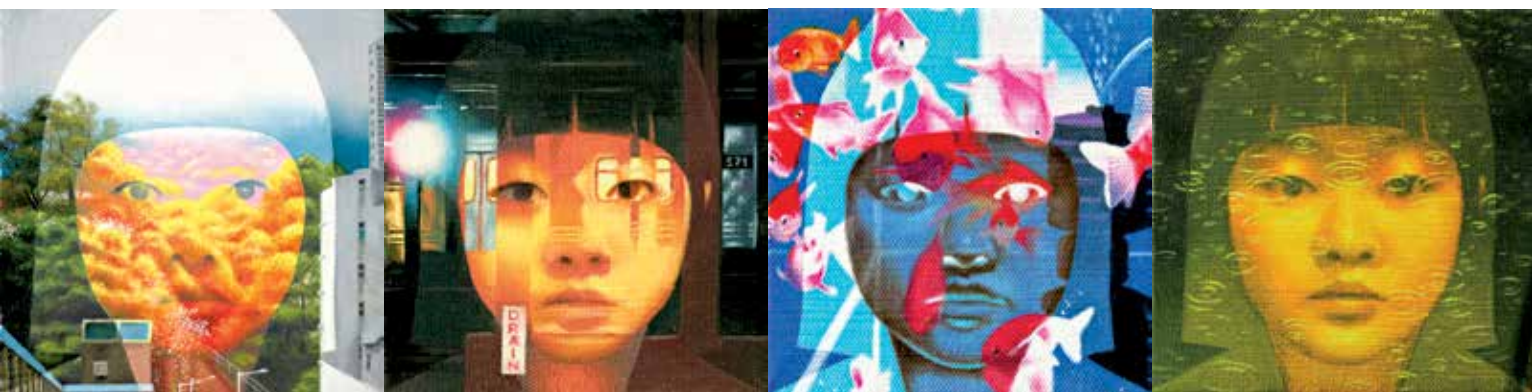
f. not like all those other Chinese, the ones who hawk and spit on the street, the ones who have bad teeth, the ones who come over and give the rest of us clean-living, upwardly mobile, college-educated Chinese a bad name

g. Chinese, but really Cantonese-speaking (the lively, adventurous, bawdy, spirited, playful, folk-heroic people, unlike those uptight Mandarin speakers)

h. Chinese, but really Mandarin-speaking (the classical, refined, learned, all-knowing yet modestly quiet, rooted in antiquity, modern- and in-the-majority people, unlike those crass Cantonese speakers)

i. glad to live near a community of Chinese, even to be part of a community of Chinese, so long as you can be anonymous at the same time

3. When your family comes to visit, the aunt who is your mother's older sister bears a pink box of pastries and puts them down on a large round table with a lazy Susan in the middle. She nevertheless defers to your mother's brother, your uncle, the youngest of the three siblings, who comes bearing a sheepish smile with the question he is planning to ask his eldest sister for the sixth time: Can he borrow some money? He heard about a really great stock that's guaranteed to outperform the Standard & Poor index, but doesn't have the cash on hand. (Maybe it was Bitcoin. Maybe it was a pony who was supposed to be a sure thing. Maybe it was Pai Gow.) He stands to the right of your mother's cousin who is wearing a blue blouse, the one whose husband ran away to Hong Kong to live with his girlfriend, and so she laughs nervously, even though she can't produce the old uncle and has no new uncle to introduce to you. Your maternal grandmother needs



to be spoken to every five minutes or she'll scream out your dead grandfather's name, afraid the Japanese Imperial Army is about to invade Nanjing and shoot him in the street where he stands. She must be placed near the daughter who has the most patience, who may or may not be wearing a red sweater vest. The daughter who has the most patience is the one putting the pastries on a plate. The daughter (also a mother) who has no patience and no job but three girls of her own and a drinking problem wants to tell her siblings that her husband is divorcing her, but is in the bathroom crying instead. What is the order in which the family members visit when the woman at the end of her rope is brought to the hospital after her suicide attempt? And how many seats away from the person wearing green shoes is the person wearing a red sweater vest?

- a. eldest sister, brother, grandmother, cousin, you; two seats
 - b. you, your grandmother, brother, cousin, mother's older sister; one seat
 - c. you and your three sisters; five seats
 - d. you with a bunch of irises, your mother's favourite flower (one for each person who couldn't make it), because you're the eldest and your sisters are too young; three seats
 - e. you and your mother's cousin, actually not really a cousin but just a friend your mother's known since high school, when they found god together and prayed on their knees on their church's brick floor, because she knows what it's like to be abandoned; not seated but kneeling
4. You put down your watercolours and picked up *Gray's Anatomy* so you could spend six years and \$400,000 on a medical degree that gets you a job as a resident in an HMO-run hospital earning \$80,000 a year. Given that the interest on your student loan is 9%, and you still carry a balance of \$68,000 of undergraduate debt, pinpoint the exact time at which you develop a rash and an inexplicable shake in your left hand when you ask

your mom (who works seventy hours a week at her dry cleaning shop) to lend you money for a down payment on a house.

- a. after \$68,000 of debt; 4:16 p.m. Central Standard Time
 - b. before you wanted to drop out of medical school but after your mother had the stroke and couldn't work any more; 15:34:49 Greenwich Mean Time
 - c. when the elementary art teacher for whom you would have knelt on broken glass bent down and stroked your cheek gently, calling your pictures beautiful, her long straw hair resting on your shoulder for a moment as if it belonged to you; then and forever
 - d. now that you live with your mother, you don't need a separate house; there is only one time zone in all of China
 - e. when you dropped the nice boyfriend who made you dinners while you studied for finals and wanted to marry you because your mother said he was the wrong I) colour II) race III) religion IV) ethnicity V) gender, and it was either your mother or your boyfriend; never
5. You finally decide to become a citizen at the age of fifty-three, after three kids and 17,492 pockets sewn into half as many pant legs. You go to school for the first time in forty years. At your citizenship test, you will be asked to name the statue standing in the harbour where your cargo ship came in thirteen years ago, the same cargo ship in which you sat with two hundred and fifty-seven other emigrants in a hold stinking of three months of human waste. That statue in the harbour is known as
- a. the Goddess of Democracy
 - b. the Goddess of Mercy
 - c. the Virgin Mary
 - d. none of the above
 - e. all of the above



6. You and your partner finally decide to have children. Would you

- a. adopt a little girl from China, or try in vitro fertilization?
- b. give the child a Chinese name? If so, whose family poem would you choose, if applicable?
- c. ignore anything “traditional,” only to regret it years from now?
- d. select as your place of residence an urban area diverse enough in population so as to minimize the likelihood your child will ever have to face stares, slurs, and that heart-piercing question, “What are you?”
- e. wait so long the question becomes irrelevant?

7. You live:

- a. on the East Coast, in an urban area where you either inhabit a small dense Chinatown and grow up with an accent and orange-dyed hair, or in an upwardly striving middle-class suburb, yet you wonder why whenever “race” is discussed it always means Black or white, and if you mention otherwise, you are simply grinding your axe or fingering the chip on your shoulder
- b. in Toronto, where the choices always seem to be Old School Ethnic or Sole Asian in the Room; the former means you aren’t trying hard enough to transcend the sewing machine hum and hot iron hiss of your tailor-and-laundry-filled ethnic enclave, and the latter means you circulate among what passes for Old Money; your personhood is delimited by the supposed sophistication of the white people around you, most of whom find all this “Asian American” talk undignified and a form of special pleading. How can you win when you’re still facing Europe?
- c. on the West Coast, but in the northwest corner of the United States where there was a governor who was Chinese American. Otherwise 66% of

the people are white and the rest are Asian, Black, Latino, and Indigenous; it is the Midwest of the West Coast

- d. in California, where the postal workers and bus drivers and schoolteachers and hippies and cell-phone salespeople and internet millionaires, and yes, garment-factory and restaurant workers are Asian American, but importantly so are lawyers, judges, city council members, mayors, state legislators, residents of the state penitentiary, and people in crazy, risk-taking professions like rock star and movie idol and screenwriter; white people here are familiar with or well acquainted with the various ways of being Asian and may be the third- or fourth-generation white person to grow up around and feel comfortable with Asian Americans—that, or the white people are inflexible and insane and belatedly inflamed by “race mixing” and “mongrelization”
- e. in the Prairies, where you walk around small, defensive and unseen, and people make jokes about Swedes versus Norwegians, so how the fuck would you even register on the map? When you do talk about being different, you talk about Asia—long silky hair, blue and white vases, ancient Chinese secrets—and think it applies to you, hoping to wrap yourself in the safety of embroidered silks and quaintly oppressive customs because our American progress has set us free
- f. in Hawaii, which mainland Asian Americans who are unrelated to anyone there regard as the promised land—but if you grew up there, you love the concentration of people and maybe also long for the apparent variety and breadth of the mainland. Because even though the majority of people in Hawaii are descended from Asians, there are ever infinite ways to discern and define rich from poor, light-skinned from dark-skinned, thin from fat, smooth-haired from kinky-haired, Native Hawaiian

from local from settler, pidgin from standard spoken English, and losing yourself in the infinity of the ocean or the enormity of the mainland seems like the only escape from the panopticon of a small town

8. You have family living in Singapore, Boston, Bangkok, Fuzhou, Beijing, Los Angeles, Washington, DC, Baton Rouge, Winnipeg and Sydney. Where should your grandparents, born on Chinese soil, be interred upon their deaths so their descendants can find them again?
 - a. this is a trick question since immediate ancestors bounced around China and India escaping the Japanese Imperial Army and no one has lived in ancestral homes in WuYiShan or Fuzhou since 1948
 - b. they should be interred in a totally new place, like Hawaii, which is beautiful and has intrinsic visiting value that will reinforce proper filial connection
 - c. their cremated remains should be kept with the eldest male in the line, and the question opened again for debate upon that man's death
 - d. their remains should be kept with the girl in the family who cares the most
 - e. the remains should be kept with the smack-addicted, fucked-up male heir of the line, even

though he can hardly be relied upon to hold a job or stay in one place longer than seven months, as sweet as he really is

f. it doesn't matter, because the girl who cares the most has already snooped, listened, wheedled, stolen, embroidered, overheard and otherwise prompted every story she can from any kin who ever parted lips around her

g. why can't the remains be divided up among all the family members? Oh. Well, who can say they'll be walking around heaven missing crucial body parts? No one knows that for sure. They could be whole and intact. I mean, it's heaven. No Black, no white, no Chinese, not even green or purple. You'd think they'd solve problems like that there.

Cynthia Liu's prose has appeared in the Tusculum Review, emerge, and an anthology of genderqueer writing. She gratefully acknowledges support from SSHRC, Artist, Jack Straw Writers Program, the CAPE New Writers Fellowship, and Film Independent's Project Involve. Her residencies include Upstart & Crow, Banff, Mineral Arts, Hedgebrook, and the Vermont Studio Center. She lives in Vancouver, BC.



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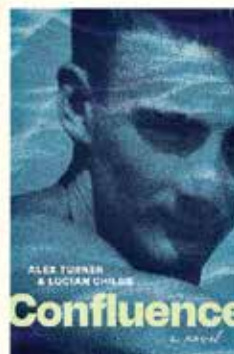
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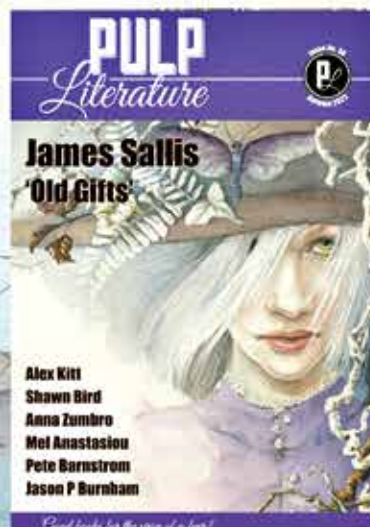
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Grace Beyond Our Doing

EVELYN LAU

Plumbers

This was the month the plumbers came and went, colognes clashing in the air. Once inside, their hands roamed everywhere—probing under sinks and appliances, fingertips inching along the contours of pipes and drains to feel for the crack, the damp. They twisted and tightened screws and clamps, crouched then lay face up on the floor, groping blind behind them. The older ones called me *dear*, *sweetie*, their eyes tired, unsmiling, trained toward the horizon of retirement. The younger ones were tattooed, muscled, so polite—like guests, they asked if they could *please* use the toilet before departing on their hour-long journey back to the suburbs. The plumbers' lives were men's lives, ones I couldn't imagine—on weekends they rode dirt bikes, fished in northern lakes, dreamt of building mansions on acreage in wilderness country. Each one terrified me with the power he had to come and go at will, phone tingling with more lucrative trade, leaving behind globs of golden grease, balled-up tissues, streaks and whorls on the walls like a child's finger-painting. Leaving me pacing, vibrating to the *drip, drip, drip* of another sprung leak. Rain in the night like a burst pipe, gushing.

Sit-to-Stand

Present! This is arthritis class, and we are strange
children garbed in the Halloween costumes
of the aged, eager to be taught how to sit, stand.
We've hobbled here to learn, or maybe unlearn,
decades of bad habits, poor posture—
propped up by poles, canes. In our circle

there's a white-haired belle still rocking
a red lippy, a sinewy ex-runner
clad in branded athletic gear—
then there's the rest of us, lumpish, bulging
in odd places, studies in asymmetry.
Grimacing, we squat, lunge, bend

for dropped spoons with a golfer's reach,
try to avoid the misstep that will throw
our neuromuscular systems off-kilter.
Tighten lower bellies to spines,
envy the physiotherapist's ease—
how casually she sits with legs crossed!—

while we negotiate each minor motion. Wary,
we tiptoe invisible tightropes, tether ourselves
with resistance bands in primary colours slick
against our palms like burst birthday balloons.
Grunt and grumble as our joints squeak, crumble.
We're kind, though. We know the worst off

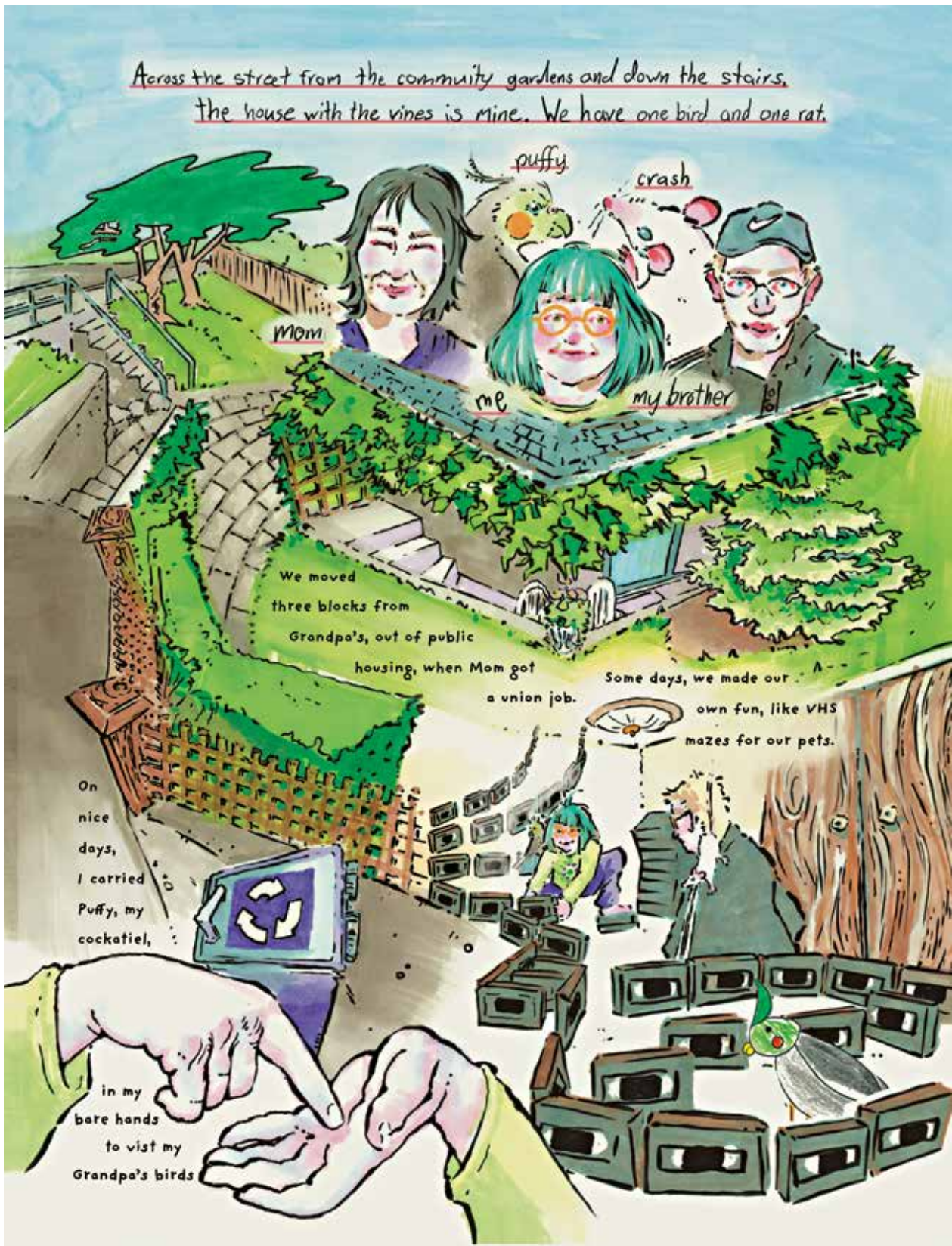
among us could one day be us. We've lived
most of our lives, taken more than our share—
to get this far, a measure of luck was involved,
grace beyond our doing. It wasn't our fault,
was it? Too many inflammatory foods
that tasted like heaven? Impossible!

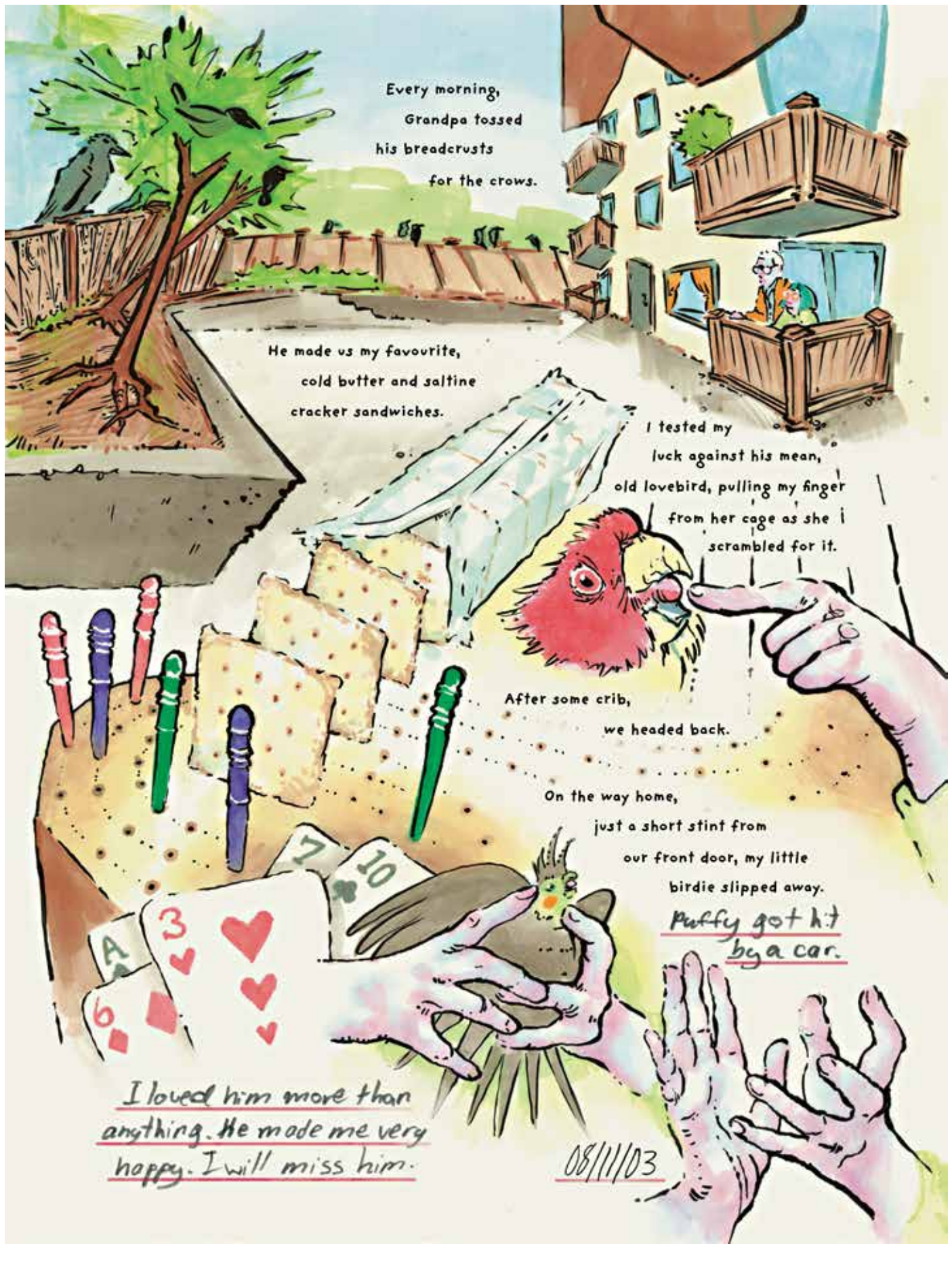
We share compliments, encouraging smiles,
recognize that once, some of us clambered over fences
and shimmied our way into tree canopies,
skidded across frozen lagoons, flew down
pebble-strewn paths on mountain bikes
and were briefly airborne.

Evelyn Lau is a lifelong Vancouverite who has authored fifteen books, including ten poetry collections. Her most recent, Parade of Storms (Anvil, 2025) was shortlisted for the Al and Eurithe Purdy Poetry Prize.

Best Bird Friend

BY ANGELA SCHMOLD





Every morning,
Grandpa tossed
his breadcrusts
for the crows.

He made us my favourite,
cold butter and saltine
cracker sandwiches.

I tested my
luck against his mean,
old lovebird, pulling my finger
from her cage as she
scrambled for it.

After some crib,
we headed back.

On the way home,
just a short stint from
our front door, my little
birdie slipped away.

Puffy got hit
by a car.

I loved him more than
anything. He made me very
happy. I will miss him.

08/11/03

I cried for three days

08/14/03

my friend showed
up and brought me
blackberry picking
we picked
a tonne.

in an
empty-ish lot
beside the
Burnaby-Coquitlam
highway, a rock
waited for us.

I heard squeaking noises
and we thought it
was a rat

"go look!"

"No, you go look!"

and then I

found out
it was a
BIRD!

a white faced cockatiel
trying to climb my
purple rain
pants



I was scared

Could birds catch rabies? °

in the end we picked
him up with a bag
and walked home with
fewer berries than
we started



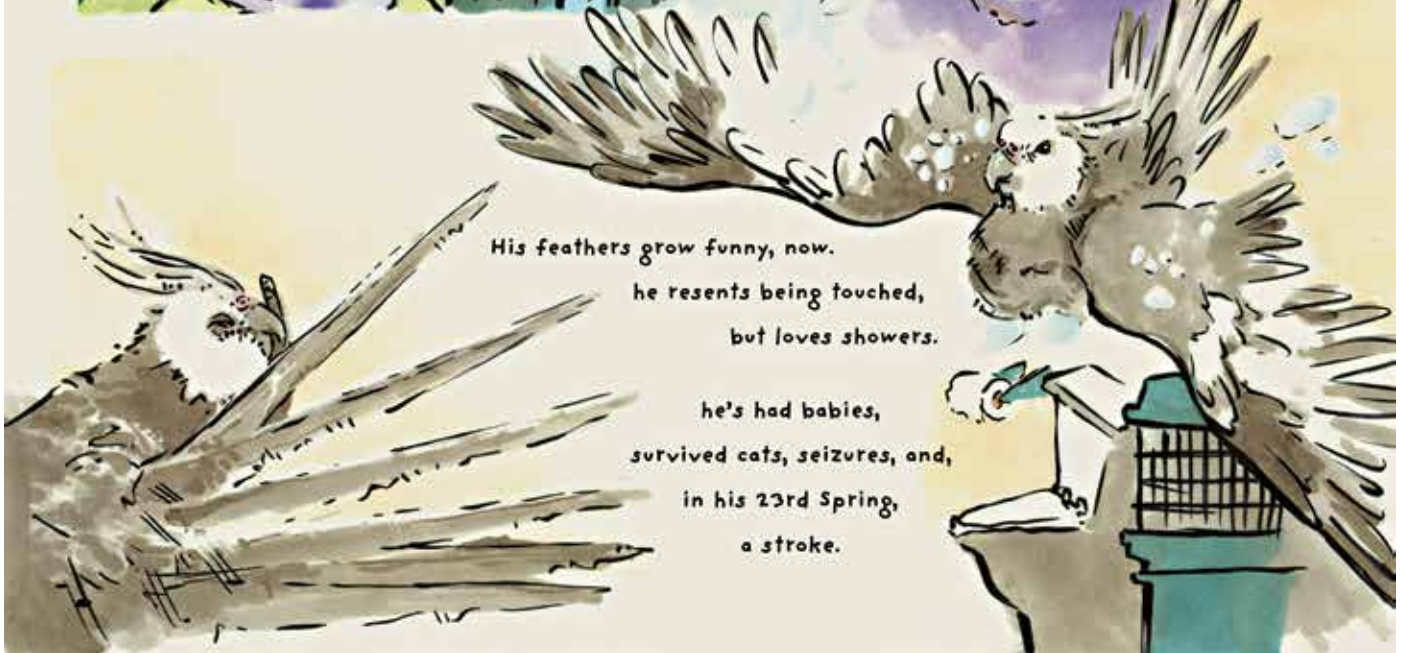
Would you be
able to tell a
sticky, sobbing
little girl she
couldn't keep
her serendipitous
bird friend?

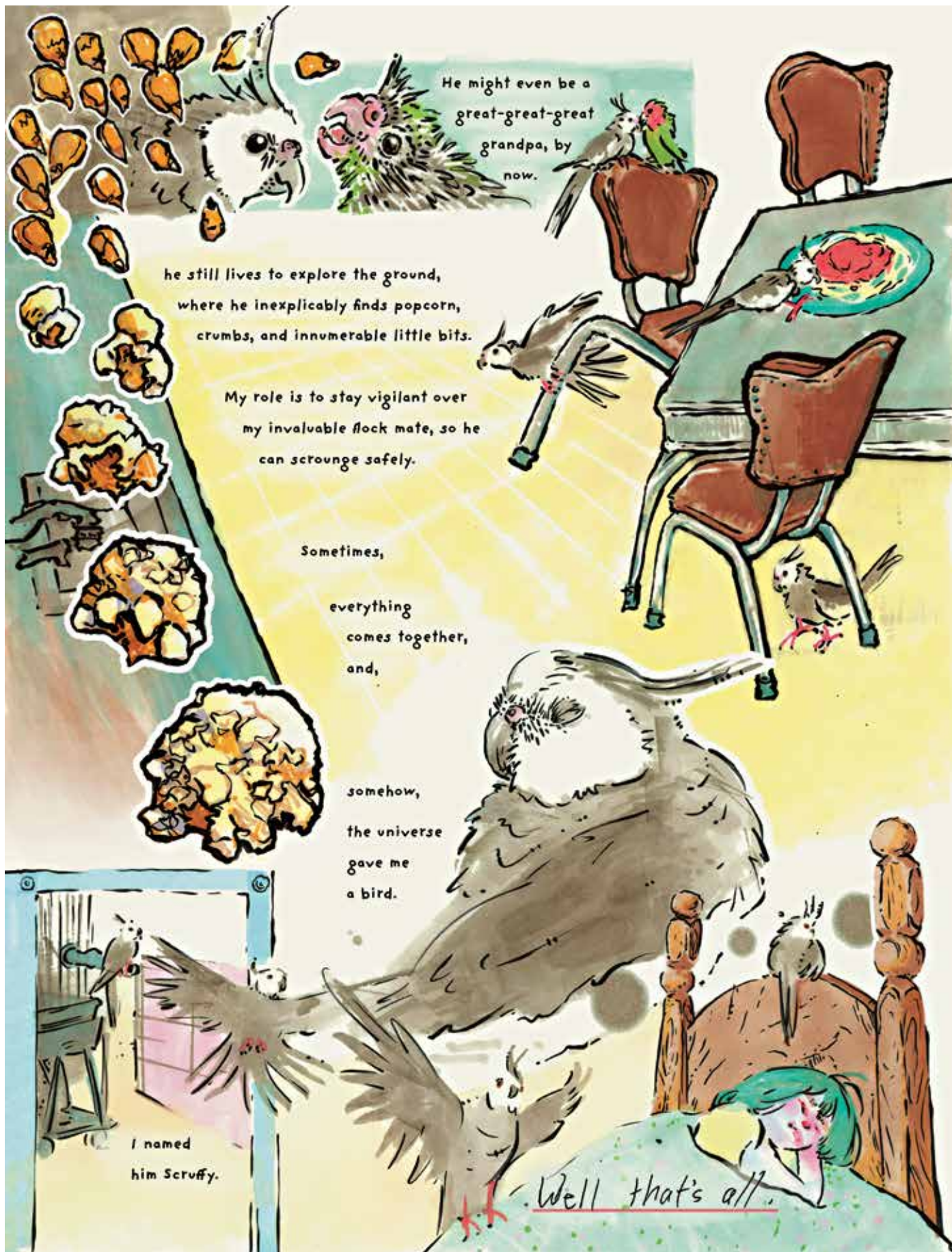


His feathers grow funny, now.

he resents being touched,
but loves showers.

he's had babies,
survived cats, seizures, and,
in his 23rd Spring,
a stroke.





He might even be a
great-great-great
grandpa, by
now.

he still lives to explore the ground,
where he inexplicably finds popcorn,
crumbs, and innumerable little bits.

My role is to stay vigilant over
my invaluable flock mate, so he
can scrounge safely.

Sometimes,

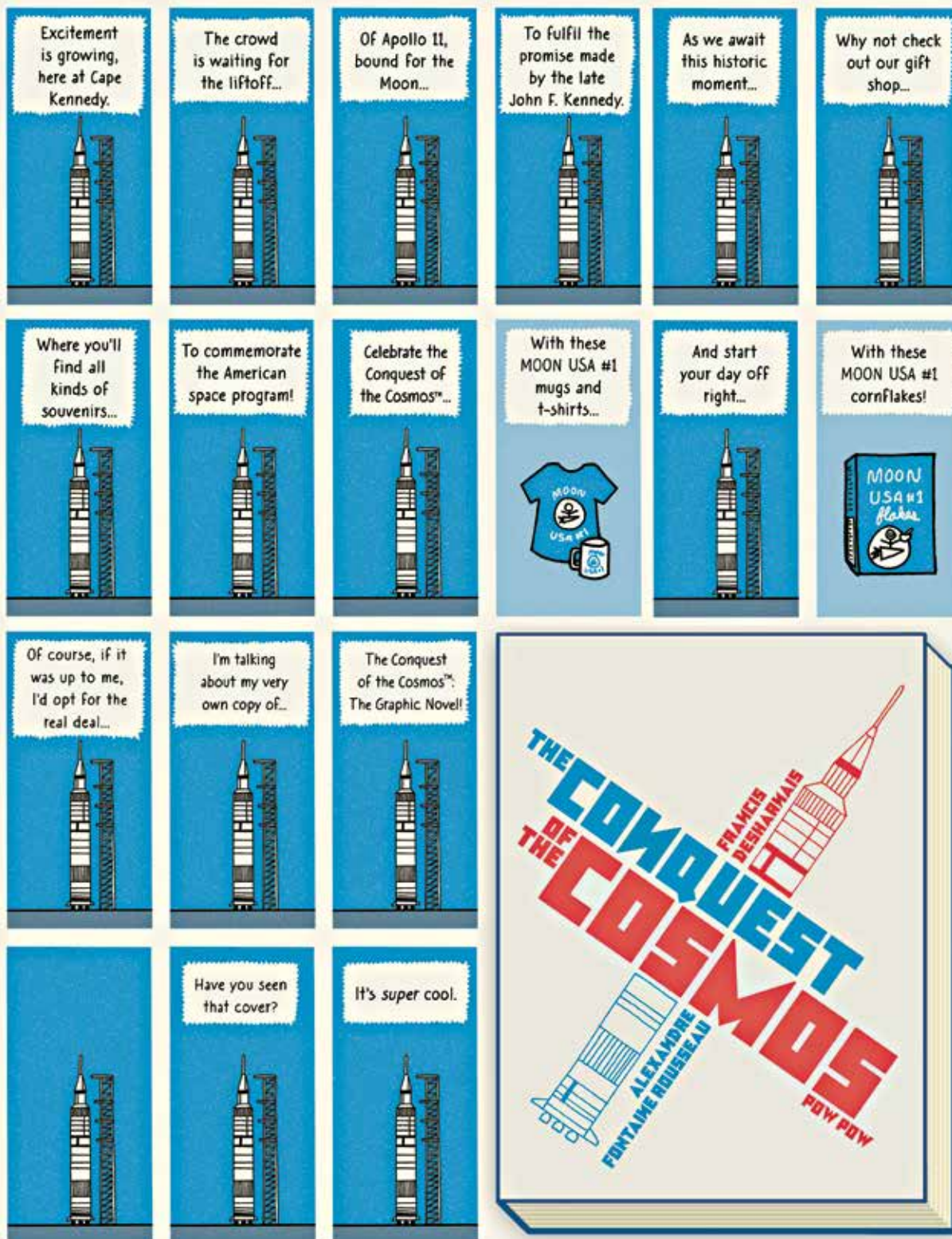
everything
comes together,
and,

somehow,
the universe
gave me
a bird.

I named
him Scruffy.

Well that's all.

FRANCIS DESHARNAIS & ALEXANDRE FONTAINE ROUSSEAU



Thirteen Portraits of Ishiuchi Miyako

CHRISTINE LAI

What is a photograph unable to capture?

I

In the photograph, a little girl is walking down the street. Old houses and a truck are visible in the background; otherwise, the street is empty. The heavy grain and chiaroscuro of this black-and-white photo characterize all the images in Ishiuchi Miyako's first series, *Yokosuka Story* (1976–77), in which this picture appears. The girl seems to be smiling, yet the image appears sombre to me, perhaps because I interpret it through the lens of the photographer's own experiences. I imagine this little girl to be Ishiuchi herself, for the setting is the coastal town of Yokosuka, to which she moved with her family at the age of six. Yokosuka was the site of one of the largest US naval bases in the Pacific, where masculine energy pulsed, and violent crimes and sexual assaults were rampant. As Ishiuchi later recounted, "Yokosuka was the town that taught me I was a woman." The shadows in *Yokosuka Story* are also the shadows cast by the American occupation over postwar Japan, and Ishiuchi, like many in her generation, had conflicting feelings about the influence of American culture, on the one hand fascinated with the cultural products—"we all wore jeans"—and on the other hand, harbouring resentment toward America. The sense of unease and fear compelled Ishiuchi to leave Yokosuka in 1966, at the age of nineteen. Yet between October 1976 and March 1977, she returned on weekends to complete *Yokosuka Story*.

II

Ishiuchi is a pioneer in the veritable "boys' club" of Japanese photography. In the influential *New Japanese Photography* show at MoMA in 1974, the curators John Szarkowski and Yamagishi Shōji did not include a single woman photographer. Later, the 1979 *Japan: A Self-Portrait* exhibition at the International Centre of Photography in New York, also curated by Yamagishi, only included one woman alongside eighteen male photographers: Ishiuchi Miyako. The twelve photos exhibited in *Japan: A Self-Portrait* were from Ishiuchi's *Apartment* series, which won the Kimura Ihei Memorial Photography Award in 1979, making her the first woman to win the prize. Ishiuchi is now considered one of the most important photographers working in Japan today.

III

In Ishiuchi's work, the personal and the subjective filter the act of seeing. Photography, though a product of technology and chemistry, is an affective artform for Ishiuchi that reflects the photographer's sensibilities. A photograph reveals not so much the truthfulness of reality, but the interiority of the person who pressed the shutter. By photographing the streets, buildings and strangers in Yokosuka, Ishiuchi confronted the city of her past, and the photos represented the memories that she "coughed up like black phlegm onto hundreds of stark white developing papers." If a subject resonated with one of her own memories, she would "hurriedly stow it

away in [the] camera." "That to me," remarks Ishiuchi, "is photography."

IV

In 1976, at a time when few women were exhibiting, Ishiuchi co-organized the group show, *Hyakka Ryoran* ("Riot of Flowers"), for which ten female photographers were asked to respond to the theme of "men," with Ishiuchi herself contributing photos of the male nude. She also wrote a manifesto for the exhibition catalogue: "Standing on its head the female experience of being captured in thousands, tens of thousands of images in this intensely personal process of photography, the female now deliberately chooses to see, to relentlessly and thoroughly see."

V

One of the most prized volumes in my library is a copy of issue 3 of *main* magazine (1996–2000), which I discovered in an independent bookstore in the Fukagawa district of Tokyo. *Main* was launched in 1996 by Ishiuchi with fellow photographer Narahashi Asako, its name based on the initials of the two founders while also referring to the French word for "hand." According to the founders, *main* was meant to be "a forum which 'the other hand' of these artists have made to demonstrate their work and themselves." The publication also represents "the other hand" of media, which exists outside the mainstream. Ishiuchi explains the impetus behind *main*: "We were tired of the old-fashioned



stuff . . . We don't need men, I thought . . . let's just do it ourselves." Despite the fact that Ishiuchi has resisted the label of "feminist," her work often demonstrates, as she has stated, a "commitment in regards to other women."

VI

Following *Yokosuka Story*, Ishiuchi produced *Apartment* (1977–78), featuring black-and-white photos of derelict postwar buildings inspired by her memories of the crowded single-room homes she shared with her family for thirteen years. She brought together the pictures of different apartments, photographed at different locations, to create a single, fictitious dwelling. Ishiuchi's goal, she stated, was not to produce documentary photographs of the apartments, but to "capture a feeling, more like a body odor—something invisible, rather than the apartment itself." In the interior spaces that she photographed, the peeling wallpaper,

the stained walls covered with posters of movie stars, the crammed cupboards, all bear the imprints of human lives.

VII

Ishiuchi's fortieth birthday compelled her to reflect on the ways in which time is sedimented on the body. She asked friends—and later, strangers—born in the same year as she was, to allow her to photograph their hands and feet. The series *1.9.4.7* (1988–89) features photos that reveal all the bodily imperfections that are often unseen by the world: the wrinkles, calluses, cuts, and patches of dryness. In one photo, a pair of upturned hands rests on the table; the creases on the palm and fingers are visible, as are the cracks around the nails. Studying this photo now, as a woman in my forties, with my fingertips touching the photographed hands of a stranger, I feel an affinity with this anonymous woman whose experiences and

hardship are narrated by the lines that Ishiuchi has captured. Photography, for all its focus on visual perception, might be capable of capturing something on the other side of the visible.

VIII

Interviewer: From the very beginning, your work has engaged with time and temporality. In *Apartment*, for example, and *Endless Night* (1978–80) with images of buildings that were former brothels, it felt like you were photographing these buildings as though they were flesh that held time within them.

Ishiuchi: When I shot *Apartment*, I did think of it as shooting the body of the building. A wall is a skin, you see. I was shooting time. The traces of time's accumulation. You can't see time with your eyes, you can't grab it with your hands. It has no smell. It has no form. I wanted to photograph the invisible time.

Interviewer: This is also evident in *Scars* (1995–2003), with the close-up shots of the material traces left by illness, injury, or war. Your photos of the burn marks, scabs, and scar tissue on damaged skin show the private records of painful experiences, but they are also evidence of survival.

Ishiuchi: The human body is a container for time. [And a scar] is an imprint of the past, welded onto a part of the body. Both the scars and the photographs are the manifestation of sorrow for the many things which cannot be retrieved.

Interviewer: Your images have a visceral and palpable quality. The grain in your gelatin silver prints gives the photos of buildings and bodies a tactile dimension. Could you speak to how that relates to your darkroom process, since such grain requires long hours in the darkroom?

Ishiuchi: Being alone in the darkroom and standing in front of these large pieces of photographic paper is both a physical and a psychological event. The dark room was like a womb for me. When you print, you are in the dark with only one red lamp. And from there, a new world is born. The products required in the darkroom were the same as those used to fix colour in fabric. So developing photographs became a dyeing process for me.

IX

In the aftermath of loss, how does one photograph absence? After her mother passed away, Ishiuchi, overwhelmed by grief in spite of their fraught relationship, gathered her mother's belongings and photographed the objects that had come into direct contact with her body—the lipsticks, gloves, shoes, and the hairbrush that still held tangled strands of hair. The first time I saw Ishiuchi's work in person was at the Met in New York, where I entered a dimly

lit room and encountered a large print of a red lipstick, almost worn down to the base, giving a sense of something left unfinished. Looking at this photo from Ishiuchi's *Mother's* (2000–2005) series, I thought of Roland Barthes studying photography in the aftermath of his mother's death; I thought of the photographer André Kertész taking Polaroids of a glass bust that reminded him of his deceased wife, as though the act of taking pictures could also be a work of mourning. The size of Ishiuchi's photo rendered the most minute details visible—the smudges on the black-and-gold lipstick tube, the striations left by the lips—and a feeling of sorrow seeped from the image. What began as a process of private mourning became a meditation on loss, on the relationship between the things left behind and the vanished lives they represent.

X

In 2007, Ishiuchi was invited to Hiroshima, where she photographed the clothing and objects that once belonged to the victims of the atomic bomb, now housed in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. While shooting the artifacts, Ishiuchi occasionally spoke to them, as though the dresses, blouses and bags—which were mostly owned by women—could reply and tell her of the lives they once inhabited. Using natural light and a light box, Ishiuchi illuminated the garments and objects, showcasing the texture and filaments of silk, organza and cotton. The resulting series, *ひろしま/hiroshima*, consists of colourful and ethereal still-life photos that push back against the monochromatic images of death and destruction that typify Hiroshima imagery. Ishiuchi's vision is one of the pre-bomb city, of a time when the owners of these garments chose their fashionable clothing with care, and led their ordinary lives until that fateful hour on August 6, 1945. In response to critics who claim she has aestheticized Hiroshima, Ishiuchi argues that “these photographs

are not records or documents. They are creations.” The feminine beauty that the photos convey is in many ways a product of her imagination, which becomes evident when her photos are compared to the faded fabrics shown on the website of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.

XI

Yet Ishiuchi's aesthetic vision is not seamless, for the viewer's eyes are drawn to the holes and tears on the garments, the frayed edges and scorch marks, the stains left by blood and black rain, all of which recall the brutal reality that befell the human bodies the garments once enveloped. The photos put me in mind of the plaster casts in Pompeii that likewise trace the outlines of the lost bodies, and mark the absent presence of those who have disappeared. The beauty found in Ishiuchi's photos is inseparable from the traces of death and destruction that leave their imprints on the fabric, the traces that both sustain and unsettle the photographs' aesthetic appeal.

XII

What is a photograph unable to capture?

ひろしま/hiroshima #102 shows a delicate pink blouse that once belonged to Shimokubo Kikuyo, who died on August 15, 1945, at the age of twenty-three, from injuries she sustained during the bombing. The white silk blouse, dyed pink by bloodstains, was made by Kikuyo's sister, Hagimoto Tomiko, who carefully preserved the garment in her room for decades, before donating it to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum in 2014.

What is a photograph unable to capture?

Although initially reluctant to be photographed, Ishiuchi's mother finally allowed her to capture images of her hands, feet, and burn marks for the *Body and Air* series (1999). The

photographing gave mother and daughter the chance to establish a newfound intimacy, and to resolve the tensions that had existed between them, at long last. Ishiuchi's mother passed away approximately ten months after the photo sessions began.

XIII

A photograph is memory, history, elegy. It is a record, a feminist manifesto, an archive. It is conversations missed and paths untrodden, a surface on top of countless strata, and a prism that refracts a single moment, dispersing it across different temporalities. A photograph is what survives of beauty on the far side of destruction. It arrests the wandering gaze and does not let go. And who are the ones that continue to photograph, in spite of the camera's limitations? "Those who can firmly grasp the world before their eyes," Ishiuchi writes, "to cherish and love it with all their hearts, are the people who photograph."

Acknowledgements

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum Peace Database, <https://hpmm-db.jp/en>.

Maddox, Amanda; with contributions by Itō Hiroomo and Miryam Sas. *Ishiuchi Miyako: Postwar Shadows*. The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2015.

Mitsuda, Yuri. "Ishiuchi Miyako." In *Aperture Conversations: 1985 to the Present*, edited by Melissa Harris and Michael Famighetti. Aperture, 2018.

Vermare, Pauline, Lesley A. Martin, Takeuchi Mariko, Carrie Cushman, and Kelly Midori McCormick, eds. *I'm So Happy You Are Here: Japanese Women Photographers from the 1950s to Now*. Aperture, 2024.

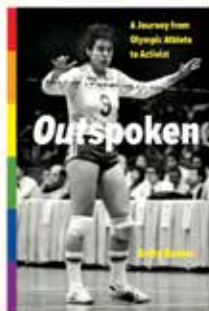
Editor's Note: Section VIII of this essay takes the form of an imagined conversation between an unnamed interviewer and Ishiuchi Miyako. The questions are invented. Each response is assembled from verbatim excerpts of Ishiuchi's published interviews and exhibition catalogues, selected and arranged into composite answers. The quoted material is drawn from *Aperture Conversations: 1985 to the Present* (2018); "Photography Makes History," (Louisiana Channel, 2020); "Publishing the Body," (*Aperture*, Spring 2014); *Scars*, Ishiuchi Miyako (Sokyusha, 2005); *Ishiuchi Miyako: Postwar Shadows* (2015); and "Ishiuchi Miyako: Photography as Psychological Event," (*Ocula Magazine*, 2021).

Christine Lai's debut novel, Landscapes, was published in 2023. She is currently at work on a second novel, which engages with photography and the urban culture of Tokyo. She holds a PhD in English literature from University College London.

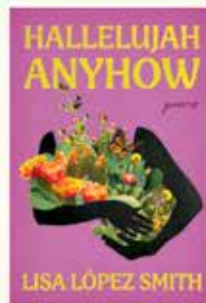


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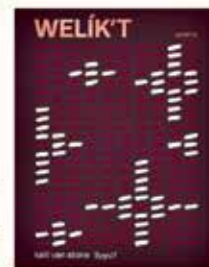
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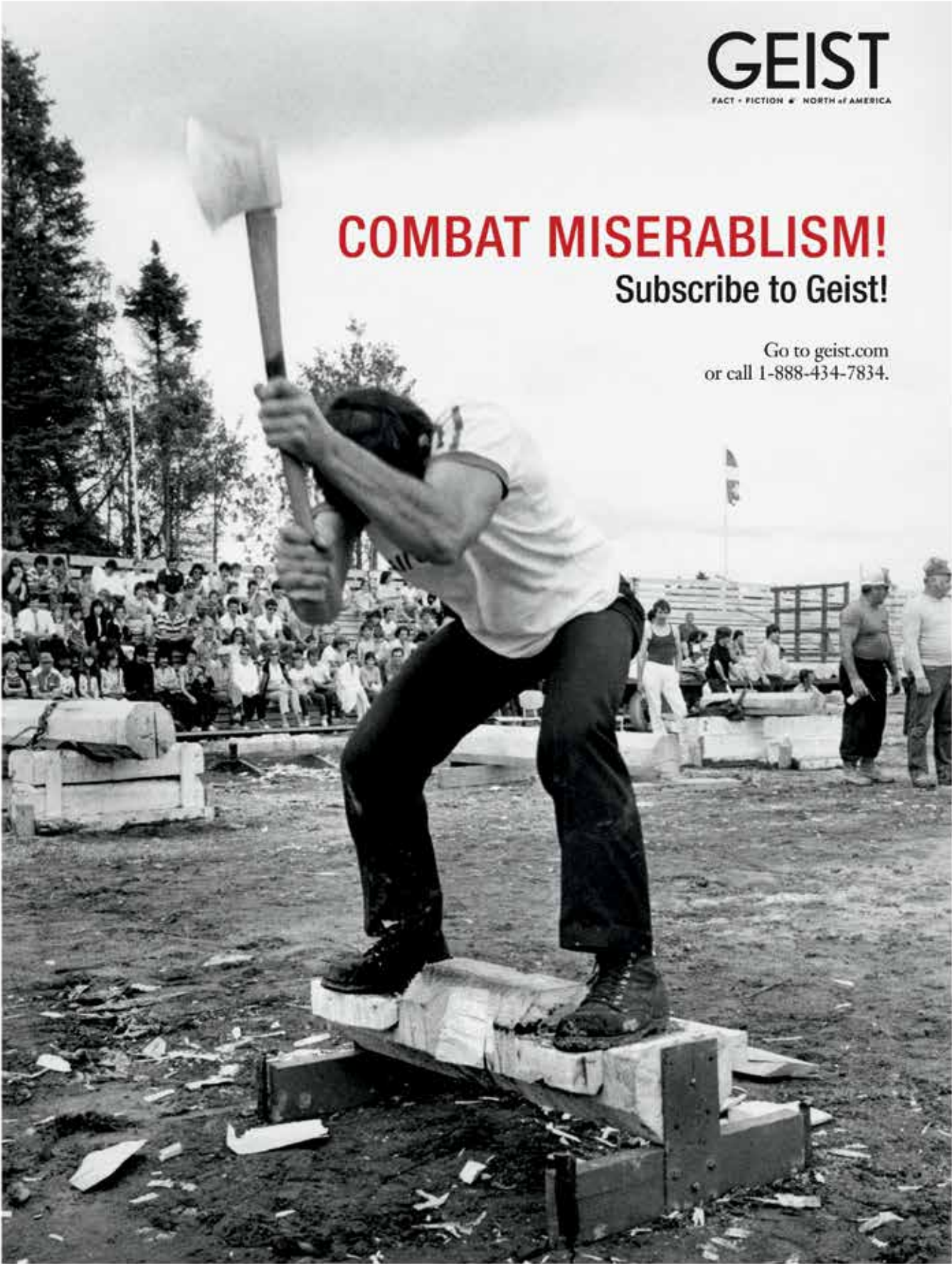
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ENDNOTES

REVIEWS, COMMENTS, CURIOSA

TRYING ON THE CANADIAN DREAM FOR SIZE

The Bigamist (Linda Leith Publishing) is a peculiar pseudo-love story written by Felicia Mihali and translated by Linda Leith, which details the particularities of intercontinental immigration, assimilation, and the translation (or mistranslation) of relationships relocated to unfamiliar settings. Mihali, who lives in Montréal, seemingly draws from her own experience as a Romanian émigré to Eastern Canada to tell the story of a teacher, scholar and writer who decides to uproot herself and her husband, to get out of her element and try on the Canadian Dream for size. In Montréal the narrator lives out her new life as a prolific cook, proficient domestic housewife, homebody, avid reader, and member of a haphazard group of Romanian intelligentsia. Meanwhile, her husband refuses to work or participate in any of the trappings of North American life, and seems determined to live a frugal yet curious and curmudgeonly existence as a “bad citizen” and dependent husband. Everything is put in perspective when the narrator meets Roman, a typical bourgeois living in the suburb of Laval, with whom she begins an affair. *The Bigamist* is an interesting and unexpected commentary on the immigrant experience in Montréal, told by a fallible woman who refuses to settle or be satisfied, while simultaneously being unable to resist going through the motions of being a “good” Romanian woman. Visceral, philosophical, grim, witty and grounded, *The Bigamist* exists in a grey area between fairy tale and exposé. —*Thalia Stopa*



MERE IMMORTALS

One recent Saturday, I visited the **Richard Avedon: Immortal, Portraits of Aging, 1951–2004** exhibition at the Montréal Museum of Fine Arts with my grandmother. The exhibit begins with pictures of Avedon’s father, taken as he approached death with each year of illness. “Not one happy expression!” my grandmother quips. Beyond this separate, private room are Avedon’s portraits of public figures. The images highlight the soft flesh of faces, changes in once-taut ears and foreheads over time. The slough of under-eye skin drooping gently onto cheeks. Folds on necks, on chins. The deep smile lines that carve archways around the mouth. I am taken with a ferocious portrait of Samuel Beckett, his angular forehead wrinkled like spiked canyons above his significant eyebrows. I particularly enjoy the portraits of writers, not just because I know of them—though I am swayed by familiarity—but because I do not recognize many of them. Beforehand, I did not know what Beckett or

Auden—with his lovely wide ears and wide nose—looked like. I am compelled by their presence among all the other, more famous figures and performers. But the anguished, intimate images of Avedon’s father always cast their shadow. Even when looking at the cheeky half-smile of Antonioni, with his beautiful and apparently adoring wife, I can’t help thinking of the elder Avedon, approaching his death. At the exhibit’s end, a self-portrait triptych of Avedon himself is displayed. He looks to one side, then down at his wrinkled hands before staring straight at us. I leave the exhibition with my grandmother, and as we have our coffees, I watch the shape of her tendons as they move beneath the softened skin of her wrists. —*Morgan Maclaren Beck*

HOW TO RAISE A FATHER

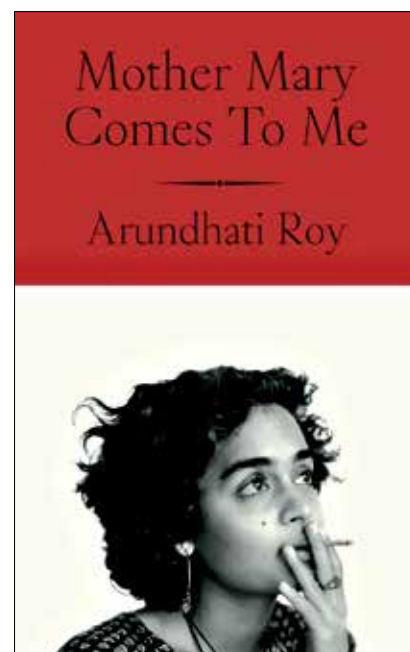
Lori Thicke’s memoir **Dreamer’s Daughter** (Simon & Schuster) has a crackerjack opening: on a morning in 1972, Lori, then age fourteen, arrives back at her house in Kirkland Lake, Ontario, along with her father and nine-year-old brother, to find their home in ashes, smoke still hanging in the air. Her father, the dreamer of the title, takes it all in. Even after realizing that he’d let their house insurance lapse, he thrusts his arms skyward and exclaims, “Well, kids, now we’re free!” This potentially traumatizing incident helps explain the book’s subtitle: *Surviving My Childhood and Raising My Father*, and sets the tone for the years that follow. Just how *do* you survive and try to reach your *own* goals when the head of your single-parent family is a man who dreams big, who is independent and entrepreneurial by nature,

and whose ambitious schemes always seem to come to naught? There's the self-built gold-mining contraption, which will soon have them all living like royalty—until it breaks down in a remote streambed and is left to rust and ruin. There's the brilliant plan to buy up broken-down cars, crush them on the cheap by driving over them with a bulldozer, and then transport them in bulk by ferry, on a semitrailer, to the scrap-metal dealer in Vancouver—only to have the load burst into flames after driving onto the ferry. Despite these serial failed dreams, it is obvious that the relationship between Lori and her father is a loving one: he encourages her and lets her make her own mistakes, in exchange for which she becomes the practical one in the family, taking care of many of the essentials—in effect raising her own father, rather than vice versa. You start the book expecting disaster and end it feeling full of hope.

—Michael Hayward

SENTENCE-LEVEL ADRENALINE

Arundhati Roy grew up in a small town in India, where her unpredictable mother founded a school to give both girls and boys a modern education, and while Roy's mother was patient with her students, her two children bore the brunt of her temper. Roy left home at sixteen, became a political activist who is still regularly taken to court over her writing, and earned an unimaginable amount of money for her first novel, *The God of Small Things*, an immediate bestseller. Her memoir, **Mother Mary Comes to Me** (Scribner) is stuffed with fabulous writing, dark humour and sharp irony, but what made my heart beat faster were her sentences. Before *The God of Small Things*, Roy wrote screenplays and magazine articles while she struggled to find her own writer's language which, in her words, "was out there somewhere, a live language-animal, a striped and spotted thing,



grazing, waiting for me the predator." See what I mean? Of the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2002, Roy wrote that "US hypernationalism was punching the whole world in the face, making our local Indian brand look like a shabby hand-me-down." Of her first crush, who had long hair and a beard and reminded her of Jesus, she wrote, "Brown Jesus, I mean, not the geographically-relocated, genetically-modified blonde one." Throughout the book Roy refers to her mother as "Mrs. Roy" and reflects that she "hovered over me like an affectionate iron angel. The metallic swoosh of her iron wings spurred me to pick the big fights, not the small ones." Later in life, when Mrs. Roy told her grownup daughter that she must find good husbands for her stepdaughters, Roy's "jaw dropped, bounced on the floor, and went somersaulting down the street." For me, this was the most thrilling sentence in the book, but there are many more in there. So jump right in! —Patty Osborne



TO LIVE A SECRET LIFE

Wild People Quiet (Scribner) is the third novel by Tara Gereaux, a citizen of the Métis Nation, Saskatchewan,

and what a novel it is. The title is explained in an epigraph that opens the book: “In 1869, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald sent the lieutenant governor of the Northwest Territories to Rupert’s Land to negotiate terms with Louis Riel and his Métis supporters for entry of the prairie territory into the confederation. Macdonald told a colleague: ‘I anticipate that he will have a good deal of trouble, and it will require considerable management to keep those wild people quiet.’” *Wild People Quiet* tells the story of Florence, a Métis woman passing as white in a small Saskatchewan town in the 1940s. Her life is tightly controlled, as a secret life must be. It’s also lonely. Everything changes when a group of Métis workers are hired on to a local farm, one of whom Florence shares a past with. Moving between timelines, from the early 1900s and Florence’s childhood to the post-war years of the novel’s present day, we gradually understand the reasons for Florence’s deception. There is no room for a “half-breed” in a white town, no employment, no future. The novel goes deep, and by the end we have been on a remarkable journey with a remarkable woman. The motif of beads and beadwork carries throughout, adding both history and story. *Wild People Quiet* is an enthralling, lovingly told story by a major talent. —Peggy Thompson

FAMILY NEVER FORGETS

The allure of multi-generational novels is their ability to tackle expansive emotion with a particular depth: the wisdom of an older generation mingling with the truth of the younger. *Fancy Gap* by Zak Jones (Hamish Hamilton) reveals that the old are not always wise, the young are almost never truthful, and the reality of a situation lies in the spaces that connect sentences, pages and chapters. Jones’s novel often focusses on the

small—fragments of memory slipped between gestures and dialogue, which expand into a web of hardship, injustice and relationships. Grace, the grandmother of the Fuquay family, who has absconded from town but remained in rural Appalachia, has a small cult following veneered by the thick smoke of charismatic preaching. Her callous self-victimization serves dual roles, that of drawing the reader into her well-laid mythology, then allowing the scales to fall from your eyes as you discover the connections between each family member’s perspective. Grace’s grandson Dalton has recently received a discharge “other than honourable” from the military and returns to a town that refuses to let him escape teenage wrongdoings, forcing him to come face-to-face with his mother Jane’s breast cancer prognosis. The events of the novel seem to radiate out from Dalton’s wrongdoings—and this is, in fact, the way that both Grace and Jane view their

lives. However, Jones consistently draws attention to small, unnoticed moments that reverberate through the family, every truth undergirded by a lie, which has its own element of honesty. *Fancy Gap* manages to strike that difficult balance between highlighting the nuance of each emotion felt and word said, while revealing even more in what is left ignored and unspoken. For those who appreciate ambiguity in their multi-generational sagas, I would recommend this book. —Malaika Mitra

YOU SAY POTATO, I SAY ALOO

Two tandoori spice-coloured signs spell out Himalaya Restaurant at the corner of Main and 50th in Vancouver. Fittingly, this is the restaurant’s fiftieth year, standing tall in the thinning Punjabi Village. My mom suggested that we come here for aloo parathas, a flatbread filled

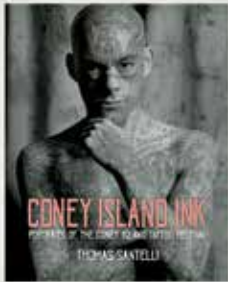


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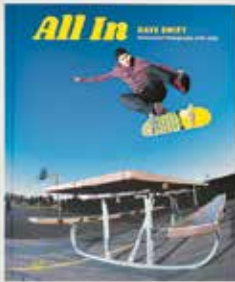
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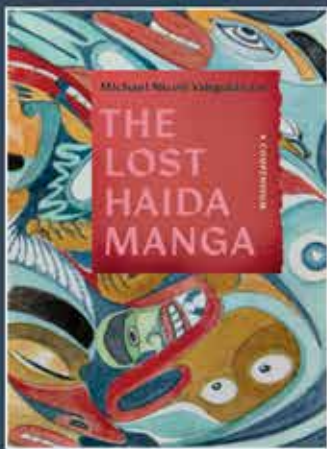

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From celebrated Haida artist Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas comes a striking new collection tracing the origins and evolution of Haida Manga—a bold visual genre that blends North Pacific Indigenous iconography and framelines with the dynamic energy of graphic storytelling.

“Yahgulanaas has refracted the familiar comics form through a Haida aesthetic to produce something that is both uniquely his own and a testament to his cultural inheritance. Beautiful, bold, amusing, poignant — one of a kind and a breath of fresh air.”

— JOE SACCO,
author of *Palestine*

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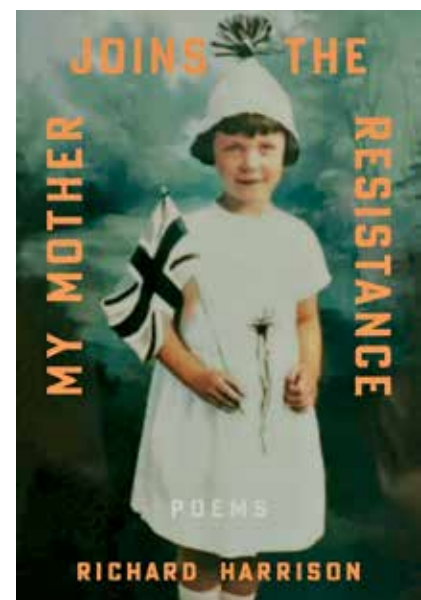
with spices, mashed potatoes and onions. She used to eat at Himalaya when she first immigrated to Canada in 1974, a newlywed seeking authentic home cooking. We schlep in from the dreary grey. My mother points to her favourite table by the window, and the young server takes us over. It's a time warp, no different than when I was a kid. Bollywood love songs whispering from the overhead speakers. Scuffed, white tile floors with chipped corners that would make Pythagoras smile. Vinyl seat cushions, Formica tables, napkins shoved beneath table legs to level them. On the far side of the restaurant, the display of Indian sweets looks like fireworks: barfis, gulab jamuns, ladoos and jalebis. Oh, to dunk them in a glass of masala chai. My mom orders us a paratha each with sides of yoghurt: a Saturday morning staple for me and my brothers. We would eat until we ached. She wraps her hands around her warm cup of chai. She can't spin parathas as she did before. Her hands are arthritic from her years as a custodian: wringing mops, buffing floors, Windexing windows. Then, later, at home, pinching and rolling out paratha dough. I can see the blue veins just beneath the thin skin of her knuckles. She adjusts her royal purple shawl over her shoulder. The sky opens for a blink, and sunlight cuts through the window onto her face, her skin soft and radiant as ghee. She smiles. I try to remember the last time we came here together, and I'm sure that it was before my voice dropped. The food arrives, and we dust the yoghurt with chili powder, spread melting butter on top of the parathas. My mom nods. We each fold our parathas and break off a piece. They're soft, and have a textbook-perfect potato-to-bread ratio. I pause as she scoops some yoghurt and pops the bite of paratha into her mouth. She bobbles her head (you know the one). I exhale, then

eat, a spicy rich warmth flooding my tongue. It's Saturday morning.

—Paul Dhillon

ACT OF REMEMBRANCE

My Mother Joins the Resistance (Buckrider Books) by Richard Harrison is his latest collection of poems, themed around the life of his mother, who grew up in war-time Britain and died by MAiD in 2017. The result is a tender and lyrical portrait, not just of his mother but of a family, in which Harrison evokes both the wistfulness of youth and the sorrows of aging. Like many memoirs, this collection is very much about the act of remembering. “No wonder / we all love the fiction of time travel; / the drama of the way we remember—past and present / all in one place, the future going back / to mess things up or make them right over and over / in its endless work. The boy remembers himself not the way he was, / but changed because he remembers.” Harrison's poems toggle back and forth in time and space, like family snapshots in a box, in a way that mimics how we actually recall memories. Harrison grapples with time, old age, trauma and death in a clean and sparse language, and the effect is quite stunning. “All there is, is light and darkness



and wonder. / And in that moment, there is no difference, either, / between love and the memory of love." Anecdotes are often told in a conversational tone, but the line breaks and indents suggest that nothing is as simple or as easy as it might seem. These poems are studded with sparkling insights and images that deserve multiple readings and really shine when read aloud.

—Cornelia Mars

A WEE MUSEUM

Everything in the **Little Museum of Dublin** has been sourced or donated by the citizens of Dublin. And it *is* little, housed in a narrow old building. This isn't a museum where you ramble through; you're led in a small group by someone who is part guide, part stand-up comedian (my words). Our guide is Saul, a young man wearing a tight, mustard-coloured three-piece suit complete with bow tie, with a shock of black hair that stands straight up. Before we set off, I ask the young woman behind the ticket desk about the object beside her, which resembles a large space heater. She tells me it is an air raid siren from World War II and lets me give the crank a turn—and there is the sound, familiar from so many films and television programs set in the Blitz. So this is an air raid siren, and this is how they work! Who knew? Saul herds us upstairs to a small, pleasant room, where the first item we see is a large, framed piece of . . . art? Some sort of installation with rows of items, circular, behind glass. "This piece," explains Saul, with a straight face, "was donated by the dogs of Dublin, and these are their tennis balls." Looking closer, yes: half-chewed tennis balls, each with a dog's name beneath. Saul then indicates a more museum-like object on a plinth, contained in a glass box: a large book, opened, with pages of extremely thin paper, indicating great age. "Now, this is an early edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Have any

of you picked that story up and had a go?" A few hands go up. "And did any of you manage to finish it?" No hands remain raised. "Not to worry, that's not unusual. You'll see that we have the book opened at the last page, in case you're curious how it all ends." The final room on the top floor is dedicated to more contemporary culture, including Bono's sunglasses. Which are certainly as iconic as *Ulysses* and the tennis balls of Dublin's dogs.

—Peggy Thompson

TO THE LETTER

Collections of letters are published infrequently now that email and text messages have replaced paper-based "snail mail." Three recent books are welcome exceptions. **Love, Joe: The Selected Letters of Joe Brainard** (Columbia University Press) is an eclectic collection of the letters Joe Brainard wrote to many of his poet-and-fellow-artist friends (and to his lovers) from 1959 up to his death from AIDS-induced pneumonia in 1994. Brainard is best known for his experimental memoir *I Remember* (1970), in which he recalls incidents from his boyhood, each memory beginning with the identical incantation, *I remember*: "I remember taffeta. And the way it sounded"; "I remember my collection of Nova Scotia pamphlets and travel information." *I Remember* proved influential, the "I remember" opening being copied first by Georges Perec in his 1978 memoir *Je me souviens*, and later still by George Bowering in *The Moustache*, his 1993 homage to Canadian painter Greg Curnoe. Poet Anne Waldman was among Brainard's correspondents, as were John Ashberry, Ted Berrigan and Andy Warhol, a reminder (if Patti Smith's fabulous *Just Kids* were not proof enough) that New York City was a hotbed of creativity in the 1960s and '70s. **From Ted to Tom: The Illustrated Envelopes of**

A story of
fractured
sisterhood,
aching hunger,
and what
blooms in
the dark.



For readers of
Nightbitch and
Motherthing

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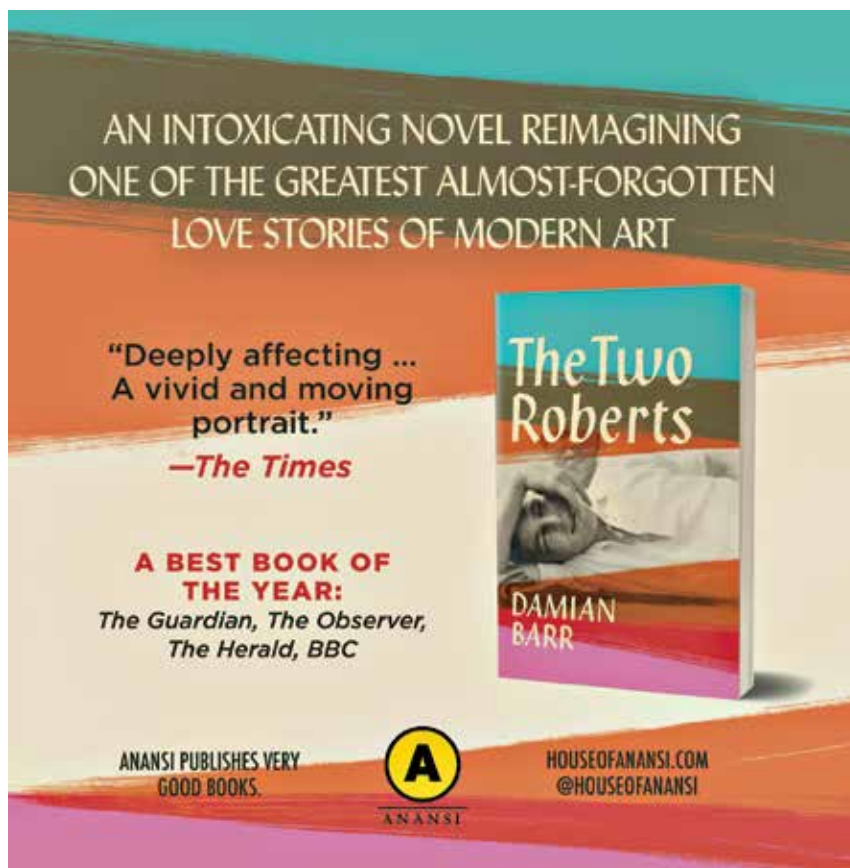
Edward Gorey (NYRB) presents all fifty of the distinctive envelopes that famed author and illustrator Edward “Ted” Gorey sent to his friend and pen pal Tom Fitzharris, in 1974 and 1975. Pairs of phlegmatic dogs abound: masked; sporting varsity sweaters (bearing the letter T, of course); lounging on unicycles; standing stoically on rocks, gazing out to sea. **Over to You: Letters Between a Father & Son** (Pantheon) collects letters between art critic and essayist John Berger and his son Yves, an artist. In these letters, written between 2015 and 2016, the pair discuss “work, time, the universe, life, and death,” as well as specific artists and their work, reproductions of which illustrate the letters. There is a tenderness to the correspondence, which may have been prompted by an increasing awareness of mortality (John Berger died on January 2, 2017, at age ninety). —*Michael Hayward*

ESSAYS AS POEMS AS ESSAYS

In the title essay of her collection **Is This an Illness or an Accident?** (Caitlin Press), Daniela Elza reflects on bureaucracy, drawing on intense experiences while a pregnant grad student in Ohio. “If you stand out too much, a paper-pusher puts a magnifying glass on you and holds it there till it burns.” Anger runs through many of these memories, but the stronger current is her joy in climbing trees as a child in Nigeria, in family ties to Bulgaria, in community building in Vancouver—the place she finally calls home. Almost simultaneously with the publication of this essay collection, McGill-Queen’s University Press published Elza’s latest collection of poems, **SCAR/CITY**, in their Hugh MacLennan Poetry Series. Quite a literary coup! Not surprisingly, certain themes run through both the essays and the poems: urban development, community building and personal identity. “today it’s a building

lobby / yesterday it was // a tree.” To simply describe the wood panelling in a corporate office and remind readers of its forest origin would be prosaic, but to throw the transition at us as the conclusion to a tale of eviction and protest packs a real punch, particularly that pause before “a tree.” Punctuation, word play, allusion and other poetic tools are wielded to carve out deeper meaning from everyday experience. The poems demand our attention. Most contemporary poetry reaches an elite audience, but Elza’s subject matter is the here and now of the ordinary citizen, and she does not aim at obscurity. She also has a wicked sense of humour. Pondering the fate of Vancouver’s Georgia Viaduct, she concludes: “if it were not a viaduct / it would have / jumped off a bridge / decades ago.” Both of these collections lead us vividly to many places, but most magically into the heart of a courageous and creative writer.

—*David Shewell*



GUILT: A WAY THROUGH

In the riveting opening of Chris Moore’s **The Power of Guilt: Why We Feel It and Its Surprising Ability to Heal** (HarperCollins), we are told of a life-changing event. Leaving a party one dark night, Moore was involved in a horrific accident. Haunted by subsequent events, he does eventually manage to move forward, achieving a doctorate at Cambridge University. Later, Moore served and taught at Dalhousie University in his home province of Nova Scotia, where his articles on psychology were widely published. In *The Power of Guilt*, Moore interweaves the personal with the academic. Complex topics such as family, relationships, friendships, religion, law and culture are enlivened by vignettes of personal experience, which illustrate Moore’s comprehensive research. Guilt has an “image problem,” he

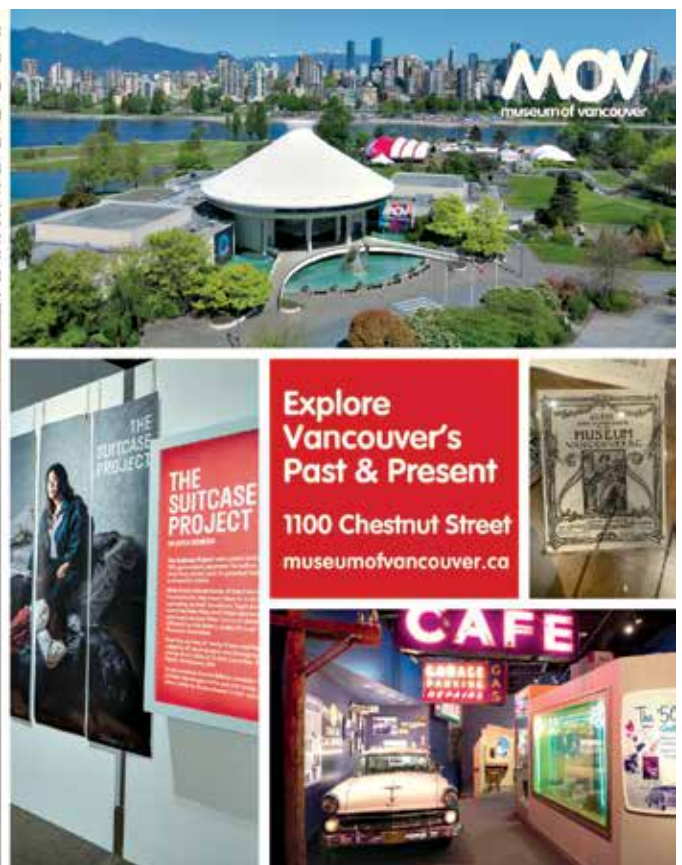
writes. It is a signal that something requires our attention, and he maintains that experiencing guilt means that we care. Guilt indicates that we are not indifferent, nor psychopathic; those niggling jabs of uncomfortable emotion are a call to the self. And who has not been confronted with this complicated sensation, as a child, parent, sibling, lover or worker? Each chapter takes us ever deeper into the labyrinth of our own history as we retrace Moore's path. Throughout, Moore shines a light in bleak places with his hard-learned message of remediation. Sensitively written, *The Power of Guilt* is a recommended read. —*Maryanna Gabriel*

WHEN YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE THE ONLY ONE

Sometime around 2001, blues guitarist Sue Foley came off the road. She was thirty-three years old and wanted

to stay at home with her four-year-old son. By her own admission, she was a changed woman in the way motherhood makes you. Still, Foley struggled with the conflict between devotion to her child and the pull to get back to that other self. In this case, that other self was a guitarist based in Austin, Texas, straight out of Antone's Nightclub music scene. She wondered how other women did it. And so, from 2001 to 2011, Foley interviewed over a hundred guitarists. Eventually, between raising her son, touring, writing and recording her music, the weight of this work became unwieldy. The way through was a PhD in Musicology and focusing on historical research. The album *One Guitar Woman* was her dissertation. In her new book, **Guitar Women: Conversations & Life Lessons with Six-String Heroines** (Sutherland House), Foley features twenty-five musicians, in what will hopefully become volume one of a

series. There is no one soundtrack: Bonnie Raitt, Rory Block, Nancy Wilson, Suzi Quatro, Alice Stuart and Ellen McIlwaine represent an older rocking, sliding blues vibe; Liona Boyd and Sharon Isbin are the classical nomads; June Millington, Del Rey and Alice Artzt are the historians. There are also a handful of women from a still earlier generation who stood alone and broke it all down: Carol Kaye, Etta Baker, Marian Hall and Barbara Lynn. The commonalities are obvious. Most started young and didn't quit. The questions are the same, too. What happens when you have a child, or your record fails, or alcohol and drugs pull you away? With the exception of flamenco guitarist Charo, whom Foley spoke with in 2020, the remaining interviews took place between 2001 and 2009. These older interviews seem to land closer to the truth. Time has not forgotten what it was like to think you were the only one. —*Connie Kubns*



The GEIST Cryptic Crossword

Prepared by Meandricus

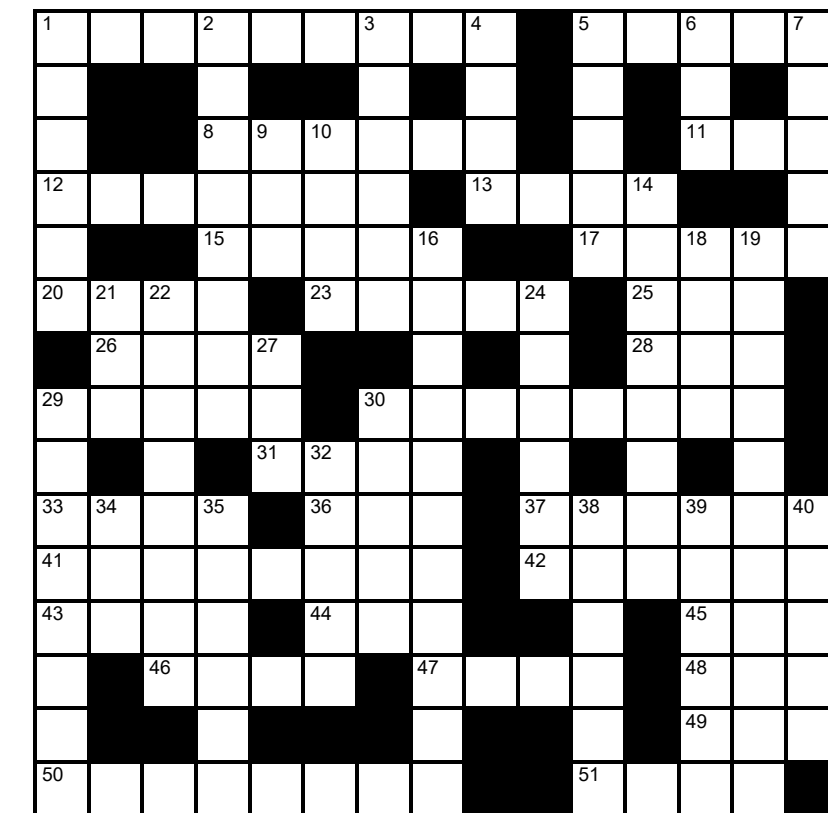
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A winner will be selected at random
from correct solutions and will be
awarded a one-year subscription to
Geist or—if already a subscriber—a
Geist magnet.

ACROSS

- 1 Try using your impressive intelligence
to clear out your brain lint
- 5 They say they're intelligent but I
think they just dress well
- 8 Guys like Jimmy had no cause
- 11 Why does this do-over hurt? (abbrev)
- 12 A private tag line confuses some
external organs
- 13 Do you mind following the Queen's
rules?
- 15 OMG, is he in charge in Mecca?
- 17 OK, pay off that roof rascal so we can
get some sleep!
- 20 In the beginning, Lewis's twins were
just too sweet
- 23 When does that hungry bird get up
for breakfast?
- 25 Johnny was a maverick but did he
speak Yiddish?
- 26 When Red Rover calls me I have to run
- 28 That picture gives me attractive
vibrations (abbrev)
- 29 When the singer growls it really tests
my mettle
- 30 They usually park their auto near the
airport
- 31 Tuck and taper before you run
- 33 That cow sounds like it's pouting
- 36 Just put on your boots and stop
sounding disgusted!
- 37 Those unsophisticated Australians
- 41 Formal attire in Bangkok can lead to
dark language (2)
- 42 Unlike Edison, we're going to play
within the boundaries
- 43 We got cleaned out in Ontario but
we're still loyal
- 44 To liven things up, let's connect
outside! (abbrev)
- 45 She got 'er done!
- 46 Which side chose to have two festivals
in the Maldives?
- 47 It's kind of nuts that they claimed it
made things go better



- 48 Grab your calorimeter card, go to the
clinic, and get censored (abbrev)
- 49 He always mistakes the duration of his
jog (abbrev)
- 50 It'd be smarter to bar Erin from that
stupid app
- 51 When the burning flame went grey,
they pulled the anchor

DOWN

- 1 Don't you think natural light is
stronger than artificial?
- 2 I think it's just parroting info about a
rainbow in Australia
- 3 Did she really fly a mile a minute?
- 4 Sit down! Your fundament is showing
- 5 My French readers know a lot
- 6 Do we always have showers at 4?
(abbrev)
- 7 Can you visualize preoccupation?
- 9 In Greece it might arrive on the 7th
- 10 Sounds like that cotton-pickin' singer
might not have shown up
- 14 Don't act like pigs! That food waste
was meant for me
- 16 Did Kent fire her for exercising her
mind without paying?
- 18 Is that pure butter bean from South
America?
- 19 By the way, I judge your comments to
be unnecessary (2)
- 21 On Wednesday he was sad
- 22 Can you get these people out while I
use the toilet?

- 24 Hey guys, it sounds like you know
who you are!
- 27 There's nothing sinister about driving
in Britain (abbrev)
- 29 The failed party left me speechless (2)
- 30 Sounds like it was ludicrous to think
the girl was ours
- 32 Can you operate those vehicles
without a manual?
- 34 I was sure the Canadian functionary
said that we're all bi (abbrev)
- 35 In Greece, rounded mouldings can be
mistaken for sea urchins!
- 38 We can ride the tower or we can go
via train (abbrev)
- 39 They often duck down before eating
- 40 Herb seems to have some sharp edges,
so he always puts a damper on a party

Solution to Puzzle 132

S	E	C	A	T	E	U	R	S		A	U	G	E	R
I	U		N		C	A	R	P	E		A			
C	O	L	O	U	R	W	A	Y		A	R	E		I
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O	U		P	O	T	A	T	O	S	C	O	O	P	
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B	L	U	E	B	E	R	R	Y	P	I	C	K	E	R



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