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AURORA BRACKETT

THE EDGE OF MERCURY

She was making a list. Too many things had been disappearing and Emma believed in ghosts. She looked up at Henry standing at the sink. He'd used too much dish soap again. White foam freckled his arms and dripped into the basin. He was so attentive with his chores. She thought of getting up, of grabbing hold of his arm. Numbers were scribbled on the pages in front of her.

Last week, on the way to the mailbox, she'd heard a voice distinctly saying her name. It was a man's voice, half-whispered but urgent, as if he had something important to say and wanted her full attention. She supposed it was the wind or a flight of fancy, but there were so many other strange things. They'd been happening more and more. The bath left running when she'd gone to answer the phone was turned off when she returned. Henry had been outside pruning trees. The radio turned off when she knew she'd left it on. Things disappeared and reappeared. Eight years ago, she'd lost her favourite brooch on a trip to New York, and last month she'd found it sitting next to the bathroom sink. She almost cried when she saw it. Henry swore he didn't know where it had come from. Nights sometimes, when she was watching TV, she thought he'd come into the room, thought he was sitting in the corner chair, but he was already in bed. Asleep with his pants on again—she'd stopped bothering with that. And how many times in the night had she felt him stroking her hair, touching her shoulder, only to turn and find him curled into himself at the other edge of the mattress? She wrote all this down, pressing the pencil firmly to the paper.

"Did you water the roses?" he asked. "It's gonna be hot all week." Henry was looking out the window at the yellowing weeds.

"No," she answered.

"It's gonna be hot," Henry said. He ran the water again.

Water the roses, she wrote at the bottom of the page. It had been hot. They'd kept to the house, shopping at night if they had to. She'd thought of a movie or an air-conditioned mall, but never decided to go. Henry fell asleep at the movies. He didn't like any of the ones she picked. Space travel movies, that's all he'd watch. She used to have a nightmare, hadn't had it in years. In the dream she'd be standing over the sink, just where he was now, and she'd see him in the yard looking through his telescope. It was night. Everything dark and unseen but her husband and the stars. It was good, usually, the beginning of this dream. Because how often do you really see a person? There

he was, his pants loose at his waist revealing white skin. She smiled. She'd had the dream so often. It changed from time to time. Sometimes she'd call out to him and he would turn his head and there would be nothing there. Nothing at all. Sometimes she would watch as Henry was devoured by the sky. It was slow; the blackness came and blotted him out in patches. It was disgusting. Why dream such things?

Water the roses, Henry thought. Emma won't remember. She flits from thing to thing, always up and doing something else. He scrubbed the bottom of the pot, trying to rub the black out. It needed something stronger—a soak in vinegar and soda. The yard went dry again. Nothing he could do. Burrs stuck in his socks. He spent hours picking them out. Didn't bother to change his clothes much lately. Emma complained. Dirt and whatnot on his pants; it made him feel productive to see it add up the way it did. Why put on another pair? People don't make sense. Change their clothes every half hour. Wash their faces three times a day. Pay attention to trivial things. She reads to him from the paper in the morning, "So and so adopted a puppy. So-and-so wed." Who are these people? Why is this written down for others to read? Fill their minds with chatter. At the store the girls talk about their teams and their shows. What are you going to do with your future? he wants to ask them.

Emma's chair scraped against the tile. There she goes again, he thought. It bothered him more lately. He could sit in one spot for three hours and in the meantime she'd have made a thousand revolutions around every room. He could always concentrate. Once in awhile a young man would search him out to ask him about Palomar. How did they know him? Astronomy bled into cosmology and there was the entire universe to grapple with. Distracted, absent-minded. He loved his work. Now they wrote about implosion, dark matter. The solar system was archaeology—they wanted the whole universe. The way the new generation changes things. Challenging Einstein! Now Anne calls to tell him about her therapy. "Dad, you were never there." What did she want him to say?

The steel wool scraped his fingertips raw. Emma was playing the piano. It was fall. She was playing the piano and Anne was outside chasing the dog. They ran around the trees, girl shrieking, dog barking. So much lightness in the air around them. The laughter bubbling up, filling his head. The piano—staccato high notes bouncing. He was dizzy. They kept spinning, wearing patterns into the grass beneath their feet. Stop that, he thought. Stop. But there was no one. It was another time.

He put down the pot and picked up a bowl. Emma's oatmeal from this morning. It was easy to wash clean. Just hot water and a sponge.

Emma didn't play songs anymore, but made up her own melodies. Maybe it didn't sound very good, but she loved the way it felt not to care, not to think about where her hands had to go. For years she'd played strictly, even taught Anne, "Now arch your palm." She held a ruler under the girl's hands as she'd been taught. And a ruler to her back. Anne in her tutu squirmed and giggled. "You're tickling me!" She wanted to be a dancer. A dancer should know something about music. Now Emma played with her eyes closed. Her hands wove the sounds together. She wondered if Henry had noticed. He used to love to listen.

He would come to her father's house every Saturday—a well-dressed, quiet man. "Harvard!" her father liked to point out to anyone who would listen. "He studies at Harvard!" After dinner, they were left alone in the front room. Her father called it the parlour. For months they hardly spoke. Emma wasn't accustomed to suitors. She played the piano and Henry listened, sitting on the couch behind her, hands clasped between his knees. He paid attention to music in a way she'd never known possible, as though every tiny detail mattered, every note, the up and down movement of her elbows, the weight of her foot on the pedals. When she glanced at him, she caught him looking at her in the way she'd observed people looking at paintings. It made her nervous. But Henry kept coming back. Emma began to pay attention to herself under his gaze. She noticed the fluidity of her movements, the rise and fall of her breath against beats to a measure. She noticed the freckles on her arms, the curve of her waist.

Now Henry was eighty-three. The tap ran in the kitchen. There were the roses. There was her list. What would she do with it when she finished? Her hands were splayed across two octaves, the webbing between her fingers stretched thin. The room was darkening and Emma hummed a melody. There hadn't been that many dishes. He did everything so slowly now. It chilled her to think of him like this. There was just something about the bend of his back over the sink, the way his feet rooted to the floor, as though she'd seen an image that would always remain fixed to that spot. An old man washing dishes. His dirt-heavy clothes, beads of soap and sweat stuck to his pale skin. He was strong, unquestionably solid, and yet there was nothing about her husband that Emma could ever touch, could ever hold on to. He would always be there, just out of reach. She would remain at a distance, observing him.

A car drove past the house. She used to pace the yard, waiting for him to come home, his dinner in foil on the stove. She used to yell so fiercely—she wanted a husband, not a scientist. "That's your line," Henry would say. "Put it in the papers." She played one note of a song, over and over, her eyes closed. What had happened to all that anger? It fell asleep somewhere along the way. Buried itself, sunk down and gave up. You can only repeat yourself so often before your words lose the thread of the thing they were sewn to. She mouthed lyrics without sound, imagining the two of them dancing, his hand warm at her back. Emma noticed a red blooming beneath her eyelids. A light had been turned on. Henry. She smiled and continued to play.

He turned off the water. Emma was singing, a halting song. There was a room in the house where he used to sit, going over images. The scarred surface of a planet. Her voice just outside, putting their daughter to sleep, a lullaby. A grey wash of dust brightened by heat. He'd held his face closer to the photo. He'd brought it home to show them Mariner's miracle. *A pearl*, his wife had said. *It looks like a pearl.* In the bedroom, Anne's voice lilted questions and his wife shushed her. The edge of a crater raised from an impact four billion years ago. *Listen*, Emma was saying. He looked through the magnifying glass. The ticking of a clock. What had made that crater? *Listen.* A song. She was singing, the girl's eyes closing. The edge of Mercury and behind that, behind that, silence. "Who made the pearl?" his daughter wanted to know. It all came down to questions he could never answer. Just listen. That's all a man could do. She was singing and he was listening, her father clearing his throat in the next room. She was singing and he was listening, running his finger along the edge of a planet, standing at the sink, lost in a wash of time. He couldn't isolate a single note.

It was dark and Henry had turned on the light for her. She hated singing aloud but felt compelled to. Her face was flushed, her eyes still closed. She rested her fingers for a moment. He was there—leaning against the wall, just behind her left shoulder. She could hear his breathing, strained through a stuffed nose and see him in her mind's eye, hands in his pockets, face lit with a smile. She heard the sound of a cup being placed on the kitchen counter. She opened her eyes. There was no one. Henry hadn't left the kitchen. The light was off when she came in. Now it was on. Her mind couldn't play such tricks. She had numbered them. There were at least eight things on the list. Now another.

"Henry." He turned, dripping water to the floor from wet hands. His quizzical look, bubbles floating around him—he was their daughter at five, fresh from a bath and about to ask another

impossible question. Her heart made itself known in her chest. She nearly forgot what she'd come in to tell him.

"Henry. We have a ghost."

Henry turned to face his wife. "What?"

"We have a ghost."

"A ghost?"

"I just saw it."

"You're telling me you saw a ghost."

"I did. Yes, I did. My eyes were closed and it got dark. Then the light came on. I thought it was you, but you were here the whole time, weren't you?"

Henry had read all the brochures in the doctor's office. His mind attacked him with disjointed phrases. Warning signs. Personality changes. Alzheimer's. Deterioration. Ghosts? "I don't understand what you're saying." He didn't mean to yell.

"There were other things. Remember my brooch? It was sitting there, plain as day."

If it were a mouse he could chase it off with a stick, kill it and show her the carcass. How do you chase a ghost? White sheets with smiles cut out. People die. Their bones break down. The towel he was holding fell to the floor and he bent to pick it up. He thought about magnetite—slim evidence for life on Mars. One thing becomes another over time. Emma was standing in the doorway. She was breathless and frightened. Something had upset her. Where had she been? The street. A man had called her name, followed her halfway home. A burglar. A stranger. Henry wanted a knife, a bat, a gangster's defenses.

"I'm calling the police," he said.

"Don't mock me, Henry."

"They'll make a report!"

"You don't believe me? I lost that pin after your sister's funeral. I wore it to your graduation." She was looking at him like it was all his fault—everything that had ever gone wrong. He didn't know what they were talking about anymore.

"You don't remember?"

"I can't keep track of these things!"

"It was a ghost. Maybe not a bad ghost."

He glanced at the floor. White linoleum. "What did it look like?"

She drew a breath and exhaled before answering. "I think I felt it more than—" she interrupted herself. "It's strange. I imagined you. I mean I felt you watching me. There was a presence in the room with me. I'm certain, Henry."

"Me." Henry ran a hand under his belt. His face was hot. The room was hot. He didn't want this conversation anymore. A ghost that was him and not him. What did she want? He was used to having his responses mentally prepared, sorted by topic: the house, groceries, television shows, the weather. He had nothing for ghosts. Emma shifted her weight from one foot to the other. Her knee must be bothering her again. He needed to change the subject but she wouldn't let it go.

"I made a list," she said. She thrust a piece of paper at him. He didn't take it.

"Did it scare you?" he asked.

He could never match the excitement she came at him with. The things that filled her time didn't interest him. Party decorations. The affairs of neighbours. He couldn't force himself to care, even for her sake. A ghost was an excuse for an absent mind. Henry was pretending. He was tired of pretending.

"No," she said. "It didn't frighten me at all. It was pleasant, actually. The feeling I used to get when you watched me play. That wonderful, warm feeling you give off at times." She paused. "I sang to you. I knew you heard, but there was no one there."

Emma was a girl, twenty-five. She was standing in the doorway in her yellow flowered dress, her grey eyes clashing against that smile, those round cheeks. Her hands and knees were muddy; she'd come in from planting the last of the saplings. Henry blinked. He was lost. "Tell me what you think," she seemed to say. Bold, flirtatious, proud. She scared him. "Tell me what you think." He could never quite answer. He was an old man. His hands shook. Emma held one hand at the back of her neck, the elbow pointing towards him. Her grey hair hung loosely at her shoulders. She wore the blue jeans Anne had bought for her on her last visit. "So you can match Dad," she'd laughed. The pants looked attractive—modern and simple like their daughter. She was still beautiful. It frightened him.

"Do you remember how you used to listen?" she asked. Henry didn't answer. He was staring at nothing. At a corner of the ceiling. He hadn't said a word in what felt like hours. His mouth was open, his thin lips receding. His expression was blank. She realized that this was how he looked often lately. She felt the silence of the house around her. The refrigerator made a ticking sound. Moths clung to the windows. There was too much air; the night was too wide. She didn't want to be

left alone. She said his name and he started as if jolted from sleep. She wanted to cling to him, to tear at him, to dig under his skin. He looked at her coldly.

"You believe in ghosts?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said.

"What do you mean, you don't know?" She looked at the piano in the empty living room and imagined she could hear her song the way he must have heard it, thin and faltering. "I thought you said you saw this thing!" He was yelling now. The room swam with light. Henry's face was too bare, his eyes wide in panic. He gripped the edge of the counter.

"Henry," she said.

Emma had left him once. Called from a pay phone with the baby in her arms. A train station near San Francisco. He'd been up all night. *Tell me where you are. I'll come.* Instead she told him about the weather. The scenery out the train window. The quality of light in the morning. On and on. *What did I do?* he'd asked. He had looked out at the yard and almost expected to see her there under her favourite tree. Heard her breathing over the line. A crackle. A hiss.

The universe had been dated by a sound like this. An echo of radio noise like static over the phone. Emma was waiting for him. Always waiting for him. *What are you thinking?* Late at night, sitting up in bed. In the car while he drove. Standing in the doorway, keen and angry. She was pulling at him. *What are you thinking?* How could there be an answer? His mind was his own. A vast expanse he couldn't explain in words. The operator came on to ask for more change. He held his breath. If the line went dead, how would he find her? She would take their daughter. She would take on another life. Another house. Another husband. A street looking over the ocean. The silence over the line seemed to stretch. He heard her crying. He thought he heard her crying. Why couldn't he speak. "Don't hang up," he said. He looked up and saw her standing in the kitchen doorway. She looked shocked.

"I'm here," she said.

"I'm sorry." He directed the words to her bare feet. Her toenails were painted an odd sea colour—when did she paint her toenails? His wife was getting younger. It was absurd. He wanted to shake her into his world where people followed the simple rules carved into their biology. There was that look she used to take on so often, curious and angry, about to break open. A hook in his heart, pulled by the gravity of that stare. She was trying to tell him something, ask him something. She was pulling. She wouldn't let go. And Henry wanted to shout, and to hold her, just hold her because she

was something rare, something that defied logic, something perpetually waiting for him. Waiting for what?

He was staring at the floor, at the gap between their feet. Emma counted eight tiles. Her frustration was fading, replaced by worry. He had spoken from a memory. She imagined him in a few years, confused by simple sentences, easily upset. It was already happening.

"There's a lot of stars out tonight, Henry," she said.

"It's a new moon." He didn't look up.

"Will you tell me some of their names again? The way you used to?"

"You never remembered."

"I probably never will," she said. Emma walked across the kitchen to where he stood. She buttoned the top buttons of his shirt, pressed her palms to his chest and leaned her head close to his shoulder. His breath was warm against her neck.

"Stars," he said.

She led him down the back stairs and into the yard. It was dark and they took small steps. There was a clearing just past the orchard where they used to sit on summer nights. Emma made her way toward it, pulling him along behind her.

She knelt and helped him find the ground, watched him lie back and then lay down next to him. Dried yellow grasses caught in her hair. They tickled her skin, uncomfortable and comforting. The smell of those weeds, baked in the sun all day and cooling, reached out to her in echoes of memory, eclipsed one above the other—summer and the freedom always bound to the season, a feeling she imagined to be like flying. She turned her head towards him. "Tell me," she whispered.

Henry pointed to the sky. "The bright star there is Vega. And beside it, four stars make a square, you see?"

She nodded. "Lyra," she said.

"You remember." He was so pleased by this very simple thing. Emma didn't understand why. But she said it again, liking the sound of the word in her mouth and his joy in hearing it.

She leaned closer to him; rough wool scratched her cheek. Henry exhaled and she felt his arm curl around her, holding her to him. But she knew he had not moved.

Our Second Annual Thomas Morton Memorial Prize fiction winner, **AURORA BRACKETT** lives in Las Vegas, Nevada where she is a PhD fellow in fiction at University of Nevada, Las Vegas's Black Mountain Institute. She is a recipient of the San Francisco Browning Society's Dramatic Monologue Award, the Wilner Award for Short Fiction, a nominee for The Pushcart Prize and a 2013 Sozopol Fiction Seminar Fellow. Her work has appeared in *Nimrod Quarterly*, *Eleven Eleven*, *The Portland Review*, *Fourteen Hills*, and other magazines. She is currently fiction editor of *Witness Magazine* and was an associate editor of *Hope Deferred: Narratives of Zimbabwean Lives*, published by Voice of Witness/McSweeney's in 2010.

NATHAN SLINKER

NEW PASTORAL

I. When Asked What the Hole Was For, the Child Said It Was a Grave

To be in this body with a rucksack and wet flesh
on a wounded planet's back. Solutions: the one-bullet gun,
the riding whip, or the lost gauze. I chose not the first

and saw some world:

Orchard trees sewn into hospital gowns grasp at dusk,
at each others' appaloosa leaves. And each dusk the same—
the botched sun, the moon nuzzling our flea-bitten galaxy.
Down all the rows, bees build mausoleums under gurneys.

Gods of the abandoned silo, blackbirds dance and caw
through a broke tractor. The mule rebuilds himself
from a farmstead's rusty machinery—heads out for another go
at the golden hills, the earth moist with dead medicines.

II.

On the radio in a white city I built from planet-skin, the pretty voice describes workers
who have dug their last ditch and used it. Flocks of birds pretend to be water, filling the culverts
an old man crawls through—feather streams cut him into spirit, the bright seaming of sound.

III. In Deference to the Creation, All the Medics Have Laid Down Their Harps

This is the laboratory of dust.
Men invent cemeteries
where they bury knots of DNA
inside the skulls of buried women
who unravel the helices with teeth
as small as the white mountains
where we fashion needles from bones
that the earth spits up. Sit up straight—

this is the tailor's forgotten shop.

Animal hides hang on blue wires torn from sky.
Hide, animal. Hang on. The sky just tears at its blue,
a wire in the hideous body on which the animals hang.

This is the land of plenty
of florescent lights and not much else.
Our new veterinarian carves
the cow's heart out, then cuts off
her hooves and strings two together as if in prayer—
puts that bundle in the breast. Rest. And fluids.

IV. The Ambulance Lights Looked Like Fireworks on Television

Outside the circus tent, two chimpanzees arm wrestle
to the growls and squawks of the other animals. One arm
snaps like—if you want to hear it—a rice cake.
I collect my money from the bookie, then open the flap.

The magician wraps her in an American flag
and then cuts her in half with a lumberjack's saw—
it's not hard to imagine the cloven stomach,
blood spraying like sawdust into the audience.

If you remember that none of this is real
it makes it easier.

In the workshop, we made chairs from what good pieces
of the past we could find. We made a fire with the rest.
What was it like to live while the world was dying?

I want to hold your hand, walk with you
into the blue, wind-lipped waves and past
the grove of sunk trees to a village
at the bottom of the reservoir. We could dance
in the old church—two lovers sharing the last breath,
moving in perfect unison beneath a dark weight.

V.

And then I was carried home, if you could call it that. I found the avenues the same, but unsigned. In the foothills where I was born, pines had encroached into many fields that were once plowed. Walking there was like walking into a night that I, in my innocence, had contrived, and when I looked I saw no man or building clear to the distant horizon. A thin layer of pollen covered everything, and I felt as though something too big to name had finally folded.

Winner of the Second Annual Thomas Morton Memorial Prize for poetry, **NATHAN SLINKER**'s other poems have recently appeared in, or are forthcoming from, *The Kenyon Review*, *Ninth Letter*, and *Hinchas de Poesia*. He was chosen by *Orion* editor Jennifer Sahn as a 2013 Fishtrap Fellow. Nathan lives in Tempe, Arizona and is an M.F.A. candidate at Arizona State University.

MEGHAN ROSE ALLEN

DARIÉN GAP

I

The car stopped after we crossed into Panama.

"It went farther than I'd hoped." Marianne shrugged as she pulled the keys from the ignition. "Now what?"

The Pan-American highway sat in the distance. Far, but we could walk. You could still see the tops of trucks and hear the buzz of motors over the sound of wind on leaves.

"Maybe," I said, "we should head back to the main road."

Marianne ignored me and took out her phone to record the birds. To me, they sounded the same as in Mexico, Guatemala, and Costa Rica. We hadn't heard the birds in El Salvador, Honduras, or Nicaragua. In those countries, we'd powered through except for stops every four hours to switch drivers. We travelled through the night, not thinking anything of it until, in Costa Rica, we met the wide-stanced Israeli tourists, their shoulders muscled from years of carrying military-issue automatic weapons.

"Two women driving Nicaragua at night," Aryan-blond Ari said. "You are lucky you haven't been carjacked and raped." Ari bounced as he spoke, his English mimicking the ascended South African tone of his parents. We sat together at the hostel bar drinking warm Imperial. I had Marianne and Ari had Dawid: black, Ethiopian, and he didn't speak English.

A scandal, Ari told us, how well he and Dawid got along. He wanted so badly for us to recognize this so I nodded. Dawid said something to Ari in Hebrew.

"He says you were lucky, but also too old," Ari translated. "They want young American girls, not old American women."

"We're Canadian," I said, as if that made a difference. When Dawid spoke next, Ari didn't bother to translate. They drifted further into the bar lit with Christmas lights and mosquito coils while we drank premixed rum-and-cola from a can.

"We're too old for rapists," Marianne said after they'd gone.

I agreed because I always agreed with Marianne when we were young, and now older with arm fat that sagged and the hints of double chins and a whisper of what might be called jowls, I still

did it out of habit. When we were young, we'd dreamed of being older. Now we were older and for what? We kept sitting, ignored, in a bar at the Nicaraguan-Costa Rican border.

Ari and Dawid planned to travel north, us south. When our car stopped, each light blinking off one after the other until the dashboard darkened and turning the key didn't even make a cough of the engine spilling over, we needed Ari and Dawid's Israeli army training, alone in the jungle with a dead car. Instead, Marianne and I sat on the trunk to listen to the birds.

South—Marianne's only goal. In Guatemala, we drove down roads that led nowhere and when they petered out, we sat in the car with the windows rolled down and tried not to breathe until the birds sang again. Marianne recorded them on her phone and played the clips at night wherever we'd end up, listening for the differences that would tell us we were on the right track.

"Pete said we'll hear the difference. Right now," she said on the nights we weren't rushing through the middle of Central America, "they all sound the same."

To me they all sounded the same. Birds were birds. Cawing, squawking, singing, ugly nature noise.

"You need to come with me," Marianne said. I drove through snow in Ottawa in December to get here. The condo sat in a cold dampness the electric heat couldn't get out. I heard the whirr as the radiator clicked on and off. "I need you."

For the Spanish. I'd had a nanny from Ecuador growing up. With Frank Jr., we'd hired girls from the Dominican Republic and Cuba.

"Who starts to travel at forty-six? I'm too old," I said.

"I'm serious. You have nothing here keeping you."

"Frank Jr."

"Who's in university. Who hasn't thought of you once since being dropped off at his dorm. Come on. It'll be fun."

"I don't know. There are diseases. Malaria."

"DEET, long sleeves."

"Dengue."

"Still mosquito-based. Same precautions."

"Ebola."

"That's Central Africa, not Central America."

"I'd rather do Europe on holiday. I've never been to Europe. We could be eighteen again

with all the other eighteen-year-olds with oversized backpacks, but we'd have the money to get tickets on first class trains and luxury hotels. Tuscany, Greece, Paris at dawn."

"I've done Europe. And Pete—" Marianne's voice dropped down low. "I want to go where Pete went. I want to see." She blinked quick and turned away so I wouldn't see her eyes getting wet and dopey.

"Fine," I said. "I'll go with you."

The tears stopped as if she'd turned a switch.

On our abandoned car, Marianne balanced the phone on her palm to play the recordings again and again. The sun sat high. We stuck to our clothing.

"Do you hear that?" Marianne's voice caused the birds' voices to disappear. We waited until, no longer spooked, they sang again through the green of the trees. The difference lay there: the green, so much of it, all the same until you started to look close, until you put your face right up to the leaves of the trees and the blades of the grass. Every object its own shade of green refracting in the light, almost the same as the green thing sitting on its right, on its left, from the leaves overhead, but not quite. I couldn't tell one of these countries from the next, but the green burned into my mind.

"We're almost there." Marianne hopped from the trunk and walked down the road, almost a run. Not toward the highway, but farther into the jungle.

"We can't leave the car," I called to her shrinking silhouette. Our car had New Mexico plates though we picked it up in California. We'd bought it with gouges on the hood, and the rear where the manufacturer's logo had been hacked off. A grey sedan, maroon seats, windows unrolling with a crank, odometer stuck on one hundred and twenty nine thousand four hundred and thirty-six miles.

"Leave the car. Let them junk it."

"Who? Who will junk it?" Trees overhung the road, dipping down low. "There's nobody here to junk anything."

"I see a sign." Marianne pointed to words in yellow paint on brown wood. The road went somewhere. "There'll be a bus. There'll be people."

At *people* I thought of Ari and Dawid. We'd left them to a boat on Lago Nicaragua, but maybe they'd reversed to wait for us south of this new border. Marianne might be marching toward Ari and Dawid, waiting and smiling with cigarettes, ready to go.

I'd fucked Dawid or let him fuck me or we'd fucked. The words had changed from when I'd

been young and getting a boyfriend was as easy as taking my top off at the bar and watching as the men would queue up for their turn. Now, Dawid knocked on my door and pointed to his crotch with a face as solid as dried clay. I'd nodded and motioned for him to follow me inside. He undressed with locker room efficiency. I pulled off my underwear but kept my top on.

The sex was roughly unpleasant. I came by touching myself, thinking of Frankie doing this with the roles reversed, him the aging specimen with the rolls of fat drifting downwards, her the taut, tanned, shaved, arching, screaming, moaning, seething, writhing flesh he buried himself into. Dawid stroked my back until I reached my hands around to bat him away. Misunderstanding, he pulled out and shot semen along my tailbone. I had nothing to clean up with, neither towel nor top sheet. I lay on my stomach while it dried. Dawid sat next to me, tugging on himself, remaining flaccid despite his best attempts. He answered the door with his pants wrapped around his waist like a towel.

"Ari," he said as he held the brown door half-closed with his foot. Dawid pointed to his crotch again then to the door. "Ari?"

I shook my head no. Ari must have continued down the hall to the hostel's other single: Marianne's room. The next morning, she said nothing about Ari and I kept quiet about the smoothness of Dawid's skin, the fine razor wire crop of the hair on his head, the way for days afterwards I'd find strands of hair mixed into my clothes, black pubic hair so clearly not my own.

II

Everything standard and basic. Formica framed by silver chrome. Twice the teenager who served drinks walked by with a gas canister to spray on the gutters

"Cover your mouth," Marianne said. "That stuff is poison."

Marianne wanted locals. In Ottawa, she figured that we'd hit backpacker bar after backpacker bar, never imagining how invisible we'd be in the sea of twenty-somethings and thirty-somethings pretending to be younger, the rows of dreadlocks and cigarettes and pillows tied or taped to metal-framed bags. Ari and Dawid had been the only kids to talk to us.

"So," Marianne said, picking at the plantain.

"So."

We had old money, Frankie too, but Pete grew up in a small town on Cape Breton full of Catholics and fishermen. He said his grandparents spoke Gaelic. Two cousins were priests. He had an accent that came out with the right people and in the right place and at precisely the right time. Marianne brought him as her date to my engagement party.

"Isn't he precious?" she asked as we stood in the ladies' room adjusting ourselves.

"He's older."

"Thirty-five."

"Your parents will be furious." I opened my lips to put on mascara.

"I don't care." She meant it didn't matter. She'd breached her trust-fund floodgates at twenty-one. Mine were locked until twenty-five. There'd be a leak for the wedding, then another four-year wait.

The bathroom shimmered. Everything mirrored back-and-forth, making thousands of me, thousands of Marianne, thousands of the bathroom attendant who knew better than to make eye contact with us.

"At least finish your degree," Marianne said.

"Why?" Frankie had a position set up at a firm. Not his father's, of course. Instead a family friend's to stall any accusation of nepotism. Soon there'd be babies and parties and fundraisers. I didn't need a BA attached to the end of all that.

"Don't lose yourself in a man," Marianne said, but the next day she left, following Pete to Ottawa, transferring her credits to Carleton and switching her major to public policy administration, lost in a man she'd thought more appropriate for her than Frankie was for me.

"I miss Pete."

"I know." Night fell late so high up in the mountains. You could see down across land. A blue strip, maybe the horizon, maybe the sea. Leaves slithered against each other as we sat in the dusk of a Panamanian bar near the border of Costa Rica.

"I think he must have been here," said Marianne. "This place, can't you feel Pete here?"

I couldn't.

Marianne looked through her photographs. The cover said *Brag Book*. She filled the pages with photographs of Pete in the '70s and '80s. Polaroids. Square Instamatics. Black-and-white shots on thick cardboard stock. Pete in jeans on a pickup. Pete on a thin strip of tar-black beach. Pete under a palm tree. Pete drinking with friends.

"This could be here." She pointed to a picture, then to the corrugated metal roof of the bar.

"Or there." I pointed. "Or there. Or really, anywhere. Do we have more to go on? Did Pete work while he was here? That might be a lead."

"I don't know," Marianne lied. In the long shadows that preceded the night, I didn't see it. Later I could pinprick the moment by the slight twitch along the skin of her cheeks, the minute dissonance between the tone of her voice and the hold of her body, the ways the vowels lengthened, the long ones the most. She rapped her knuckles on the table with an upbeat tune not belying the mood.

"Drinks?" I suggested, and left to find the teenager running the bar.

"I think," Marianne said when I returned with a promise of more food than the congealing plantains we hadn't touched, "that Israeli, the black one, he fancied you."

"He said we were so unattractive a rapist wouldn't want us. I don't even remember his name." My body warmed up. The birds sang. I wanted them to be quetzals, the sound of the word, the *tz* sound in the middle like a sizzle of water dropped onto a stove. Marianne guessed toucans. We ate fried chicken without cutlery, exchanged US bills for Panamanian Balboa at the bar, solicited advice on where to stay. A guesthouse down the road was closest. Pete had stayed in guesthouses in Panama in the early '80s. Marianne bubbled at the thought of staying in one too.

"It won't be the same one," I said.

"But it might."

We walked through the dark. During the day, the sun smothered us with waves of humidity so solid we could have hacked through them with machetes. But when the sun vanished, the street chilled as if all heat had been no more than a dream.

"Easy to forget the sun without street lamps as reminders," I said. Dark was dark here.

Marianne ignored me.

The guest house had one room, shared, and no, when I asked the proprietress: they did not allow men.

"Not now, before. Have men stayed here before?" Marianne asked. "Jools, translate that."

"I don't remember how to do past tense."

Marianne glared at me and pulled all the muscles of her body in close. She didn't speak as we got ready for bed and didn't accept my offer of bottled water to brush her teeth. I turned off the florescent lamp to her unspeaking back.

Then, in the morning, she had gone.

"I don't feel as old as I am," Marianne told me late night once on the phone.

"No one does."

"I don't feel forty-five."

"No one does," I repeated. "No one feels older than thirty. I guess in your thirties you can convince yourself that you're thirty-two, thirty-three, thirty-six, thirty-nine. But when that forty hits, you put your mind to the age when you were perfect. In your head, I mean."

"When were you perfect, Jools?"

"Twenty-one," I replied.

A long pause, lengthier than normal, and Marianne came back on the line when she'd managed to stop crying.

"It's Pete," Marianne told me. "He's not doing so good."

I rushed to the street. Marianne had taken her bag, her shoes, the money belt to strap around her waist. The road was filled with more goats than people, more chickens than goats.

"*Señora*," a man called to me. "You search for something? I take you." He wore Tommy Hilfiger; I recognized the logo from Frank Jr.'s shirts. We were the same height. He ran toward me.

"I'm fine, thank you. *No gracias*," I added for good measure. I turned to go inside the guest house. The sun, barely up, had already cooked the cheap tar of the road. The soles of my shoes stuck deep into the muck. I had almost crept inside when the man grabbed hard on my arm.

"You can come with me. Is okay."

I pulled my arm back. We both lost our balance and fell away from each other.

"Money?" he asked. "I have four children and my wife has illness. I have no way to provide."

"Then get a job. *Trabajas*."

He switched into Spanish and I lost track of the insults until he cried "*¡Puta!*" as his tirade began to fade. "*¡Hija de puta!*"

I thought of Dawid. My hand jumped up and I slapped the man, my right hand, his left cheek, chickens and goats and the guest house proprietress as our witnesses. The man started to laugh. He laughed and laughed as I stepped inside the shade of the guesthouse and closed my eyes to the street burning into my retinas.

"*Por favor*." The proprietress pointed towards where we'd slept, then back outside. She

mimicked putting on a backpack over her blue cleaning robe and apron, then walking, exaggerated, steps away.

"*¿Para limpiar?*" I asked. "*¿Cuando podemos volver?*"

She shook her head so I took my things onto the street. The man had gone. Fewer chickens. No Marianne.

"You haven't been to Israel?" asked Ari.

"I haven't been anywhere."

"I have," Marianne said.

"Ethiopia?" asked Dawid, his lack of English notwithstanding. The *th* vanished as he said his country's name, almost a *ch* instead.

"No," Marianne said. "No, wait. Yes. Something in the capital once." The lights from the hostel bar hollowed her face to a skeleton. These same lights shone on her hair, picked up the strands of white between the black and made them glow like candles. I'd wrapped my hair, short, easy to manage, in a red bandana now stiff from sweat. We hadn't bathed since Guatemala. My shirt was a modernist painting from dots and stains of moles and salsas. We should have gone to the room before the bar.

"What's the capital called?" Marianne asked.

Ari conferred with Dawid.

"Addis," Dawid said.

"No," said Marianne. "That's not it." She clapped. "Food. Jools, try some." She shoved something sticky into my face. "It's so good," she said without trying any herself. Her arm fell around my shoulder so she could pull me close enough to feel her breath on my cheek. "See my friend Jools," she called out to everyone at the bar. "We're going to drive south on the Pan-American highway all the way to the end of the world, to Tierra del Fuego if we have to."

"That is impossible," Ari said. "You can't."

Marianne turned, wobbling the table as she did, steadying the circle again with her elbows. "The Pan-American highway," she enunciated. "It goes all the way to the tip of the world."

"It stops," Ari said, "in Panama. There's a break in the road."

"There can't be," Marianne said.

Dawid yawned and pulled on his friend's arm. He pointed to the inside of the bar.

"We're leaving tomorrow at breakfast." Ari pointed to the sky. "North."

"You heard Marianne," I said. "We're going south." I pointed stupidly at the ground.

He nodded. Then he was gone.

I stood by a square slab of concrete in the ground with a grey metal cylinder sticking straight up from the centre. At the top of the cylinder, a rectangle of a phone box. I picked up to listen to the dial tone humming like phones I remembered from home.

The street crowded with more chickens and more goats and now a short and fat pig. No one but me seemed perturbed by the livestock criss-crossing the road.

"Be happy to see animals," Marianne said. "The places without animals, where the streets have nothing living—those are the places where one should be concerned." But she gripped the wheel tighter while a bull, lazy, took slow step after slow step to his side of the road.

"It is," I paused to think of how to stay culturally sensitive. "It is an unfortunate way to live," I decided.

"How would you make living here better?"

"Hot water at least." The coil in the bathroom that morning hadn't switched on, leaving me with an ice-cold shower. "Not like this."

"Pete didn't mind. Pete said Central America was charming."

"Anything is charming when you have the option to leave."

"Where Pete came from wasn't much different than this," Marianne said.

"It's a lot different from where he ended up." Pete and Marianne in their luxury condominium overlooking the canal. Pete and Marianne in their sixty thousand dollar car. Pete and Marianne serving swordfish to senators and members of Parliament.

"Pete ended up where Pete ended up because of me," Marianne said. "Maybe he should have stayed here. Maybe everything would have been better then."

"The air quality here though. Everyone smokes. All the cars run on diesel. Staying here wouldn't have helped. His lungs would have been worse."

Marianne didn't answer.

"No hammocks tonight," I said. My back ached from the previous night. "Some place fancy. Where are we going today?" I asked.

"We'll know when we get there. That's what Pete would say. He knew when he got there." Over the engine, I strained to hear her. "We'll know, too."

She sat at the bar from the previous day, drinking coffee from a metal mug.

"They grow coffee everywhere here but give you Nescafé when you order," Marianne complained.

"You left me alone," I said. My words shook. My fingers tightened to claws and my teeth ground against each other as I spoke. If I hadn't slapped someone already that morning, I would have hit Marianne. I would have torn at her face, her smug, coffee-tinted teeth. I would kick hard in the shins, the ribs, the neck. "How could you leave me there without telling me where you went?"

"It's Panama." Marianne waved her free hand. "You can buy package vacations here. You were perfectly safe."

"A note would have killed you though?"

"I couldn't have gone far."

"The town is bigger than you think." In the other direction, farther, over the hill, you could see civilization spreading down in a series of grids with the shanties at the edges bleeding into the trees. A tall, stone church in the middle of the square. Smaller, white, stucco ones dotted the green of the mountains, the same white churches we saw from the highway, *Evangélico* written large on every sign.

"We need to do something," I told her. "The car. Where to go next."

"We should ask people here about Pete."

The buzz of insects overtook our conversation.

"We need to see if anyone remembers him."

"Yes, we need to see if anyone remembers someone who may or may not have been here thirty years ago. That's precisely what we need to do." The words stung my tongue.

"Then we'll go," Marianne promised. "You said you'd help. There's a youth hostel near the centre of town." Marianne held up a guidebook she'd set on her lap. The pages curled, yellow and black specks like pepper across the words. I smelled the mould standing above her. "The man at the bar said I could have it." Marianne pointed inside and a man waved back at her. Not the previous day's teenager. A man in cowboy hat, jeans, red button shirt. He had white sneakers. Nothing white of mine had survived the dust and the rain and the mud of Central America but he wore sneakers so white that they beamed.

"That book's too old," I said.

"The older the better. We need something that's been here for years."

"When—" I stopped, not wanting to reinforce Marianne's delusion. "*If* Pete had come here, they wouldn't remember at a youth hostel. No one over twenty-five works at a youth hostel. They wouldn't have been born when Pete was travelling. Why don't you ask him?" I looked toward the bar. "He looks the same age as Pete."

"He doesn't speak English." Marianne stared at me.

"Fine." I took the photo book from the table. She followed me slowly, like walking over loose cobblestones rather than concrete.

"*Señor*," I said, my accent more French than Spanish, more Québecois than French. "*¿Olvida esta hombre?*"

He smiled, missing an incisor.

"What's funny?" whispered Marianne.

I thought. "*Olvidar* means to forget. I need the word for remember."

"Which is?"

I shook my head. "Here, I'll try this. *¿Usted conoce esta hombre? El está aquí*," but numbers over twenty failed me. "When was Pete here?" I asked Marianne.

"Early '80s. Eighty-four maybe."

I wrote the number on the chalk board advertising specials at the bar. "*Los photos son cuando el está aquí*." I handed over the book. He flipped through, not actually looking, then spoke too fast for me to follow. When he finished, he smiled, the missing incisor again. I looked lost. He started explaining again, this time slowly, with hand gestures.

"He says many people come through here often. He doesn't know. Around then there were some," we watch as he puts his hands together to genuflect, "missionaries?" I guessed. "Was Pete doing missionary work?" I asked Marianne.

"No."

"People won't remember a backpacker from thirty years ago. This is ridiculous."

A ping on the metal roof. Another. A pause of six beats. Then a downpour. The street, livestock and all, scattered.

"*Chulos*," said Marianne. She mangled the pronunciation by affording each syllable an equal emphasis. "Chew-lows."

"*¿Chulos?*" I repeated for the man who froze at the word.

"No," he said with vehemence. "*No tenemos los narcotraficantes aquí*."

"What?" I said as the translation filtered through my brain. "Narco-traffickers? Marianne?

Why is he talking about drugs?"

"He's probably confused."

"But drugs?"

Marianne laughed. "Don't be so mother-hen shocked. It was the eighties. Everyone did coke. Well," she stared at me again, "maybe not everyone. We're on a drug trafficking route. That's all."

"Marianne?"

"That's all," she repeated.

"*¿Señoras?*" the bar man said. "*¿Mas preguntas?*"

"*No, gracias*." I thought of the day's earlier encounter. "Give him some money," I told Marianne.

"Why?"

"He helped us out."

"I'm not giving him cash. He didn't tell us a thing."

I handed him a bill. He looked at it and pointed, misunderstanding, to the bottles on the far side of the bar. "*Dos tragos*," he said.

"Rum," I told him, worried an explanation would lead to an insult. "*Blanco, por favor*."

I knocked them back before wandering into the rain, which had calmed. Drops hit the ground, but didn't jump up with force to make a mist two inches tall off the street like they did on the highway. The rain hit the pavement and rolled away into puddles that soaked through the sides of my shoes. Marianne grabbed her things from the table to catch up from behind.

"Now you've abandoned me," she said.

"Now I don't care." My foot twisted on trash and I fell. My ankle twinged, my fat stubby ankle, barely differentiated from the rest of my leg. I sat on the road, foolishly wet. If Frankie were here—I stopped the thought. If Frankie were here, he'd run back to his eighteen-year-old girlfriend without a backwards glance. I laughed. Marianne sat on the road next to me and laughed, too. Each breath distanced the possibility of ever stopping. I began to snort and guffaw. Water soaked through my pants. My first bath since we'd left. This made me laugh harder.

"Jools, we should go," Marianne said. "There's nothing here. We need to go farther south."

"To continue this wild goose chase? You're never going to find anything. We don't know where Pete went or what he did."

"He ran drugs," Marianne said.

This made me laugh harder. "You said—"

"I lied. You heard the guy at the bar. Narcotics."

"*Narcotraficantes*," I said for her. "But Pete?" Pete being Martian would have been more believable.

"Maybe," said Marianne. "A little. I don't know."

"And now you don't know again."

"Fine. I do know." Her lips thinned. "He needed money to keep traveling, that or go home, to welfare or construction work in Toronto. You don't know what Cape Breton was like then. Places without running water, indoor toilets."

"Here places don't have running water, indoor toilets."

This did not amuse Marianne. "It's warm here, with beaches. Pretty girls. Flowers. Pete called Panama the garden of Eden."

I shivered. The humidity slid away into dampness. I fought chattering my teeth.

"He moved things around Panama. It was easier for him. He'd play the dumb gringo card and the army would leave him alone."

"So he was a mule then?"

Marianne wrapped her arms around herself. A drug trafficker meant romance, aviator sunglasses and white haciendas. A mule was a pedestrian job. Marianne kept herself far removed from pedestrian. Annoyed, but not wanting to show it, she ran to hide underneath some trees for protection from the rain, just as the branches caved under the strength of the rain drops and water the weight of a bucket fell onto her.

"Pete never said it would be like this." Water dripped from the ends of her hair and mixed in with her tears. Her voice hung flat with disappointment. "He said here was like magic. He said he was happy here. He said here was like the start of the world and I came here and everyone yells into their cellphones and drives Mitsubishis and wears designer clothing. Pete sold me this whole story of pristine wilderness and none of what Pete said is true."

"Of course nothing he said was true. You think he told you the truth?"

Marianne shook her head.

"I don't want to do this," I said. If we left, I wouldn't have to admit being kicked out of the guesthouse. I could go back home, go back to sitting in my house by the ravine, go back to the volunteer committees, go back to the specialty coffee house at the end of the road, go back to writing cheques for people who worked in these places rather than having to see these places myself.

"Maybe we can hire someone to drive us to Panama City."

"We'll take a bus."

"Do we have to?"

"A bus won't kill you. Unless you find an ATM, we can't afford anything else."

It kept raining. My shoes squeaked on the pavement as we walked down the hill to the centre of town. Marianne pushed me forward to negotiate tickets inside the station and gave me her remaining Balboa to pay. I negotiated time tables with the woman on the far side of the grill. We found a fast bus, *Primera Clase*, with personal televisions, air conditioning.

"We need to buy blankets," I told Marianne. "The bus will be *frío*. Cold." Bits of language mixed together the more Marianne refused to learn even some Spanish basics.

"I'll be fine."

"Suit yourself." Shops nearby sold coarse wool blankets. Guatemala, Mexico, the vividness of those colours shone five countries away. I'd forgotten the souvenirs I'd bought in the trunk of our car. Once home, they would have been pushed away to the back of closets and forgotten about until charity drives. I'd decluttered early, was all. No real difference.

"I'm going to use the facilities," Marianne said. She returned too fast to have done anything.

"I need money for toilet paper," she said. I gave her a handful of change without sorting the coins. They jangled as they fell into her palm. "I can't believe they make you pay for toilet paper."

"Pete forgot to mention that?"

Marianne stalked off.

When the bus drove by the car, unmolested except by the rain streaking away the drive's worth of dirt, Marianne opened the square glass of her window. The bus' ambient temperature rose instantly as the cool of the air conditioner swooped out. Marianne took the keys and threw them. They hit the hood, skittered off, and landed in some plants at the side of the road. The sun hit the metal. Anyone going by would see them.

"Someone else can have it," Marianne said. "I'm done."

I smiled. My uninviting grey blanket warmed me. The bus rocked gently, reminding me of our drives home with Frank Jr. after weekends at cottages north of the city. My eyes closed longer and longer with each blink.

"We didn't get there," Marianne said. "We didn't go far enough. The song never changed. Pete said you could hear the difference, Mozart versus Stravinsky. This was more like all those stupid pop songs on the radio that all sound the same."

I fell asleep.

III

"I slept with Frankie."

We were on the phone talking about nothing. I'd called to tell her something I'd seen that reminded me of her, something worth sharing over the phone, but had forgotten when she picked up. We laughed at growing older.

"I slept with Frankie," Marianne said.

"Again?"

"What?" A clicking on the line like teeth distracted me.

"You're talking about the '80s right after we got married. Or another time?"

"You knew about that?" The noise continued. I realized she must have had a pen, a clicky-top, absentmindedly tapping it for comfort.

"You told me." Then I thought. "Maybe Frankie did. No," I decided. "It must have been you."

We both waited. I shifted around the telephone alcove, our house of the style and age that had telephone alcoves under the stairs. I moved to one position, then another, trying to find a way to rest my body against the wall so my bones wouldn't ache. The alcove fit snug, snugger than the space had been ten, five, even two years ago.

"All I've been thinking about," Marianne spoke first, "for weeks now is this secret I've been keeping from you. I'd forgotten about me and Frankie and then it comes bubbling up to keep me awake at night, and you already knew?"

"Yes."

"This is anti-climactic. I was so sure you'd be angry and never speak to me again and I'd be all alone."

"You have Pete."

"Not the same at all. You'll forgive me?" Her voice cut like glass. "We're still speaking, so I guess you did."

"We didn't talk the first five years I was married," I told her.

"That was different. I was so busy at work, I didn't talk to anyone but colleagues and Pete."

Marianne sighed. "How are you, really?"

Frankie gone for six weeks. Guilty, he'd signed some papers he'd fight over later, but until then, so many things, so many tangible objects I could hold in my hands, belonged to me. Having stuff made it easy to forget about feelings.

"It was meaningless," I said. "Something about too much to drink, bad drugs."

"Is that what we told you?"

"Yes."

"It was only the one time," said Marianne.

"I believe you," I said, but something in my voice told Marianne the opposite because she kept insisting. Only one time, only once, it never happened again, it wouldn't have ever happened again, an isolated event, an outlier, a mistake, I'm so sorry.

An old flyer sat on the same small table as the phone's cradle. Months old. I checked the front. Over a year. "I believe you," I repeated. "If your dalliance had been more than once then ultimately Frankie would have used it in a fight. He probably would have said he liked having sex with you better than me."

"That wouldn't be true. You had sex enough to get Frank Jr. and all those miscarriages," she said with the nonchalance of the never-pregnant. "Frankie loved having sex with you."

"And with you and some of the other partners and associates and general office staff and random people he met at conferences and on the street and at bars and, of course, let's not forget, girls he met from his son's high school graduating class."

"I can't believe that one. An eighteen-year-old with Frankie. Her parents must be furious."

"They keep calling here to yell at him even though he moved out."

"Can you imagine how vigorous sex must be? I'd hate to have an eighteen-year-around me gagging for it. I can't even imagine having sex with someone in their twenties. Thirties, I could handle. I was in my thirties ten years ago. That doesn't seem so long ago. Yes," Marianne said as if making a decision. "I'd have sex with someone in their thirties."

"I'm sure Pete will be thrilled."

"I wouldn't do it." The nervous clicking started again.

I'd read the flyer from cover to cover. "Maybe I should be going."

"Look, Jools," Marianne said. "That one time thing with me and Frankie, I was an angry person then."

"Fine," I yawned.

"No, listen. I was angry at you and your perfect housewife anti-feminism and I was mad at Pete and my work. I'm not that person anymore."

"I don't care. Let it go."

She breathed into the phone. "You haven't been to Ottawa in a while."

"You haven't been to Toronto, either."

"It's hard with Pete."

"I should let you get back to him then." Marianne didn't reply. "I'll visit in spring to see the tulips."

"Don't think I'll forget. Pete's had a setback lately, but things might look up by the spring."

She dangled the bait but I didn't ask about Pete and we both hung up angry. Marianne and Frankie. I hadn't thought about that in years. The two of them in her dorm room or her apartment or some hotel downtown near the market. Always her and Frankie. Always at the centre.

She could have asked me about Pete. She could have breathed a loud breath. "So you know now, me and Frankie. I need to ask, the other way round—no, it's silly."

"No. Tell me. What's on your mind."

"Was there ever, has there ever, been anything the other way. You and Pete?" Her voice would break, crack over a word. She might lick her lips, dry from the Ottawa cold.

"No," I could say. "There's never been anything between me and Pete." The truth.

But Marianne would never even think betrayal of her possible.

"Don't be upset," Marianne had said. "It didn't mean a thing. Not for him, not for me. But," she lowered her voice so I had to lean in close to hear, close enough to smell her perfume, close enough to notice unwaxed hairs on her upper lip, close enough to see that her eyes lacked fear of me rejecting her. "I thought you should hear this from me first."

After the funeral, Marianne told me, "There's no one left to call Frankie Frankie anymore."

"I still do."

"What does Suzie Tight Tits call him?" Marianne asked. "That's what Pete calls, called, her."

"You call him Frankie, too. And charming."

"We were always on your side. Such a jerk. He doesn't try to hide it, Frankie."

"You did it again. Lots of us call him Frankie."

"I must have picked up the habit from Pete," Marianne said.

"You don't remember in university, Frankie used to complain how undignified *Frankie*

sounded?"

"That's right." Recognition flicked across Marianne's face. "Still, why would a teenager want an old-man name like Frankie?"

"He made us promise to stop. We went to that bar—"

"You got away with calling him Frankie, though. You even got Frank Jr. to stick."

"I guess he never told Pete to stop." Marianne stared at the ceiling to hold the tears in.

"Even if he did, Pete would have done his own thing. He would have called Frankie Mordechai if he felt so inclined. Abdul, Mickey, Vladimir, anything at all."

"Maybe." Marianne froze hard. "You didn't know Pete that well."

I surveyed the room. No one but me wore black.

"Frankie should have come," I told Marianne.

"I told him I'd rather you did. He e-mailed me—"

I interrupted her. "He e-mailed you? Frankie? He doesn't know how to use a computer."

"He has a gmail account." Marianne said. "He asked about coming. I told him not to come, even alone."

"But we're all friends. Always."

Marianne smiled but with disbelief. "We're not friends with Frankie, Jools. I told you. Pete and I are on your side in this. I mean, were, I mean, he was, I am." The blinking sped up. "Pete was always on your side."

Then she started to cry.

"Come on, sign it," Frankie said.

"No." I shoved the pages at him. Marianne had left for the bathroom. We sat in a booth close to the door to get puffs of fresh air when someone walked in. The cheap cigarette haze hurt my eyes.

"I think you should respect that I want to be called by my name."

"Frankie is a reasonable diminutive." I had to try more than once to get the word past my tongue and my rapidly numbing teeth.

"It's the name of a dog." Frankie sipped at his beer. "It's the name of a janitor."

"You don't call me by my name."

"But you don't mind. Diamonds, emeralds, sapphires."

"Except you don't say *jewels*."

"Maybe I am." He smiled like he could still feel his teeth. They lined up as straight, ivory rectangles.

"So what are the consequences if I don't comply? Show me your brilliant legal mind here." I took the pages off the table. "I give you a dollar whenever I say Frankie. Here." I fished a grey bill from the inside of my pocket. "Frankie."

"That's Marianne's contract."

I flipped further down into the stack of pages.

"That's disgusting, Francis," I pronounced slow and loud after reading the contract through. "And I want my dollar back."

"For a first offence, I would accept a kiss. On the cheek," he clarified. "I mean, if you want your dollar back."

"Now you're paying me a dollar to kiss you?"

"It was your money to start with. I'm not paying you anything." He looked down at the table as his cheeks started to redden. The Frankie we'd come in with, commandeering us a table, ordering drinks, flattering the waitresses, vanished. "Maybe you should find Marianne. She's been gone a while." Frankie tapped his fingers on a fogged-up window, five dots poking through to the outside world again and again.

"I didn't realize we'd upset you so much."

"I don't mind so much when you call me Frankie. Forget about the contract, okay? Can we just pretend this never happened?"

"You sure?"

Frankie didn't move while we waited for Marianne to come back, which she did, exclaiming, "Let's dance!"

"I don't think we can, Marianne," Frankie said. No band, no speakers, no DJ, not even the radio played.

"Fine. Let's sign," Marianne scrawled her name on the bottom of her contract. "Then let's find a place I can dance."

I put some money on the table for drinks. "You too?" I asked Frankie.

"I've got exams, law school things, papers," he trailed off.

"No, come on." I leaned across the table and gave him a kiss on the cheek. "Come on Frankie. Please."

Marianne ignored or didn't notice or didn't care about the kiss or the way Frankie and my

fingertips then fingers than palms touched each other as we huddled in the bus shelter under the orange snow-shine of the street lamps. She looked away when Frankie gave me his change for the fare and said nothing about the way Frankie and I ended up in a seat together on the bus when normally Marianne and I sat together. She said nothing, lost in her own world, where the two of us didn't matter to her at all.

IV

"This isn't Panama City."

The bus sped through the dusk. I'd watched the sun before speaking, making sure the light slipped down rather than moving up to ensure I'd slept only the day away and not also the night.

"We should have gotten to Panama City by now."

"We passed it."

"Then why are we still on the bus?" I asked Marianne. My neck stung from the rough fabric of the seats where I'd rested my face. My ankles swelled from the cold and having to keep my feet held in because of the seats stuck close together.

"We didn't go far enough," Marianne said.

"You said we passed Panama City. That's where the airport is."

"When we crossed the border," Marianne slapped her hand on her thigh. "I knew it. So close. This is what Pete was talking about. Can't you feel Pete here? Like this is where he wanted us to go?"

"Maybe Pete could have been a little more specific. Maybe he could have drawn you a map. Maybe if he wanted us to visit Panama, we could have flown down here in the first place rather than drive from the States." Marianne didn't notice the harshness in my voice. "Why are we still on the bus?"

"I had to find the place where the birdsong changed," she said, almost in a trance. "At a rest stop, I recorded more birds. Listen." She played me two pieces from her phone. "They're not alike at all. It's the same bird but a different song."

She was right. I shuddered as the song switched into a minor key.

"We're close," she said over the growling bus engine and the voices of the other passengers. "We have to keep going south, as far as we can go, even if Ari says the road ends."

I'd forgotten about Ari. About Dawid. So quickly. Yesterday I would have remembered them forever and already they were gone, replaced by the man outside the guesthouse and the man behind the bar. Ari and Dawid would be strangers now if I saw them.

"What will we do at the end of the road?"

"Hire someone. Ari has a friend. He told me what to do, who to talk to."

"When? When did he tell you this?" Around a bend, we all leaned to one side. Some of the televisions flickered. The bus straightened and continued.

"After you'd gone to bed," Marianne said, except Marianne had come upstairs with me after Ari and Dawid abandoned us for the bar, before Dawid knocked on my door. She'd promised me that she said we took this bus to go to Panama City, to the airport, to home.

"I still need you," Marianne said. "The driver said we could pay the rest when we got there."

"Got where?" A blast of chilled air blew down from the vent above my head. I pulled my blanket over top of me for protection.

"To the end of the line."

We stopped on a road so narrow that branches scraped both sides of the bus. Trees and a phone box and a hut selling cellphones in bright yellow packages. Some people got off and no one got on. The bus started again.

"When we get somewhere with street lamps and taxis and fancy hotels," I told Marianne, "I'm done. I'm going to take my things and go back to Panama City and fly back to Toronto. This is enough. Enough."

The bus lurched forward.

"I haven't been truthful with you."

"Really?" I crossed my arms.

"I'm looking for someone."

"Not a place? Not this magical place where the birdsong changes and everything is the garden of Eden and fountain of youth and faeries and unicorns and Pete risen from the dead? That's not what you're looking for anymore?"

"There's a girl, a woman."

"Pete's Panamanian ex-girfriend?" I rolled my eyes "What's her name? Her address? Recent photograph?"

"Pete said finding her would be easy. He seemed to think everyone in Panama knew everyone else."

"Maybe they did thirty years ago."

The bus television showed *Friends* with subtitles in Spanish. "The One with the," I squinted. I couldn't tell on the tiny screen.

"If finding her was so important," I said, "why didn't Pete do it himself? Why didn't he give you directions?"

"There aren't addresses here like at home. He said to go and to look."

"For what?" I asked. My hands shook.

Marianne's nails scrubbed her face, smearing her foundation. The powder ran down her cheeks like peach and ivory camouflage. "When Pete was working here—"

"Muling drugs."

"Working here," she insisted. "They came into a village under the control of a rival gang but only nominally. No soldiers or protection. Pete and the others were supposed to teach the village a lesson so," she paused, "they raped a girl." She revealed this with no more emotion than ordering fried chicken. Someone in front, maybe he spoke English, turned to look at us. Marianne stared at him until he turned away.

"Pete saw this?"

"He participated." Marianne stopped. "Willingly."

"I—" I began but had nothing to follow.

"I'm going to find her and tell her that Pete died. I think she'd be," Marianne paused. "Happy is the wrong word. Satisfied to learn that. Pete says she's still here."

"How does he know?"

"That's the sort of thing Pete always knows."

After a pause, she told me, "I've known for years, Jools. Years and years. He would talk like this was something to be proud of overcoming. A meaningful experience. He learned from it. He became a gentleman. Attentive. Faithful. Loving."

I grabbed all the things which had spread out around me on the bus, me afloat in a sea of my own objects. I held them tight against my chest and moved to a new seat, an empty seat, freshly vacated and still warm from its previous occupant. Marianne stayed where she sat. We didn't speak for a long time.

The bus station flooded with light, taxis, *colectivos*, vans, bustling and fighting for attention and passengers. One look and they started shouting at me in English.

"A nice hotel," I yelled. I held out my palm, spreading my fingers wide. "*Cinco estrellas*."

A man with a sign, my name and Marianne's, pushed through to the front. "I am Ari's friend, Maxim," he said with a broad, untamed accent. "Ari and Dawid. They say you need guide?"

"I do." Marianne stepped off the bus and stood beside me. Tears had streaked her foundation more, leaving more red stains down her cheeks.

"We'll stay in town," Maxim said. "You need to buy supplies. You have money?"

"If I can find a bank," Marianne replied.

"There are banks, like Scotiabank from Canada. You are Canadian." Maxim said like we didn't know. He laughed.

"Where are we staying?" I asked. "I want hot water and American breakfasts and a place to check my e-mail."

"Of course. It will be the last time you have all these things," Maxim said. Not me, but Marianne. I would be on the first flight out.

He took us to a *colectivo*, whiter than the others and idling alone near the front of the queue. "Dawid says hello to the blonde one," Maxim said as we took off. "Just to you."

Marianne stared out the window.

I swam in the pool in the rain, alone and off-season, no other tourists. Maybe there should have been. Maybe Marianne's credit card handed over at check-in booked the place exclusively for us. I wasn't asking.

The hotel moved like clockwork. I never saw maids, pool boys, waiters, but I never saw mess or disorder either. We ate in the room. Little cards appeared in the morning for today's lunch and dinner, tomorrow's breakfast. I checked off the options for both Marianne and for me. I banished beans, chicken, plantain, rice. We ate steak, fish, steamed vegetables, white wine, together in silence at the table in the suite. Marianne left after breakfast for the market with Maxim. A pile of supplies formed in the corner of the common area. On the third day, the mountain vanished, stuffed into a metal-framed camping backpack she'd bought that morning. Marianne struggled under the weight. She wheezed and coughed and bruised herself as she lost her balance and fell against the heavy wooden coffee table. I read a book and ignored her. *Lonely Planet Central America*. Panama was the last chapter. The Darién Gap the last section before the index.

The front desk got me tickets, arranged a ride with the resort farther inland. Their bus came down Saturday at noon from the mountains. They'd let me on to go straight to the airport with the

package tourists. My flight connected in Miami. A six hour layover, then straight home.

My e-mail sat empty. Dawid who gave out his e-mail like a communicable disease had written nothing.

"I wouldn't have forgiven him. After the first time," Marianne said.

"I didn't forgive him after the last time. First, last, bookends. It's almost the same."

Frank Jr. and I went to Ottawa, looking, I hoped, ironically, at Carleton. Marianne stood outside the hotel as we pulled up. A coincidence. The restaurant inside was good. She had reservations, she said. I didn't believe her but smiled and kissed cheeks and said of course I'd been planning to call her once we settled in. Frank Jr. had excuses, some party for prospective students he'd shown no interest in until the alternative involved an evening with two middle-aged women who couldn't stand the sight of each other. He would take a taxi afterwards. He would not engage in under-aged drinking. He would be responsible. Marianne invited me to join her while she waited for her colleagues. They would be late, then call to cancel.

"More wine?" the waiter asked.

I nodded while Marianne shook her head. Then we switched.

"I'll come back once you've decided." He melted away.

"All those other times, you forgave him."

"All those other times," I said, "he felt sorry." After the first indiscretion, he came home with each move rehearsed, crying, promising, swearing to change. Later, fewer tears, fewer promises, but still the slouch and the body left open asking to be held, still offering to allow me to feel magnanimous in the act of forgiving. "But he's not sorry this time. Why should he be? She's eighteen years old. You can't forgive someone who doesn't feel bad about what he did." I wanted more wine and searched for the waiter. "I used to buy condoms for him. I snuck them into his briefcase."

"You did not!" Marianne flushed the same shade of red as the table runner.

"It was the '80s, with all those stories about AIDS. I got paranoid."

"What did Frankie say?"

"Nothing. I don't think he noticed."

We sat.

"How's Pete?"

"I don't want to talk about that," Marianne said as the waiter returned. We both nodded yes

when he asked about more wine.

Maxim stood outside the door.

"Is she ready? Marianne?" he asked.

"Coming," she shouted from farther inside. "A few more minutes. Ten maybe."

"So we can talk," he said to me. "Dawid says you are," he paused, running through which word to translate. How would Dawid have described me? Compliant? "Reasonable," Maxim said. "We will talk."

I ushered him in from the hall.

"Your friend wants to do something dangerous and with little chance of success."

"Then maybe you shouldn't have a company that takes unprepared tourists across the Darién Gap."

"That is not the dangerous part. We have good guides and information. The Darién is quiet. All the business has moved north on boats to Mexico." I stopped to ask him what business, then realized what Maxim meant. "What is dangerous is her quest for this girl. This place is a place for crossing, not for looking about for someone. Your friend is uncertain. She is too jumpy, too skinny. You maybe." Maxim stared me up and down. "I see muscle. But even you, I would not recommend searching for this girl."

"Then don't let her go."

"She paid, she goes. I have already bought a man to guide."

"Then I don't see the problem here."

"Almost done," Marianne called.

"If she backs out, I will refund the money. Come in the car with us to the edge. Convince her not to go. Your friend does not want to do this but she thinks she does. She needs an excuse."

"We drove days to get here. She won't leave."

Maxim nodded. "She is proud. Come in the car. See what you can do."

Marianne walked in, the camping backpack definitively hoisted onto her shoulders. She hadn't adjusted the straps right and they dug in deep to her skin. She grunted a little with each step and had left her makeup off.

"Let's go," she said.

"Excellent." Maxim clapped his hands together. "Your friend will drive out with us. Some companionship for me on the return trip."

"Just like Dawid," Marianne whispered with a school girl grin. I walked out ahead of her without looking back.

The *colectivo* was gone. We rode in the rear of a land rover with benches, no seatbelts, no windows. Brown, musty tarp hung down around us.

"It won't be long," Maxim told us. "The driver is good."

We didn't reply.

We arrived at noon with the sun. Men in fatigues sat on a guard tower in a clearing that pretended to keep the jungle at bay. Rifles pointed onto us as we fell out of the truck. They held for a breath, then moved away.

"Your companions," Maxim said. Marianne hadn't the money to pay for a private tour. Two other adventurers, two other Canadians, subsidized her trip. At first, in the sudden light, I saw Frank Jr., the same height and gait and hair flopping down into his eyes. What Frank Jr. must think seeing me here, like this. But I was fooling myself. Three blinks and he became older, stronger, heavier around the face. JP from Trois-Rivières. He locked arms with his wife Micheline. We stood there while Maxim talked to the guide, a man with a face as brown as leather, but smooth, pulled taut across the bone. They stood under the guard tower, occasionally calling something up to the soldiers, waiting for a reply to trickle down.

Marianne began to cry.

"I don't think I can do it." The tears multiplied and fell against the ground. JP and Micheline moved discretely towards the tower and away from us.

"You don't have to," I told her.

"I want to see her." She used the back of her hands to dry her face but they were soon wet too, moving the tears over her cheeks. "I want her to know."

"It won't erase what Pete did. You traipsing all the way down here won't make a difference. She won't be impressed by your hard work. She won't forgive you. She'll look right through you like you don't exist. You're nothing to her."

"Pete would know what to do." Now Marianne used the end of her t-shirt to wipe her tears. She pulled so high to find dry fabric that I saw the underwire of her bra. "Pete didn't deserve to die." This made her cry harder.

"The girl might disagree." I'd left my hat in the land rover and the skin on my neck began

burning. Cooler air blew over from the shady jungle. Maxim and the guide still conferred with the soldiers.

"Good. I want her to disagree," Marianne said. "I want her to be angry. I want her to hate Pete. I want to meet someone whose whole body relaxes with the comeuppance Pete got, writhing in pain while the morphine does nothing. I want to find her and tell her about Pete and watch how someone is happy that Pete died because if someone is happy about Pete dying then all this will make some sort of sense." Insects and animals and the leaves of the trees stopped to listen to her. The birds stopped singing. Rifles from the tower pointed toward us again. She took deep and steadying breaths to calm herself. "We aren't going to see each other again, are we?" she asked.

"No," I replied, but we did, and the next time we did, I walked stronger and taller, and Marianne, who before had always seemed larger than me, cowered at my approach.

The guide stood between us. "*Vámonos*," he said.

Maxim said "Ready?"

JP and Micheline started to walk forward, but Marianne stayed in one place.

"Let us go, *señora*," said the guide. "We have to move now."

"I can't."

The guide spoke rapidly to Maxim.

"I can't," Marianne repeated. The weight of her backpack pulled her down. She fell, cross-legged, to a sitting position on the ground. "I can't do it."

"Good," said Maxim. "You return to the car with your friend. I have packed Fanta, biscuits."

"I'll go," I said.

They'd forgotten about me. I took the baseball cap from Marianne's head and hoisted her pack over my shoulder. It was in the knees, lifting it. "You said it's all paid for. I'll go."

"Jools, you don't have to do this," Marianne said.

"It may be best," started Maxim.

"No," I said. "I'll go. She doesn't want to find out what's in there." I pointed to the trees. "I do."

Marianne didn't move. She sat in the sun, burning as I'd been before I took her hat.

"I don't think you understand," Maxim said to the back of my head as we walked into the jungle.

I was going to be so much more than you ever thought.

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JIM SMITH

DADDEE 2013

Dad leaned over and fired his head at the tree. The tree screamed. There was no one in the forest to hear.
The ghost is in me, dodging bullets no one can see.
—From a poem

Kim[1] was next to walk over to the car as it sat grumbling, trunk open, a plaid shirt hanging from the open trunk. He held out the shoebox filled with his stuff.

Dad grabbed the box from his hands. Shook it. Lifted it up nearer his head, then tilted his head sideways, shaking it. Kim's eyes were wet, and watching him, I could see his upper lip start to tremble.

"There's no room for this shit. You know that, you little son of a bitch." And with that, he slowly, with great precision, turned the box upside down from a height of about three feet, watching Kim as Kim watched the contents fall out, landing in a jumble at his feet, something made of glass breaking, something else rolling off into the bushes at the side of the dirt path to the one door to the little house we were leaving after three weeks.

Kim started to shake, the lines in the ripped brown striped t-shirt[2] quivering over the hollow of his pigeon chest. He started one large inhale to cry out, then another before that one was done.

I couldn't watch any longer. I knew what came next—first the back of the hand across the side of his face, then maybe the cane, now leaning against the fender of the DeSoto, down across Kim's head, and then screaming and more screaming, and we would be late sneaking away from this place Dad had never paid the rent for, and that would only make things worse.

I swooped down out of the sky, angling sharply through the treetops directly behind Dad, gaining speed from the sunshine that was disappearing, and my outstretched arm did not sag as it held the oversized butcher knife. At the last second Kim looked up at me as my swoop reached its lowest point, my arm was jolted by the impact of the knife with Dad's neck, and as I climbed back up into the sun above the clouds, his head rolled lopsidedly off into the mud beside the tap where we'd gathered water for the few weeks we'd lived there. My last sight had been the look of incredible surprise on its face. Kim smiled a small smile, tears and snot mixing on that grubby little face.

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[1] Kim had an island-shaped birthmark on his cheek. They burned it off when he had shock treatments. I do not know who they were. I do not know why they did it.
[2] I had a ripped blue striped t-shirt.

I killed him many, many times that summer.[3] I poured hot lead into his mouth while he was sleeping, drove things into his eyes in the dark, spit foul pus and deadly germs into his food as it was stuffed into his braying mouth, surprised him with a can of gasoline thrown in his face, a beaker of the most powerful acid, a matchbox filled with ravenous alien insects hungry for flesh.

By the time I was starting school, I was running out of places to put his corpulent, swollen bodies, whole and in many, many parts. I was forever changing into my other clothes, or taking Kim's if I didn't have any. There were bloodstains, gore and terrible fluids crusting on almost every surface of every house, apartment, trailer, and motel room we infested.

I knew I would get caught, and I knew that neither Kim, nor my mother,[4] nor the other kids would do anything to cover up for me. I had made them all happy by doing what they had wanted to do but had not had the nerve to, but they were still what they were, and I was what I was. I didn't do what I did for their gratitude, though. I did it because I had to, and I had the power to, and Dad never seemed to catch on to the fact that his final moments were almost continually upon him. I never gave him the chance to say anything in that dripping voice of his, never gave him the chance to feign even an ounce of insincere sorrow or remorse. His was the crime, mine the punishment.

I could even then hear you creeping up on me, panting to stand in judgment of crimes you found repugnant. You would never be able to understand how a child like me could be so strong, so resourceful, so masterful, so utterly able to deal with the hardest of situations, and to do what had to be done. You would say I was too intelligent to resort to the extreme forms of violence I chose to use, that I was somehow unnatural. I would suffer your criticisms, happy at least that he was dead.

Because he first killed us all when I was just a child, much younger than I was then. He came home drunk, ran the Ford station wagon up onto a snow bank so that it tilted almost sideways, and almost fell out the passenger door and had to pick himself up from the sludgy mess of oily grey snow and water where he should have parked. And he caught my mother, or maybe it was me, laughing at him, struggling to freeze our jaws in our face as we looked out through those yellowed venetian blinds to see if he had a bag of groceries.

None of us were near the door when he crashed in. I forget, I was either under the camp cot bed in the back room, or maybe I was huddled down by the furnace in the crawlspace basement, trying not to sneeze. The sounds were sudden and loud, like taking a steak and hitting it against the

[3] Except Saturdays when I would take a quarter and go to the library and bring back as many science fiction books as my little arm could carry and a Coca-Cola (15 cents) and a Malted Milk bar (10 cents) and needles (shoplifted) for his eyes if he found me. I never had to kill him on a Saturday for some reason.
[4] Who he told us had had sex with dogs, which is what made us.

edge of a door. I don't know who it was. Then I heard Kim. I think it was NO, he was saying, and then the little whimper as he died. I tried to freeze my mind from thinking what he was using.[5] Was it a stick? Had he gone and got a butcher knife from the kitchen? Was he using his fists?[6] Then his sound was closer. I could see the bottoms of his feet, noticed for the hundred-thousandth time that the bottoms of his dirty green baggy work pants were frayed and ragged and flapped under his shoes. Then he found me. I didn't so much die as explode in all directions, a very liquid atomic explosion which took him with me, I am sure. I whirled apart. I ripped open and all the stuff fell out. Bones popped through skin. That was the first time he killed us all, and he was not caught, he just up and moved us somewhere else.

I used to watch him kill us on television sometimes. Other times, I would sneak down after they were all dead and read about what he had done in whatever pieces of newspaper were left on the linoleum tablecloth. When we had a radio, I would twirl the knobs up and down the dial until I got a reedy station which offered a play-by-play description of what he had done to us this time. Sometimes he would smash the radio while I was listening. Sometimes he would knock it down off the shelf onto the floor and stomp around on it. When he did this sort of fat man dance, he told us he was pretending it was us, he was stomping us to death because we were a bunch of worthless leeches.

We were a bunch of worthless leeches. We sat around wanting him to come home, to come home with food, to come home and say something else other than get your stuff together we have to move, NOW, he would always yell NOW. We wanted him to not take the screwdriver he carried in his back pocket for protection and stab us. We wanted him to not take one or two of us with him to the church house and make us stand there to prove he needed them to give him money. We wanted him not to take me out in the car when he had to make the others feel crummy. We wanted him to not throw himself back in the chair and then jump up and go to the hall closet and reach up with those arms with the fat that woggled, and take down an irregular shape of a blanket around something, and it be the sawed-off shotgun he was keeping for someone, and him throw the tattered baby blanket[7] onto the floor and nudge the safety off the gun and point it at us and tell us what worthless shits we were that he'd be better off if he pulled the trigger.

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[5] This never, ever, ever, ever, never worked.

[6] Fat hands, always really, really, really dirty, disgusting hands, never soap, always that can of stuff mechanics used that seemed like warm jelly and got wiped off on rags, which would get stiff and be no good for wiping his blood.

[7] Mine.

Most of all we did not want him to point it at us and pull the trigger. We were a bunch of worthless leeches that made his life a prison, which is why he would be better off if he just did it and went to prison where things would be so much better. All we did was want things. He tried as hard as he could, he yelled, he couldn't take it anymore, he yelled, we could all go to hell and he'd send us there, he yelled, come here, he yelled, go there, he yelled, do this, he yelled.

I never wanted us all to die. I never wanted to have to kill him over again and again until I was throwing up chunks of him all over the floor there was so much.

I ignored him until he was dead and I was grown up. He went away and never went away, and kept coming back because I never saw or thought of him again. I played out his life while trying to do it all differently. That's why I finally killed myself because I could not stand it, and the absence of it, and because killing was what we had always done and it was I suppose what needed to be done.

I watched myself killing myself on television. Then I read about it in the paper. Then I would turn on the radio to hear how I had done it this time, to ensure that I had taken nobody with me. I never wanted to tell anybody, because I would then have to do it all over again. If I tell you about this, we will have to kill each other, and then maybe we can go over and sit down on the couch and turn on the television to catch the coverage of our deaths.[8]

8

JIM SMITH is the author of 15 books and chapbooks published between 1979 and 2012, including *One Hundred Most Frightening Things* (blewointmentpress, 1985), *Convincing Americans* (Proper Tales Press, 1986), *The Schwarzenegger Poems* (Surrealist Poets Gardening Association, 1988), *Translating Sleep* (Wolsak & Wynn, 1989), *Leonel/Roque* (Coteau Books, 1998), *Back Off, Assassin! New and Selected Poems* (Mansfield Press, 2009) and his new collection, *Happy Birthday, Nicanor Parra*, just released by Mansfield Press in November 2012. Jim's *Back Off, Assassin: New and Selected Poems* was long-listed (leaked list) for the 2010 Governor General's Award for Poetry. The book also made the Indigo/Chapters first-ever Top Ten Poetry Books for National Poetry Week in April, 2010. It garnered rave reviews in *Fiddlehead*, *Arc*, *Broken Pencil Magazine*, and a number of other blogs. *Happy Birthday, Nicanor Parra*, his new collection, is his most extreme book yet, both poetically and politically. The 98-year-old much-Nobel-nominated Chilean anti-poet Nicanor Parra told Jim that "translation is treason" during their meeting at Parra's home in Las Cruces, Chile last February.

WANDA O'CONNOR

HOW TO ENTER A DRESS

WISA MOTETEMIT WISA
WISA nela WISA nela
hurry hurry someone is crying
hurry me hurry me

Switch back, *l'etat*, the territory loosed, ripped of its chords *strophic*
distress
not collapse of individual but a layering, the native blood the white
skin, exposed
too long to the moon
to want
more /
or less covering (pow wow dreams are redundant
to want
a hum of vowels, when the heart gathers beneath the current
low,
parting with those who part too easily with *image*
kil hok, body song
these vowels
gridded in Valhalla flush

slow-natured ones how the sounds resist the flight through the mouth, resist the exit

WISA MOTETEMIT MOTETEMIT
WISA SIKTIELOM WISA YUT

MAKUT, NAKANAMA, WISA
WISA, nela WISA, nela
NAKANAMA
NAKANAMA WISA YUT

WISA, nela WISA, nela

MOTETEMIT MOTETEMIT YUT

No more faun afternoons everything is ode

more killerroot
  more eating eaten smudged

    enough of anguish, blood
      root, enough
        just

      to spoil the disease;
Lobelia to ease the nocturnal lilt,
spasms in the undergrowth

roots as fauna not flora, roots
fracturing *malefactor,* balmed

  where
  the skin
  recalls
  the frost.

    yes,
  it is like
  falling.

This is your ancestral claim:

    make-up the territory, "yes" to Berio's Sinfonia, 3rd movement,
      to scatter interpreters
the oddly framed ones, eyes of the corvidae, their raucous calls.

We try, sounding beyond a pale tongue
hung
  in convex systems,
    condensing above a human barrier what expectation looks like.

We are more nimble, sure.

Or wavering.

It is like this: a hand, and then another. No interpreter for these things we know, how to dress.

slow natured one hurry here
hurry, me hurry, me
Makut Yut Makut
Wisa Yut, kil hok

Let open the door, let open all who have currents to lend to the increasing chorus, warning, transitive,
the almost a river.
Which may or may not have been exposed to self-limiting camps, which may or may not have been numbered, detailed, felt, watched, talked to, prescribed.

Wolastoqiyik, you never promised me *held*
some carriage, pulling into mist
the eyes that told stories through eyelids, *undergrounding*,
unbuilt when the building was necessary

my clavicle heart, slender rivers underfoot
(a tenuous architecture hollowed out cave, ventricle-lit

the road closed in winter
n o t a s i n g l e f o o t s t e p passed

in carnation dress

but blankets overhead, covering silence, not rapture heat
slick with the money of skin,
projects and measurements delayed

Wolastoqiyik,
Wolastoqiyik,

Promise me an old city,
delights, presaged in smoke, NAKANAMA time

Promise me the Indian boy with braids on the school bus,
forever beautiful knees.

I have the body of a woman now.
I'm letting my hair grow really long.

We can make things common, again.

Maliseet concordance

Nela: me
Siktielom: Very hungry
Nakanama: slow natured w/when one who is slow
Wisa: hurry
Makut: dress
Yut: here
Motetemit: someone crying
Kil hok: the (your) body

Translation:

Hurry, someone is crying, someone is crying
hurry, very hungry one, hurry here
dress, slow natured one, hurry
hurry me hurry me
slow natured one
slow natured one hurry here
hurry, me hurry, me
someone is crying someone is crying here

WANDA O'CONNOR recently returned from a Banff writing residency, making friends with magpies and exploring fields of ornithology on the page. "how to enter a dress" is the first part of a series of poems about her Maliseet connection. Recent work was featured at the 2013 Frye Festival, Spoken Word Paris, and the Factory Reading Series. Her latest publication, *damascene road passaggio, selections* (above/ground press, 2013) is an excursus through Kafkaesque lettering, mysticism, and myth, with a little *sturm und drang* for good measure. Wanda is an editor at *Lemonhound.com*.

ANTHONY RAMSTETTER, JR.

BIRDS OF THE HOLY LANDS

~~VOGLIO FARE L'AMORE~~
~~CON TE SULLA LAVATRICE,~~
~~QUAL È IL TUO DESIDERIO,~~
~~MIO TESORO?~~[11]
~~——————№7[12]——————~~
~~SANCTI FRANCISCI~~
~~MEUM MAGNUM MYSTERIUM~~
~~BENE VALEAS QUI BENE~~
~~FUTUIS AUTEM SED DOMI~~
~~MANEAS PARESQUE NOBIS~~
~~TRES CONTINUAS FUTUTIONES~~[16]

One day, while making love,[9]
I startled an unkindness of ravens[10]
that screamed in a sort of sacred fear,
flailing their wings & flying blindly[13]
into the blue[14] pollen haziness
of night, or morning maybe.
I wonder who this makes me.
I might be St. Francis of Assisi[15]
as my moans are those of an animal:
neigh-neigh, oink-oink,[17] *moo-moo.*

---

[9] *I can't see anything wrong with sex between consenting anybodies. I think we make far too much of it. After all, one's genitals are just one important part of the magnificent human body. […] I contend that SEX IS SEX and LOVE IS LOVE. When combined, they work well together, if two people are of about the same mind. But they are really two discrete needs and should be treated as such.*
—MARVIN GAYE, liner notes in *Let's Get It On* (1973)

[10] *I ride my bicycle all the time.* —RAY LEWIS, former NFL Baltimore Ravens linebacker

[11] (~~I want to make love to you on the washing machine, what is your desire, my treasure?~~)

[12] *Every day we make it, we'll make it the best we can.* —JACK DANIEL

[13] *If you can see, look. If you can look, observe.* —JOSÉ SARAMAGO, *Blindness*

[14] *You ain't been blue—no, no, no—you ain't been blue till you've had that mood indigo: that feelin' goes stealin' down to my shoes while I sit and sigh, "Go 'long blues."* —IRVING MILLS, 'Mood Indigo'

[15] *Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words.* —ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

[16] (~~St. Francis, my Great Mystery, best wishes to one who copulates well, but stay at home and prepare for us three continuous copulations.~~) —CATULLUS AND ANONYMOUS PROSTITUTES

[17] *Culture, culture, culture, oink, this is not prigmatical, this oinkos can't withstand centrifugal, shagged, yea or neigh-eigh-eigh, oink you for shipping here.* —JUDITH GOLDMAN, *l.b.; or, cantenaries*

Born stateside in Cincinnati, Ohio, **ANTHONY RAMSTETTER, JR.** began studying singing at the age of eight, music history at the age of 15 and poetry at the age of 21. He is currently a graduate student in the Master of Fine Arts program in Creative Writing at Louisiana State University and he has earned Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Creative Writing from Miami University of Ohio where he was Editor-in-Chief of *Oxford Magazine*, Miami's literary publication, from 2012 to 2013. Anthony is continuing "Conscience Manifesto," an ongoing 50,000-word epic poem that he aspires to never finish. A recipient of the Betty Jane Abrahams Memorial Poetry Prize from the Academy of American Poets, Anthony's writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Drupe Fruits*, *HTMLGIANT*, *the Poetry Foundation*, and *Pork College*.

ATHENA G. CSUTI

RESTRUCTURING

it is easier at night
slip in spill words

in your car on a Thursday under orange streetlights and I am stripping.
you said you didn't know what sickness was so I am subordinating
to my oppositional content because it is easier to present it
as a commodity
than to exist in it organically.

We're just having a conversation.

in these jutting senses
one must be self-limiting and tight-lipped.
to be ugly and dissonant to the public
but intimately tied and inconceivable without
it.

your car is without memorable smells
so I remove my coat, skin, and automatic responses.
I can only look at the dashboard,
stable horizon.
sickness is implicit inks
impossible to staunch the speech
of taboos

I am just having a conversation at you
about sickness.

we can measure the joy in moral society with formal features.
to be provocative in polite reality is only acceptable
in silence. some people can manage the possibility
of violence in stride, but this marks a definitive
break.

There is a conversation going on
and I am split in two parts.

it is winter and the cold does not know
the boundaries of glass.
I wish I could be as still as snow,
but I can't stop breathing.

ATHENA G. CSUTI is a student, writer, and raging feminist from Edmonton. She's a post-secondary slave at the University of Calgary studying English Honours with Creative Writing & History. Her poetry, prose, and articles have been featured in *ditch,*, *carte blanche*, and *Fem2pt0*. Athena's goal is to one day become a cat.

BOLA OPALEKE

A DIRGE FOR YESTERDAY

We came back home
covered in delusional, decorated giggles
boastful and sententious,
seeking your approval. For
our plastic bones crumpling like a piece of bad script
the skeleton of our hope would founder slightly
toward an old shrine that had metamorphosed. Empty
trapeze of our conquests planted doubts on our sanity
but we continue to gaze upward still
not stiffened by the scent of death far away
not flustered by the broken footprints of our tired spirits
we stared deeper into the void
the wide eyes of our wooden gods not blinking
we came back to the night … we came back home
waiting for the final verse.

We felt abandoned by the fight—
the war
our dreams
the burden of listening
the deception of peace;
nothing to relish
nothing to make our black blood boil,
we felt betrayed by your honesty
your thirst for followership
your record for adventure … then
you upped the game
you bent the rule
you called us "human"
you erred, you goofed
for always we had enjoyed being ghosts.

We found the ropes and chains and shackles
they spoke a new language
the language we no longer understood. They
adorned a new look

the look we no longer recognized;
our souls would race after our masters' dreams
our bodies bob for his lust, as
we cringed beneath the beloved whip. Scared
of the roaring thunderstorm, and
hallucinated by illusion of freedom
our hunger for yesterday grew sharper than before
we felt victory creep through our veins,
for the wars and battles we lost
we came back home.

BOLA OPALEKE was born in Ede, a village on the banks of River Osun, in the western part of Nigeria. He graduated from Obafemi Awolowo University (Formerly University of Ife) in western Nigeria with honours in Environmental Planning. Bola relocated to Canada in 2011. A number of his poems and essays have appeared in a few print and e-magazines like *FIVE Poetry Magazine*, *Miracle E-zine*, *Poetry Pacific*, *Drunk Monkeys*, a League of Canadian Poets feature, the University of Saskatchewan's St. Peters College annual anthology (*the Society* Vol. 10, 2013), *UK Poetry Library*, and others. In August 2012, his first book of poetry, *A Note from Hell*, was published by an American publisher. In almost all of his work, the abject poverty of Africa, its eroded societal values and culture, and the political manoeuvring of the ruling class feature prominently.

KILBY SMITH-MCGREGOR

AMNIOTIC

1. SWIMMING LESSONS

called eggbeater imagine an eggbeater in the kitchen an
eggbeater hand mixer in the back of the cupboard there's
a wheel that you turn a crank you spin the blades spin alternate
never touch the blades of the eggbeater fold
everything together imagine an eggbeater iron spine like
tied to a chair now begin from your knees now
kick

keep your palms flat your fingers closed you must
invent a surface your body made flat must create
resistance in the water do you know the figure for
infinity back and forth both hands like you are spreading
jam on toast in the kitchen spreading jam on toast burnt toast but
underwater unseen labour that is virtue crack
the egg onto

don't lose focus don't forget about
your legs about between your legs they never touch
you spin work your resistance resistance is what
lifts you up work hard we see your chest out rising from
your strength that keeps your chest high rising from
the water keep

can do anything be whatever you want to be you must
we know you can we know you can be this will save your
keep your head
up head up it's

not swimming it's something else

2. TRICKS WITH EGGS

I know an experiment to get an egg inside a bottle by setting it on fire
no that's not it

I know an experiment to get an egg to swim in water
add salt

and there's another egg trick with swimming another experiment I know
an experiment where the egg's unbreakable if you only press
the right place

can turn an egg into a mirror
not telling
trick with a candle
I know

the difference between hardboiled and raw
one spins better

you can make an egg see-through with vinegar
or you can tie a bone into a knot
try it

also a joke about me that my childhood pets committed suicide maybe
they were sick nothing to do with swimming except the turtle the fish and
there is another joke about me but I don't
know it

3. VARIABLES TO BE CONSIDERED

physical
fitness desire
to live (will
power) familiarity in the
water water
temperature air
temperature current wind speed
waves
weather

sharks

the cut line's in space, no one can hear you scream but I can't remember the movie just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water is jaws II with underwater cameras cameras watching from below when I was born I broke my mother's body broke in and out when I was born my father missed the eleven o'clock news when I was born they said it's a girl so many lessons badges levels testing testing life saving artificial CPR I never learned to testing testing when god said to noah how long can you tread water everybody laughed except noah or maybe noah laughed too for a while then he stopped treading water is movement fighting movement treading water the force of work against work never reaching out efficiency of fear as economy of movement all the fight of keeping your head up cutting itself with all those rows of teeth imagine an eggbeater straight-backed resistance the möbius motion spreading jam on toast patting a dog's head good girl

KILBY SMITH-MCGREGOR reads and writes in Toronto. She has contributed both fiction and nonfiction to *Brick*, and published recent work in *Descant*, and online in *Conjunctions*. Kilby holds an MFA from the University of Guelph, where she has also taught creative writing through the centre for Open Learning. She has twice been long-listed for the CBC Poetry Prize, and was was recognized by the Writers' Trust of Canada with the 2009 RBC Bronwen Wallace Award. You can hear an excerpt of her fiction at AuthorsAloud.

KATIE FEWSTER-YAN

MOTHER'S DAY

Tomorrow is Mother's Day, and Fitz,
my upstairs landlord, is fussing with the fence
again in the backyard. I can see him through the uncovered
window he cut into my door. It is cold again
and looking like rain. I remembered to take
my pill again this morning. It could happen that simply:
a memory slips cool and wet through the brain,
an untouchable fish, until straddled
for pleasure on the mattress again, its lip nicks the hook
of a nerve, I think shit, and before we know it a few weeks pass
and some piss on a stick alerts us to our blessing:
an alien angel, swelling from the sugars
it siphons like a parasite, has landed
in the attic above my bladder.

Not everybody tries.
I have been told the surprise
of my arrival was welcome. If a different
switch in the zygote had been flipped, my name
would have been Michael. I dated a Michael.
Almost anyone can infect you with life if you let them.
The lady upstairs caught the bug again quick. It boomeranged
back like the remains of a stomach flu and she passed
her second side-effect out like a cloud of undispersing
gas a few months back. I knew when I heard
it cry: small, muted, confused. Strange
that he'd been up there all that time, nine months and silent
as a tumor in that flesh-bump, now only audible
because unplugged and hungry.

To the hormone-thwarted offspring
of my chemically stoppered ovaries: I don't have anything
wise to say to you. If you were here, I suppose
we'd make do. Go out for midday walks with our raincoats
on, when it rained. Someone would teach you to catch
fish, build fences. You'd split me like a fissure

to get out here, get out here and scream at the raw end
of every newly erupting need. I know
you'd know no better, but you'd feel like a knob
about your own fuss and rush if you knew
what was in store: day after day cropping up unstoppably,
at times like memories so unwelcome
you'd give anything to make them stop.

There are better things, too.
Like love, and the tender way skin
has of folding over itself while you sleep.
Tomorrow we are going to my parents' house for dinner.
This year, I have made my mother truffles, a new trick
I've acquired in the kitchen. We pressed each brown
indelicate mass into our best attempt at roundness,
clumps melting in our hands more quick than we could roll them.
It's like a thank you, I guess.
We'll be heading out at five. If you were here,
you'd really have no choice but to come.

KATIE FEWSTER-YAN lives and writes in Toronto. Having finally snagged her HBA in Literature and Philosophy from the University of Toronto in June, she now works as a cook and haunts the library as much as she can in her time off. She also co-runs The Ruckus Reading Series with her partner in literary crime, Kris Bone.

R. KOLEWE

OVERPAINTED PHOTOGRAPHS

I had hoped for more.
I had hoped for calculus, or image, or oracle.
I had hoped for definition.
I had hoped for more than market forces, for science which is not certainty but.
I had hoped for.
I had hoped for mathematics at least hope.
I had hoped for the surface of equations.
I had hoped for economy or psychology.
I had hoped for an algebra at least.
I had hoped for more than metro tickets weighted down to the wind.
I had hoped for more than irony or ceremony.
I had hoped for income streams.
I had hoped for plate tectonics more topical the Higgs boson a pandemic.
I had hoped for the waitress (Lindsay) to acknowledge that I'd noticed that she had dyed her hair.
I had hoped for illness, that I'd be done by now.
I had hoped for flowers still gladioli at the shop on the corner they looked like they'd been left out in the frost.
I had hoped turning would be as good as being reborn.
I had hoped a handful of pharmaceuticals at bedtime would be a constellation, a galaxy, a redshift, a lightcone, a Lockheed Electra that would say enough.
I had hoped for without remembering because memory.
I had hoped for memory to hang behind.
I had hoped for memory to last familiar as Malliol's sculpture always the same woman.
I had hoped for enough like the wind functional or opening or chalk on board or ink or pencil crayon scratch continue I had hoped for continue as it does in Plato even though my handwriting is hard to read without maps and algebra again a clear view of the sky to five satellites wait they will acquire.
I had hoped for did I write to you that I was early but I always am so I thought of a small game my hand resting a curtain or a simple Poisson distribution or the words that are not exchanged with the prince a communion.
I had hoped for no affect but nothing you could call history now or recollected trajectory.
I had hoped for nothing but corners and stars freed from constellations and planets and prosody. A standard text. Egyptian cotton. Blankets. Painting.

FIVE CUTTINGS

1. At sometime order gave way and I lost count of scissors, scraps, anaesthesia, other etc.
2. Suture bright red heart red invisible red drawn through flesh my affect. Or is that.
3. Skin cloth rolled and fastened with shark teeth, rolled and stored in a card box with bone, theology, air, if moonlight I will refuse food. I will refuse.
4. Can I say what I. Never said listen. Never said look. Not beautiful or now feeling.
5. I don't want discourse healing your name, needles or knives. Don't talk back to me. Who—

(often vengeance, one plant divided and divided and divided immortal cut again, impure cut, blessed, infected, unsealed, unsaid, bled)

R. KOLEWE lives in Toronto. His work has appeared online at *ditch,* and *e-ratio*. A still untitled volume is forthcoming from BookThug in 2014. His ongoing project (two chapbooks, a website, and counting) concerning the continuing global crisis of capitalism can be seen at hudsonpoems.net. For the past few years he's had something to do with the online magazine of Canadian poetics, influencysalon.ca. He also takes photographs.

HANNAH PECK

PRINCIPLES

Repair yawns into disrepair. Sheds,
sway-backed and molting, unclench
into the slump of entropy, escape use.
We measure time with a star that will
destroy Earth in 1.2 billion years.
Others use the moon, that gasp, that crash
repeatedly deferred, yearning to land.

Causation is the only unobserved phenomenon
in which we are encouraged to believe.
If, then, ad infinitum.
We order chaos with its own rough edge,
tear form from incoherence. The logic
was never pure. In an economy of scale,
the heart boggles. The brain
goes slack. No organ can fathom. Smaller items
slip through the net of importance,
the wrong tools become bludgeons.

It's in the gentle peripheral
that breakables hide. Sidelong, anything
can be handled: the viscosity of glass,
the pancreas, A & ~A. Something keeps us
thumbtacked to existence. When Berkeley wrote,
"to be is to be perceived," he really meant it.

HANNAH PECK is a recovering philosophy student on her way to becoming a therapist. Her poetry has appeared in *Metazen*, *PressBoardPress*, and *The Ontarion*. She lives in Toronto, mostly for the traffic.

ADAM SEELIG

THREE POEMS

Adam Seelig's work is presented as a special PDF supplement. Download Adam Seelig's three poems here, or by going to www.puritan-magazine.com/23/three_poems_by_adam_seelig.pdf.

ADAM SEELIG is a poet, playwright, stage director, and the founder of One Little Goat Theatre Company in Toronto (OneLittleGoat.org), with which he has premiered works by poet-playwrights Yehuda Amichai, Thomas Bernhard, Jon Fosse, Claude Gauvreau, Luigi Pirandello, and himself. Seelig is the author of *Every Day in the Morning (slow)*, a fully continuous concrete-lyric-drop-poem-novella (New Star Books, shortlisted for the 2011 ReLit Award), and his plays include *All Is Almost Still* (New York, 2004), *Antigone:Insurgency* (Toronto, 2007), *Talking Masks: Oedipussy* (Toronto, 2009, published by BookThug) and *Like the First Time* (Toronto, 2011). Seelig's writings have appeared in various journals, including *World Literature Today*, *Open Letter* and *Poetry Magazine*. He is the recipient of a Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship for drama, and of a Stanford University Golden Award for his study of Samuel Beckett's original manuscripts (published in *Modern Drama*). Born and raised in Vancouver, Seelig has also lived in northern California, New York, England and Israel.

GARY SINGH

DEPARTURE

(Tu Fu, the Tang Dynasty Poet of Suburban Wasteland America, Offers a Farewell Poem to his Friends, Readers and Fans)

concrete expressways
spread their tentacles

cul-de-sacs, wool-coloured stripmalls,
tract-house subdivisions

seasonless weather
suggests the time is right

who wouldn't lament
the end of an industry

obsolete columnist will not
devolve to the dark side of PR

legions of worthy readers
here in the neighbourhood

beautiful readers, you have held
me upright

now I am heading south
to a legitimate darker side

who'd give a dime, or even some tea
to this wandering columnist with a broken MacBook

An award-winning journalist, **GARY SINGH** has published hundreds of articles as either a staff writer or freelancer, including travel essays, art and music criticism, profiles, business journalism, lifestyle articles, short fiction and now poetry. In addition, for 450 straight weeks he's also penned a creative newspaper column for *Metro*, San Jose's alt-weekly newspaper, an offbeat glimpse into the frontiers of the human condition in Silicon Valley. Gary's writing tends to merge the outer with the inner. He is an explorer of that which is hidden. Being half-eastern and half-western, Gary's work, art and life often exemplify a combination of opposites. Operating between established realms—creatively, geographically or even psychically—Gary is a sucker for anything that fogs the opposites of native and exotic, luxury and the gutter, academe and the street.

JOHN MCKERNAN

NEW SHOELACES EVERY MONTH

The red and white peppermint-colour ones

The stringy lime sherbet-tint ones

Hard-to-tie extra long licorice ones

The overpriced chocolate fudge ones

Elastic ones the colour of kiwis

The 100% cotton ones with knots the size of blueberries

Orange ones that imitate a rope

Ones with the texture of overcooked pasta

Milky white ones made in Guatemala

Tiny lemon-coloured ones that stretch a bit

So when I am down on the rocky ground

Beside the seashore kissing your feet

I'll have the sensation some god or goddess had

Tumbling headfirst from sky to earth

When the blue ocean crashing against white

Sand floated into view at dawn for the first time

PLATFORM

A soapbox in every city and village
In America

Whoever wants to
Should wash their laundry
In the public square

Hang out their woes to flap in the wind
Ordinary people
Should scream with voices
Louder than soap bubbles

What kind of detergent is freedom
If you have to crawl through green mud
To a pile of black dirt on a mound
Of yellow dollar bills screaming
Some tune like "Turn Down The Volume"

FRAGILE SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Held together by pepper spray

Locked together by Taser zaps

Washed together by fire hoses

Barked together by K-9 forces

Wheeled together by throwaway handcuffs

Glued together by the folks in blue

Followed together by invisible cameras

Fenced together by wire & rope

In the distance a huge hole

Where a tall building once rose

In the further distance a lonely woman

Holding a candelabra in her broken arm

Farther yet one sentence condemning us

To a freedom from whispers & large lies

JOHN MCKERNAN—who grew up in Omaha, Nebraska—is now retired after teaching 41 years at Marshall University. He lives—mostly—in West Virginia, where he edits ABZ Press. His most recent book is a selected poems: *Resurrection of the Dust*. He has published poems in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Paris Review*, *The New Yorker*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *The Journal*, *Antioch Review*, *Guernica*, *Field*, and many other magazines.

ALISON HICKS

THE SOUL FLOATS AT THE END OF ITS SHELL

i.

I held my father's hand as he died.
The hospice nurse traced the blue under his nails
the way they said in the pamphlet
with the ship sailing off the cover.

Seawater rushes in one ear, out the other.

Two days later a dog came up
to me and my friend on the beach.
His nose brushed my leg.
Tall enough to pet without bending.
Still I continued talking
pulling the thread of some story I'd started.

He didn't seem to belong to anyone.
No one called him to them.
He stood panting, then took off into the spray.

ii.

Motor catching, turning over.
Not what you think but what happens when you let go of thinking.

iii.

If I had not wandered, could I be comforted,
had I not ventured into the rain
then asked to come in?

To coax myself into sleep
I've imagined love I've gathered
as heat in the centre of my body.

Waking, stepped as if from a perfumed bath
fogging mirrors.

iv.

If the ball could be a body
soul what the pitcher lays on it
fingers splayed across the seam.

Wherever you look, it's somewhere else.

Our design unfolds,
bolt of cloth we weave and unweave.

Sometimes to remove the flaw,
sometimes to incorporate it.

ALISON HICKS's books include poetry collections *Kiss* and *Falling Dreams*, a novella, *Love: A Story of Images*, and an anthology, *Prompted*. Awards include the 2011 *Philadelphia City Paper* Poetry Prize and fellowships from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. Her work has appeared in *Blood Lotus*, *Caliban*, *Eclipse*, *Fifth Wednesday*, *Gargoyle*, *The Hollins Critic*, *The Louisville Review*, *Pearl*, *Permafrost*, *Quiddity*, and *Whiskey Island*, among other journals. She leads community-based writing workshops under the name Greater Philadelphia Wordshop Studio.

JAIRUS BILO

AIRBUS INFINITY

so many care bears here
sometimes I wanna eat gas
or pillow myself some vapour
the whiteout held itself
and then i remembered cheese
sounds of Philly and
how they eat bagels out there
there's a whole other layer
of clouds in this sandwich
i never liked marshmallows
but they're routine anyway
and now this air shake
has me wondering
if peek freans will be
the buttery last of us

FOREVER ARLO

you are like prius
and i was once geo
something bare standard
just enough to fecund to
past the funk forever arlo
i'm kinda prairie and
a little on the hoo doo
spore love is real love
a switch click something
into nitro power heart pulse
ringing to grunge a decade
for next phase rendition
to quit with armenian it
went with cascade finish
passing genealogy through
a wifi osmosis

BRUNCH TACTICS

the niche derogatory loop
in cascade ethics
towards a tap flow alamo
this one we remember
unlike the frizzles in mid-dew
that annihilate misgivings
for want and amber
mornings sufficient
to pound a zeffer like
infusion in myrtle creeks
i bathe like honourary in
a little step from Markham
the stretch between Tecumseth
the taint of departing Queens

MANAGING MY OUTSOURCE

how far reaching. does it stop?
beyond some vernacular snapshot
of evidence no one knows
this is work. not marketable.
but for you we acquire
a taste to grow to.
something worth more
in your future sense
after you leave this,
will i but disappear?
Or will i reach out
to live in your thoughts?
during a process of figuring me out
i can only take you
this far. but you'll always
have the outer branches of me.
if you want it.

JAIRUS BILO was raised and resides in Edmonton, Alberta. *The Puritan* marks his first publication in a literary journal. His poems appear monthly in the *Alberta Filipino Journal*. You can visit his blog at http://jairusbilo.tumblr.com and follow him on Twitter @jairusbilo.

BÄNOO ZAN

TORONTO 2012

You answer my call
by calling
me

What does it mean
to mean
nothing?

Life
inhabits the geography
of time

and parentheses
open their arms
to margins

You lick my tongue
like a lullaby

My branches
sawed
by my roots

Falling—
I drink destiny—
an extinct genre

I wish
I had
missed your call

PAYÄM-DÄR[18]

You arrived at manhood
submitted
to the imperative—Iqra'[19]

in the cave—
your chest
crushed under revelation

Your large eyes—
the myth
of your long hair

You joined the mountain with the city—
the thunder with the earthquake—
poetry with faith

defied narrow eyes
guarding you against you—
the most absent from the earth and the sky—

rasul[20] of love—

BÄNOO ZAN landed in Canada in 2010. In her country of origin, Iran, she used to teach English Literature at universities. She has been writing poetry since the age of ten and has published more than 80 poems, translations, biographies, and articles in print and online publications around the globe. She writes in Persian and English. She hosts Queen Gallery Poetry Night in Toronto and is a member of the TOPS (The Ontario Poetry Society) Executive. She believes that her politics is her poetry. As a political gesture, she ascribes whatever she writes to an inner voice or muse and does not accept responsibility for the statements in her poetry.

[18] Persian: messenger
[19] Arabic: Read or recite, the first word revealed to Prophet Mohammad
[20] Arabic: messenger

"OUT OF THE WELL:"

An Interview with Bruce Bond

BY ADAM TAVEL

BRUCE BOND *is the author of nine published books of poetry, most recently* Choir of the Wells: A Tetralogy *(Etruscan, 2013),* The Visible *(LSU, 2012),* Peal *(Etruscan, 2009), and* Blind Rain *(LSU, 2008). In addition he has two books forthcoming:* The Other Sky *(poems in collaboration with the painter Aron Wiesenfeld, intro by Stephen Dunn, Etruscan Press) and* For the Lost Cathedral *(LSU Press). Presently, he is a Regents Professor of English at the University of North Texas and Poetry Editor for* American Literary Review.

The following e-mail was conducted via e-mail in the summer of 2013.

Adam Tavel: *What were the generative forces behind* Choir of the Wells *evolving into a tetralogy? At what point did you realize that it wasn't merely several individual manuscripts, but rather four interconnected books conversing with each other, and how did this decision inform the book's completion?*

Bruce Bond: As with all my books, the generative force was actually many forces. The challenge with each book has been one of drawing the threads into one braid—something that begins to happen generally once I have written at least half a book of poems. Many poems in *Choir* grew out of particular tensions that followed me around over a long period of time. That said, there was a period of a couple of years when I wrote the lion's share of the book. It came after two long-term nervous system infections, when I became deeply invested in the mind/body problem, which I see as related to the spirit/matter and form/content dichotomies and, in a fundamental way, the significance of creative will. So I found myself writing a lot, so much so that I had a backlog of unsubmitted books, four of them, each with its particular terrain, and I sent all four to my editor at Etruscan, Phil Brady, in hopes that he might pick one so I could then send the others elsewhere. To my surprise, he saw a unity there and wanted to publish all four in one large volume as—and this is worth emphasizing—parts of a singular vision.

The unity of the four parts as one book became central to the sense of sustained emotional and intellectual investment there. I suppose, since these books were evolving simultaneously or nearly so,

they were bound to be haunted by related questions: the mind/body problem, yes, but also various personal struggles: the death of a close friend to alcoholism, for instance. Some of these struggles get explored by proxy via historical and philosophical poems. Also, the poems in all four books characteristically have a strangeness and intimacy that I hoped would test, validate, and challenge the more meditative hunger for ideas in them. So a certain mercurial sensibility—formal and intimate, philosophical and playful, historical and personal, scientific and surreal—unites the book as well. I ended up holding back the part that I thought fit least well (that book, *For the Lost Cathedral*, is now forthcoming from LSU), and I pulled together a fourth part of the newly dubbed tetralogy. I also wrote various poems for each section and radically changed the architecture and rewrote parts to make something wholly new—a kind of big house with a symmetry of chambers, wherein each poem would have a lyric strangeness, line-by-line resilience, and efficiency that resonated within a larger conversation.

AT: Choir of the Wells *is bound by an elemental motif as well as by the elegiac tenor of its subject matter. To what degree do these two forces inform and sustain each other?*

BB: I think the elemental motif—such as the invocation of water, earth, fire, and air in the section titles—articulates my desire to explore the primacies out of which consciousness evolves and through which it experiences difficulty as the mother of meaning. Elegy expresses something at the core of our difficulty—not just in terms of literal death, but also in terms of our falling away from being, which in turn makes language possible and so too an object of desire. The very title, *Choir of the Wells*, refers to the mystery of origins—the origin of song, of mind, of spirit, of new being, or whatever it is that rises out of matter. The book is thus driven by metaphysical hunger. Great loss inspires a similar hunger, a longing for connection, a wonder and bemusement in the face of the unknown. Beginnings and endings therefore beg questions of continuity and its absence. Paradox is everywhere in *Choir*—especially the paradox of being bound up in a social, cultural, material, and natural world and yet in some necessary measure not quite identical with that world. Our particular cultural moment has brought this paradox into sharp focus, and the Internet is a great metaphor of all of us wired into one another as we type away in separate rooms.

There is a great scene in the movie *Tree of Life* wherein the elemental forces that engender life in an evolutionary narrative eventually lead to the capacity for one dinosaur to put a foot on another, to

contemplate the pulse in the throat of the weaker, and then to remove the foot and move on. In the terms of that movie, this moment marks the birth of grace, but also the emergence of a sense of differentiation and selfhood: me here, you there. In separateness, the terms of a new connection, the rudiments of love, are forged. When I saw that movie, I got very excited, because that was a time when I kept seeing daily life, with all its misreadings, losses, debts, desires, complexes, and connections, against the backdrop of some larger evolutionary story wherein the birth of new being renews some sense of life as creative in its essence and thus destabilizing in all the ways that make meaning possible.

AT: Choir of the Wells *is, at times, resonant with palpable sorrow due to its many elegies, and yet it never sags or grows melodramatic. What role did sequencing and arc play in the book's completion?*

BB: Well, thanks for that. Sequencing was enormously important and not easily described as a single arc. Rather, it was a matter of countless adjustments of large and small structures. Melodrama would kill any book, but especially a long one. The longer the form, the more movement it needs. One of many parts of that movement is tonal, and tone is a function of more than the obvious elements of voice, such as rhetoric and diction. We might also include some elusive sense of "otherness" as essential to the invitational and attentive quality of a poem. I know that is a bit abstract, but it actually turns out to be a pragmatic notion. A lot of poems fail because there is not enough "other" in them. Melodrama is, however ostentatious with affection, a form of exploitation that plays upon ready-made pathos. It risks very little, controls too much.

It is important to me that a poem is in a large sense a "gift." It must offer up something new, something enlarging. I know this might be a minority view, but I think of all good poems as didactic in the best sense—they illuminate. I am not much interested in poems that have nothing new to reveal to me, nor am I interested in poems that are without mystery. Poems ideally move with an elusiveness that in turn authenticates the sense of an encounter with the unknown. I like poems with a subtext that whispers, "Yes, but, but, but, but." So poems of a dynamic nature do not content themselves with being personal or impersonal or even transpersonal. They hunger for meaning too much to be merely certain or uncertain, sententious or ironic. They are too curious for that, too alive, too honourific of what they do not say or have yet to say.

AT: Water Scripture*, the second book* in Choir of the Wells*, is notable for its many ekphrastic poems, and your collaboration with painter Aron Wiesenfled,* The Other Sky*, is forthcoming with Etruscan Press. How has this ekphrastic relationship with painting evolved over multiple collections, and why do you suspect it has proven to be such an enduring presence in your poems?*

BB: I suppose the simple answer is that I love painting. I also love what painting is not. A painting cannot speak progressively with the articulate range of differentiation and connection that the language arts possess. Likewise, poems do not have the speed and physical immediacy of paintings—an immediacy whose power is wedded to a certain silence, a certain sense of spaciousness in summoning the interpretive eye. So the ekphrastic poems offer a place for painting and poetry to enlarge themselves in one another without lapsing into mere imitation. This is key. A hunger for descriptive immediacy might authenticate and ground a poem, but the merely descriptive poem is dead—a third-rate painting—because it fails to recognize the power of its particular medium.

AT: Earth's Apprentice*, the third book in* Choir of the Wells*, is comprised of three long sequences. What challenges—whether formal or self-imposed—do you encounter in these sustained cycles, and how do you wrestle with the demands they make of both poet and reader alike?*

BB: The philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty once said that freedom is predicated upon limit, and without which we cannot "articulate the field of possibilities." I love that notion. My personal experience when writing within sequential or formal demands is one of joy. I don't really feel the force of limitation very strongly. Limit is less a centering or paralyzing force in the process than a force of momentum. Moreover, it makes for yet another form of otherness, another thing "out there" that I must engage. A lot of poetry that prides itself on a process orientation fails to recognize the role of deep and mysterious thematic and formal follow-through in giving the process its power to move and so to move us. The lazily considered desire to move, move, move to the ever surprising new thing can degenerate into a superficial skipping across the surface of experience. That is just the new face of stasis to me. I see zillions of poems in that genre, and they are just not for me. Since Olson, a familiar objection to the lyric implicates its ego-centrism and self-consciousness. I suppose that self-consciousness is possible. Most formal poems are slow and lack adventure. In truth, any aesthetic, even the most Dadaist, can become a self-conscious styling. For me, poems are most

dynamic if they assert qualities of both a process and a structure. In fact the "thingness" of the poem, its sense of being well made, wedded to an efficiency of attention, energizes its movement.

I don't really care, as a reader, if a poem was a product of years of revision or if it spilled out in one gush. What is key are the feelings of authenticity and, yes, beauty, which have always required a range of consciousness that is both wild and controlled, irrational and rational. A fashionable and yet oddly nostalgic resistance to beauty is, to me, reductive, soulless, disingenuous, and a little silly. Rather, we might enlarge what beauty means in ways that are credible to the deepest courts of unconscious appeal. Cold, rational scepticism cannot reach these depths. Nor can the weak imaginings of the merely exotic, pretty, or traditional. Beauty as one more mercurial element in our imaginings must have something of the ordinary and the fierce in it. To eliminate beauty is to surrender to very narrow notions of poems as merely mimetic, as opposed to forces of "poesis" or "making," which body forth new intensities of experience. Poems create something unforeseen, both in conflict and yet related to their more obvious subject matter, and beauty becomes part of the power that persuades us that this subject indeed matters. Thus beauty cannot be dissociated from all other aspects of an artist's medium, which, in the language arts, includes its scope of reference. The dynamic function of the beautiful, ever elusive and surprising in its formal properties, is its call to us, its claim on us, its forging of felt relations. Such a call would calm and arouse at the same time. It is both ethics' adversary and ally. What we call formal writing is just one face of beauty, and it benefits from the vocal flexibility and rigors of free verse just as free verse benefits from the lyric resources of echo and pulse as engines of emotional energy.

AT: *Much has been made of your former career as a professional guitarist and how this has influenced your writing. What tangible aspects of your musicianship do you see in your poems? As a reader, I can't help but notice, say, the subtlety and nuance of your metres and slant rhyme. I'm also curious if your years of playing haven't also influenced the manner in which you read your work publicly, particularly your inflection and pacing.*

Music is huge to the emotion of a poem to me. A purely visual poem that cannot be spoken might be interesting to me but never very moving. I studied composition with David Diamond, who had me writing in baroque forms for a while to appreciate how music might be "about" something, not in a symbolic way but in terms of working a musical "idea" and deepening it. I was into Bach in

particular, and he has that quality of being both highly emotional and intricately architectural. When I turned more seriously to poetry, John Donne became Bach's correlative for me.

As for inflection and pacing, I am delighted that you feel that. I studied with Don Justice, who believed that syntax was primary—far more important than metre. So when I work in metre, I am aware that voice, pacing, silence, and the melody of rhetoric can never be compromised. Melody is something less theorized in poetics, but hugely important. Our intuitions for musical matters register the power of novelty in conversation with memory, how desire might suggest the terms of its simultaneous fulfillment and arousal.

I should add that my musical practice has also shaped my worldview as it relates to poetry. No doubt, music influences my views on the power of beauty in the great nervous system of the natural world. Also, music shapes my scepticism when it comes to the narrow reading of form as a cultural code. You might notice that it was in the musical world where integration first happened in this country. Music has always travelled rather rebelliously across certain cultural boundaries even as it bears the signature of culture. As a result, musicians are often less plagued by a desire to reify those boundaries than certain more language-oriented interpreters of music. Also, music makes obvious that all experience is not mediated through sign systems.

The mimetic function of music is, if postulated, extraordinarily complex and never the whole story. Music is the art most obviously about itself, about beauty. Sure, the inclusion of noise marked an important development in the history of music, but insofar as it has survived the middle 20th century, that movement is still invested in form and aesthetics. So music is, for me, part of the conscience of my work. It teases me out of thought. It returns me to a slippery otherness that is at the heart of the human condition. It reminds me that a poem is not simply a mirror held up to nature. It is a force of nature. It brings new being into being, out of the well whose silence it makes audible without ceasing to be silence.

ADAM TAVEL received the 2010 Robert Frost Award, and his chapbook *Red Flag Up* was recently published by Kattywompus Press. He is also the author of *The Fawn Abyss* (Salmon, forthcoming 2014), and his recent poems appear or will soon appear in *Quarterly West*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Passages North*, *Southern Indiana Review*, *West Branch*, and *Crab Orchard Review*, among others. He is an associate professor of English at Wor-Wic Community College on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

"THAT THING TO HAVE:"

A Review of Souvankham Thammavongsa's *Light*

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REVIEW BY PHOEBE WANG

Though it was late in the season, I sprinkled a pinch of kale seeds, about to expire, into a pot. I'd moved house in May and been abroad in the summer, and so hadn't planted a garden that year. I gave the soil a scoop of water, and pushed the pot to the window. In a few days, green specks appeared. The next morning, a dozen tiny sprouts were straining toward the light. I marveled: this too was a form of work.

In her poem, "Parsley," I feel Souvankham Thammavongsa shares this awe: "All lean / in the same / direction / as if / some event / outside / needed witness." Yet the growth of the plant is an event itself, and we witness to it. Thammavongsa's third collection of poems, *Light*, alerts us to the act of witnessing, as well as to the events and moments that can be easily missed. The poems plot those moments and memories along a kind of trajectory. This trajectory does not always form a story. Instead, it leaps and takes us from one impression to another. The mind works this way too, assembling its observations and revelations seemingly without order, making us wonder how we arrived at a certain point in our lives or in our work. Small shifts can lead to a transformation, a rearrangement of language or an adaptation in nature, and Thammavongsa's poems stress how necessary those shifts are. What do those changes cost us? What do they offer? How do we view them? What energy makes these transformations possible?

The book expands on the literal meaning of light, as a source of illumination and energy, and as a source of nourishment that makes growth possible. These idiomatic and metaphorical connotations are also alluded to in poems about bringing things to light or about being light-hearted, without burdens or weight. Because of these multiple inferences, the book's title, for me, stands for an open-endedness rather than a quantifiable thing or object. Light is an agent that stimulates vision

and direction, like poetry. Thammavongsa's work highlights this role of poetry—to look at our relationships and the world in many different lights.

Fields of Action and Influences

Thammavongsa lays her words out in a variety of shapes and forms, though her signature style includes lyric compactness and austere line placements complemented by ample white space. The spaces are given as much thought and weight as the words themselves. Her style is a refreshing contrast to the dense, baroque imagery of current poetic styles. Other work can feel hyperbolic and verbose after reading Thammavongsa's lean verse. The poems in *Light* are neither superficial nor undemanding, creating instead a space of quiet discomfort.

Some poems take the shape of lists and prose poems, others look like little jetties, unmoored on the page but carrying the reader across ledges of language. Most make minimal use of punctuation, letting syntax do the work of conveying sense. The sentence structure is often straightforward, emphasizing a clarity and strictness, but occasionally, the word order conveys playfulness and surprise.

There aren't many precedents for Thammavongsa's work, though some of the practices associated with concrete poetry, the Black Mountain poets, and Japanese haiku can serve as possible entry points for thinking about her writing. William Carlos Williams has called the poem a "field of action," and a "daydream of wish fulfillment." There is a tension between desire and beauty in Thammavonga's work. These poems seem to circle certain truths, but ultimately refrain from satisfying that desire, like someone who wishes to gaze at the sun but must take care not to damage his or her retinas. The views that are offered, eventually, feel involuntary. The reader is also caught in that dream of wish fulfillment, looking to the poems for explanations.

A few elements of Williams's formal technique are present in Thammavongsa's poems, which break from traditional forms and rigid stanzas. Rather than relying on a formulaic metre and rhythm, Williams preferred using the breath as a measure. When Thammavongsa reads aloud, I hear how her natural pauses and intonations shape the line-breaks and stresses. The white spaces then, are not empty, but taut with silences, pauses, breaths.

If comparisons must be made, the poems of Susan Howe and Robert Creeley can serve to show what *Light* sets out to do. For example, here is Thammavongsa's "The Sun in Flannery O'Connor's *The Violent Bear it Away*:"

Here, it bursts
  into blood
and fire
  or rises

calm
  and contained;
slips
  over thin lines

of trees;
  or circles
and circles
  in a yellow haze

and Creeley's "A Night Sky:"

All the grass
dies
in front of us.

The fire
again
flares out.

The night
such a large
place. Stars

the points

Not only are the line-breaks, punctuation, and diction similar, but there are echoes in the arrangement and economy of syntax. With a subject or verb omitted occasionally, the line is even more brief and musical. The severity of the line-breaks stack the clipped "i" and "in" sounds. The violence of the sun may seem "calm / and contained" by the compact stanzas. The ferocity is a closely guarded, but it is still "furious / and hot," and the danger of things bursting and slipping is always present.

In "When You Learn to Swim," the poem tells us, "It will be different here. You can take a leap / off this ledge ten feet and never touch / ground. You can hover in what / could be air." Making your way through a Thammavongsa poem is a like letting yourself float through a strangely familiar fluid, only to be buoyed by a mysterious force:

> it's some kind of physics, law, a rule of matter
> put in place, set in place
> as old and as constant as that sun:
>
> that unsettled speck, that shadowless thing,
> that thing to have.

Susan Howe's "That This" begins:

> Day is a type when visible
> objects change then put
>
> on form but the anti-type
> That thing not shadowed …
>
> Is light anything like this
> stray pencil commonplace
>
> copy as to one aberrant
> onward-gliding mystery

Thammavongsa's work is less abstract than Howe's, but both poets embrace a sense of mystery, each making room for the impenetrability of their subject matter.

But what do we know about insects, sea creatures, birds, plants, scarecrows, houses, feathers, volcanoes—the subjects that give rise to Thammavongsa's poems? The poet describes their forms and shapes for us, and the descriptions hold their own. We see, as Howe writes, "when visible / objects change," but the forces behind that change are an "aberrant / onward-gliding mystery." The poet provides little to no imposition of human presence or mediation; sometimes we don't know what we're supposed to feel toward this world of living things and commonplace objects. They're shown as self-contained, as if they have lives of their own.

Poems such as "The Sun Does Not Know" turn the perspective of the poem toward these unknown forces: "it doesn't even know / what it looks like / to each of us." In "A Volcano," the poet suggests the sun could be embedded in the earth: "You don't know it yet, / but here, / it won't come round." These poems do more than simply personify nature. The special importance or value of an object is not dependent upon human qualities or knowledge. Instead, these poems deviate from the idea that objects in nature are on display for our personal benefit. They shed light and give life regardless of our presence.

For instance, in "Mountain Ash," we're told, "Whatever we know of fire, we know it is not done." Might ash "have colour like life?" The tension between ignorance and innocence is the subject of a poem about children cutting paper snowflakes, who "know none of these things are like the real thing." They're not told how the light will melt and destroy their complex patterns. In another poem, a small cat "knows / to go out there" along the train tracks and neighbourhood blocks to hunt its prey. Thammavongsa brings us to the edges of the limits of our knowledge, and to places we're reluctant or afraid to know. The poems turn an unflinching eye to the violence, the death, and the unstinting love in our relationships.

It will be different here. The reader will be set adrift.

Bands of Colour and States of Being

In interviews, Thammavongsa cites influences from art forms other than poetry; she also works on photographs and paper-clip paintings, and collaborates on short films. The first poem in *Light* refers to a painting by Agnes Martin, *Untitled #10*. Thammavongsa has perhaps more harmonies with the work of Martin than with any other poet. Martin's most well known works are large canvases with neutral washes and bands of colour. Grids and lines, drawn with pencil or graphite, divide the canvas, some extending to the edges, others just short. The geometric patterns resemble hand-drawn graph paper. When I viewed a series of Agnes's work a few years ago at the AGO, I thought of musical staff paper, awaiting the hand of the composer.

"This is a clearing: a rule / you will bind to yourself like a promise / to begin," writes Thammavongsa. It is a clearing, but it is not empty space or silence. There are rules here, and measures, but they are not restrictive or dogmatic. Rather, they are prompts, promises, and guarantees that the work of the artist will emerge.

The poem asks us to note the "colour" and "shape" of "the lines, the grids, the marks" because—as in Martin's painting—there are no figures or objects to be differentiated from the background. There is no horizon or obvious perspective. Instead, the viewer is presented with an austere vision of a landscape that withholds forceful emotions. It's a space of meditation, a psychic space that represents a real experience. In her 1976 lecture, "We Are in the Midst of Reality Responding with Joy," Martin writes that reality "is an absolutely satisfying experience but extremely elusive. It is elusive because we must recognize so many other things at the same time." Thammavongsa's poems also express this elusiveness and the multiplicity of experience; for instance, in "A Straight Line," she tells us: "It's hard to tell / at this point / where it's going / and where it's been." All that's known of the line or mark is that it's both too soon and too late to tell "what it was / before it got here."

The Abstract Expressionist painters attempted to convey the spontaneous act of creation rather than a figure subject or object. Martin's precise work reveals the discipline and concentration of her process. In images where there are so few elements, the poet's or artist's ego appears to be almost negligible. Similarly, Thammavongsa's poems are not landscapes where the self competes to impose its vision, and yet her experience comes across in a powerful way.

When Thammavongsa and I chatted about Martin's work, she commented that the fine lines and grids, rendered with such care, are still merely lines. The meticulousness and discipline exist for their own sake.

For her, writing a poem is like clearing a field and marking it. An empty page resembles a landscape, but one that has limits, just as there are limits to experience and knowledge. The poem, like a mathematical proof, makes a proposition that we can choose to accept as real. It tallies and deduces each change in argument. Do those changes reverberate more loudly in a sparser field? Are variations in the lines more visible? Can the "the plot and path / of a small single letter" stand out in that clearing?

There are other entry points into the landscape of Thammavongsa's poems, which may be inevitably compared to Japanese poetic forms such as haiku and tanka. Thammavongsa does not use strict syllable count, so to align her work too closely with other Asian traditions would be overly facile. Yet there is a similar sensibility, particularly in her use of juxtaposition, a feature of haiku.

For instance, in "Lightning Storm Seen from the Window of an Airplane," a series of images are tenuously related: "Some bent metal wire charged and flickered inside an incandescent bulb /

Some fly fisher's line pulled at by one who didn't know how to fly cast." The poem stacks a series of views and images, each one seemingly independent. Each line also conveys a particular perception and moment in time, and altogether they plot an actual event in the physical world.

Regarding a haiku by the 16th century Japanese poet Bashō, Jane Hirshfield writes:

> Seemingly a moment of pure perception, this poem also portrays a state of being. Though the poem is rooted in an actual visit to a mountain temple, a prose notation written by Bashō tells us of his intention—to present the condition of 'profound quietness, the heart-mind open and transparent' … Bashō's subject is one independent of place and time, of the stories and plot lines of self. But even the condition of transparence realizes itself within the stitched fabric of the phenomenal world, and all good haikus are precise in their seeming, true to the facts of the outer.

Thammavongsa's juxtaposed images and similes produce a "stitched fabric" of feeling. Each detail is still grounded in sights and sounds—snow in a field, a bit of tinsel, the sound of a gunshot. For instance, in "At the Farm," a number of flies enter the car window where the speaker is sitting. "One was on the rear-view mirror /// The other three were perched on my left hand" and then: "I heard a gunshot by the barn and thought nothing of it /// We were at a farm /// I saw a cow come charging forward with its head half gone /// A man with an axe came running behind it." The almost-comic violence is underscored by the brevity and bluntness of the language. The poem creates a scene simultaneously fleeting and slow. Moments are distilled, and the spaces in between are like pauses in between a speech in which someone else might respond or ask a question.

"Japanese poetry's brevity similarly invites renewed intensity of perception. The brief poem murmurs, 'Just this, just this,' opening the reader to the sharpness of each blade of grass," writes Hirshfield. "The poems' brevity reminds us of the nature of time and our relationship to it, but their strong roots in the particular clarify that our fleeting lives do not simply 'happen' and vanish, they *take place*—take place in the physical world; take place in the current of lived events."

However, where Japanese poetry is rooted in Buddhist and Shinto values and spiritual practices, Thammavongsa's work does not exhort an ideology or belief system. The poems of *Light* may explore faith, but they also explore electricity. Thammavongsa's poems get at something more primal—some elemental drama of the earth's memory.

The Drama of the Personal

Every poet chooses his or her own trajectory, even as readers and reviewers try to place them in a particular camp or community. The varied threads and tendencies in Thammavongsa's writing show a range of poetic style and subject matter that compromise this kind of easy categorization. This is also true of the work of other "Asian-Canadian" female poets, such as Evelyn Lau, Rita Wong, Larissa Lai, and Sachiko Murakami, whose work, paradoxically, cannot be categorized into a particular set of experiences based on their ethnicity or gender. What they do share is a similar position toward established literary traditions and Canadian writing, a position characterized by skepticism, hesitation, discomfort, and anger. It's a position that stems from so rarely seeing their experiences and perspectives represented in Canadian culture. In a recent interview, Rita Wong explains that the reason she "turned off a lot of that so-called mainstream media historically had to do with both its gender and racial biases. Why keep watching yourself being erased, over and over?"

Thammavongsa writes poems about family and memory of childhood with purpose and richness. "Perfect," "Dream," and "I Remember" are full and eventful, as if when writing about the past, she needs to go on at length. In "Perfect," a poem that relates the breakup of her parents' marriage, the teenage speaker finds concentrating on her math homework easy compared with thinking about the upheavals at home: "There's always an answer, a sure thing. / You just have to work your way there. Everything / you need to know to solve it has already been given / to you." The speaker reminds herself that everything she needs to know to solve the distress of the past has been provided, and if it hasn't been given, it's likely not needed. At the same time, working through a math problem is likened to working through a poem. Has everything we need to solve these poems been provided to us?

In "Dream," the speaker remembers the funeral of her father. His body was "light-boned" but when she picked him up and "held him like he was my child," he slips away "like he was doing a backward dive into a pool," and at last she realizes he is dead. Her mother and brother "are watching me now and want me to say / something, explain what's happened to us," and yet, the speaker remains silent, just as the poet withholds any direct explanation of the scenes in these poems. Again and again, the poet walks up to a problem of how things mean, of some mysterious event of the past or present, only to accept its difficulty and its impenetrability. Yet somehow, her view of the world, as well as the reader's, is made more familiar by the attempt.

The childhood Thammavongsa describes is typically Canadian, with school play auditions, pen pals, cutting snowflakes, Sunday School, riding the bus for fifty cents, "yo-yos and hula hoops," swing sets and lab dissections. This familiar subject matter does not match up with what might typically be deemed "immigrant writing," and while her previous collection of poetry, *Found*, drew upon a scrapbook her father kept in a Thai refugee camp, her newest work draws from a wide range of experiences and images, and not a predetermined category of themes.

The speaker in Thammavongsa's poem experiences tension between how others see her and how she sees herself. Someone who grows up without seeing her own experience reflected in mainstream films and TV, in children's books that are never about parents' accents or holidays in distant countries, learns that her perspective and her view of the world is incongruous, out of place, barely visible. While I am also the daughter of immigrant parents (my father was born in Shanghai, my mother native of one of the many small islands south of Hong Kong), my own childhood—surrounded by their paintings and record collections—had its share of cultural tension. It's for that undercurrent of tension that I read the work of other Asian writers. This sense of not belonging is devastating to a young woman's sense of self and confidence, but valuable to a poet, who learns never to take things for granted.

Thammavongsa takes nothing for granted—every line, every meaning is a slow achievement and a gradual accumulation. In a few of the poems, she contemplates words for *light*, in Icelandic, Arabic, Dutch and Lao. The poems offer vocabularies, brief translations, images of how the letters circle on the page. "Ljós" is the Islandic word for light, we're told: "And the word for poem is ljóð /// What happens at the end changes everything." The letters travel as if making a journey on the page, looking back or pointed upwards, small changes in direction making a world of difference. In "Bare": "If the ending were different, if you placed the last letter right after the beginning, it would be an animal, a power, a warning from which to stay away," and Thammavonga notes, "a rearrangement, a shift, a move out of place, a spine realigned" because it is those small shifts that have the noticeable effects on our understanding. Even in poems without words in other languages, a rendering of meaning takes place, a conversion of something from one form or medium to another.

One bright afternoon this October, I brought out the kale shoots and put them on the patio. When I came home, something had bent the shoots and crushed them against the side of the pot. There was nothing I could do but bring it inside again and sprinkle more seeds. In the world of Thammavongsa's poems, if a tree falls in a forest and no one is there, it not only makes a sound but

it changes the way the light falls. Suddenly, a beetle can scurry out, and a weedy shoot has a greater share of sunlight and air. There is an ecosystem to these poems, and some parts of it will matter more to one reader than another. Some of the images will seem more vigorous than others, some endings more hushed and static, but everything here has "its place in the universe and its order."

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"BACK TO THE WHY:"
Michael Winter Finds His Duende in *Minister Without Portfolio*

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REVIEW BY NICHOLAS HERRING

Michael Winter's oeuvre has always been concerned with the tricky push-pull of conviction, of love and of loving: in *One Last Good Look* (1999), Gabriel English admits, "I was stalled, dumbfounded by the idea of grasping an ideology. I never held an argument from a principled position the way some of my friends did"; Rockwell Kent begins *The Big Why* (2004) confessing, "if I kept close to this woman a good life would accrue. But there is something about goodness—I associate it with acquiescence, and I'm repulsed by compromise." However, his latest novel, *Minister Without Portfolio* (2013), reveals an artist not so much compromising, but rather revisiting and surrendering to the groove of former questions, letting the idea of perfection fall to the wayside by allowing the grace of recovery to eclipse the awkwardness of guilt, riffing on love and goodness like an accomplished craftsman.

The protagonist is Henry Hayward. I hesitate to describe him as a jack-of-all-trades, because there are times in the narrative when you might wonder what it is that this fellow knows at all; and then there are times when you wonder how it is that he knows so much. He is one of those men who seem to maintain sustenance by fumbling through things. Hayward is Winter's most honest and accessible character, yet there is something absent about him, a kind of malaise or ennui that cannot be readily defined. Nevertheless, to attempt a firmer definition would be to miss the point. If Hayward's character seems purposefully vacant, it's to provide a space that allows one to read more cooperatively, to breathe and even exist with him and his social circle—and what is exceptionally delivered is the loyalty he has to his friends, his tribe, his "hundred people." By allowing the space of familiarity to root, Winter establishes a gravity that allows for a constellation of eccentricities (in

much the same manner that Jerry's blandness both authorizes and bases the more dynamic personalities of *Seinfeld*). Hayward, while certainly not anybody's favourite, is necessary. In short, you need customariness to throw the peculiar into relief.

The novel begins with Hayward's partner, Nora Power, telling him their relationship is over. Winter writes:

> For three hours they talked it over and she told him how it was and he fled through the spectrum of emotions and they were both cleansed but she returned to what was not an ultimatum. I'm leaving you now can you please leave.
>
> But I love you, he said.

These are regular, decent people who mean well, people who are sensible enough to comprehend the kind of terrifying simplicity that is this: sometimes, things just do not work out.

Hayward's best friend, John Hynes, another wonderful character, pulls some strings and the two head for Afghanistan as tradesmen (the narrative never quite explains what it is that they do) so Hayward might get Nora out of his system. Seventeen pages into the story, Winter plunks these two friends down in Kabul, where Patrick "Tender" Morris, a fellow Newfoundlander they knew from trade school, presents them with two automatic pistols. Curiously, less than 30 pages later, we are back in Newfoundland. The terseness of this international spackle is a stumble in the story. Winter, always a concentrated stylist, appears to have some problems with the topicality of Afghanistan. His east coast prose fluctuates between long and winding firmness:

> They would give him the high ground and he could really dig a good ditch for himself now and remain unshaven and unwashed and drink himself into a narrow hallway with no door at the end, he could do that and search for commiseration …

… and an underdeveloped quality to the sights and sounds of Afghanistan:

> There was a blue hand-drawn sign telling you the tribes that were in camp. Nearby a well that was just a pipe coming out of the ground. Several families with blue plastic containers … A brightly painted truck was covered in dust …

Quite simply, the novel would be improved by excluding such a foreign departure, precisely because such scenes feel borrowed and inaccurate due to their frugality. There is nothing particularly

inspiring about a truck covered in dust. In my estimation, Winter forces Hayward's Middle-Eastern remembrances: there are too many instances peppered throughout of a hill on the southern shore mirroring that of an Afghan hill, which Hayward cannot ever seem to remember the name of, and it is this inability to assign a value that does not translate well to the reader—for if Henry can only recall without much exactness, why should we care? Nearing the novel's end, these recollections begin to infect the text with a frequency that, coupled with Hayward's own nebulousness, becomes somewhat irritating. A front-end loader approaching Henry and Martha's house rumbles with "the sound tanks make on roads in Afghanistan." The briskness of such callbacks does not make them stimulating, and ultimately, the presence of such occurrences is akin to throwing topsoil upon a sieve, only to then have the chicken wire come down.

The remaining majority of the novel is concerned with the emotional situation between Hayward and Martha Groves, a physiotherapist carrying Tender's child, and the house Tender Morris meant to fix up had he survived Afghanistan. Winter is explicitly searching—and I would contend *finding*—his duende (from the Spanish phrase *duen de casa*—"the master of the house"), a concept established by García Lorca about a spirit who assists the artist's perception regarding the limitations of their acumen, involving basically four elements: irrationality, earthiness, a heightened awareness of death, and a dash of the diabolical.[21] Winter is more attuned to these tenets than ever before. He allows honesty and truth to shine by adopting a style that surrenders to the groove of the plot. When Martha leaves Henry to the house so that she might visit a client, Winter writes:

> It is complicated to love someone, he said to the house. As he loved Martha he also felt he was losing his love, for the person he loved was staining her own dignity by loving him … He set about beating apart a Canadian-maple solid wood coffee table but he couldn't stop thinking about her. Of the little white pearl buttons on her shirt, it was a turquoise prairie shirt with pockets that buttoned down … No matter how much he implored her to be in control, she would take his feelings into account.

This passage exhibits the forging of a renewed authorial constitution, contending with, and putting to rest, the beliefs of a former system. In *The Big Why*, the vanity of Rockwell Kent revealed that love is not an end, but rather the engine by which one can come to meet oneself. *Minister*, by re-examining this idea, now proposes that love is a just and deserving end. The solutions Winter

[21] Christopher Maurer's introduction to Federico García Lorca's *In Search of Duende* (New Directions, 2010).

presents in *Why*, on par with Kent's first-person control of the narrative, were true, but this truth was located within solipsism. To observe a writer recognize and temper previous extremes is supremely touching. By exposing the junctions of doubt and conviction, *Minister* recasts a ballot for love. It is of note that Winter's use of colour essentially adheres to whites (there are numerous wedding parties) and orange (the zeal of sun and horses). And so, while he stumbles, his enthusiasm is to be admired.

Even though he is clearly most at home writing about Newfoundland—*Minister* has it all: dories, whales, horses, wind, alcohol, hooks for hands—there is something not exactly regional, or more precisely, Newfoundland about Winter. The first section of *The Big Why*, "Beginnings: The Naked Man of Brigus," uses a letter from Kent in June of 1914. He says of Newfoundland: "A man goes to sea here as one would depart from the earth for the moon of Jupiter"; in *Minister*, Henry does the same: "He was rowing away from the land and he saw where he lived … This is how astronauts feel, he thought, to look back from space." From these similarities, one might extrapolate that these two novels are like cousins at a Thanksgiving buffet who have unknowingly flirted with the same woman, the same object of desire.

Like Spain's fervent, even fanatical, devotion to García Lorca, Canada should really make sure it protects this artist. Like most of the greats, imagine what Winter will be doing when he reaches 70. *Minister*, despite its faulty tension between specificity and the indistinct, is a novel that works slowly, a novel that sticks to its instincts, reminding the reader:

> [w]e live individual lives with the consciousness of death and awareness of the past. But the most important part of that sentence is the individual part. Let yourself be humbled by the experiences people have been having for thousands of years. And speak of it.

By remaining faithful to the questions he confronted in *The Big Why*, Winter demonstrates that doubt is essential to both artists and their craft. *Minister* will likely convert a number of readers to raise his flag, and in this way, it is a quiet and humble addition to his oeuvre—a work that will find its own space in its own time in the plot of Canadian fiction.

NICHOLAS HERRING lives, writes, and reads in the Beaches.

"THE LOVE OF MEMORY:"

A Review of Aminatta Forna's *The Hired Man*

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Grove Atlantic Inc.
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New York City, NY 10011

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REVIEW BY ANDREW BLACKMAN

Aminatta Forna is making quite a name for herself as a chronicler of the aftermath of war. Her 2002 memoir *The Devil that Danced on the Water* told the story of her Sierra Leonean father's execution on trumped-up treason charges by the country's dictator. Her two previous novels, *Ancestor Stones* and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize winner *The Memory of Love*, both explored conflicts in Sierra Leone, one recent and one more distant.

Her latest, *The Hired Man*, represents a change in location but not in theme. The territory this time is the Croatian town of Gost, whose inhabitants are grappling with the effects of a 1990s wartime massacre. They respond in different ways to the dilemma facing every victim of trauma: to remember, or to attempt to forget?

The 'hired man' himself, Duro, chooses to stay in Gost and bear witness to what happened. His sister and mother try to forget entirely by moving to New Zealand. Others occupy a peculiar middle ground, refusing to move away, but also refusing to be entirely honest about what occurred, and the parts they all played.

Often it's outsiders who expose secrets and unspoken agreements about burying the past. In this case, it's an English family, Laura and her teenage children Matthew and Grace, who unwittingly trigger the release of uncomfortable memories. They buy a local house and hire Duro to help renovate it, unaware that the real owner has been missing since the war, and that the person who sold them the house had a hand in her disappearance.

For much of the book, these secrets are even kept from the reader. *The Hired Man*'s first half meanders along pleasantly, with Duro fixing Laura's roof, taking the family out to a swimming hole

in the hills, slowly becoming friends with Laura, and winning over her taciturn teenage kids. In between, Duro indulges in nostalgic reminiscences of hunting deer with his childhood friends, Krešimir and Anka Pavić.

It's all quite slow moving, but peppered through the narrative are little glimpses of something much darker beneath the surface. Duro's renovation of Laura's house provokes angry responses from Krešimir and his friend Fabjan. When Laura wonders why there's only one bakery in town, Duro acknowledges, "Someone could have made money opening a new one, Laura was right. In all the years that passed since the family went away, nobody ever did. Not Fabjan: too much even for him."

It's a beautifully light touch, those last five words provoking so many questions in the reader's mind that Forna refuses to answer, at least initially. It's a similar story with Gost's Orthodox church. Grace wants to visit, but Duro tells her it has been closed for a long time. There are the untilled fields around town that Laura can't believe have been left for wild flowers to take over. Duro responds by carefully showing her which ones she can walk in and which ones she should avoid, blaming difficult owners but immediately revealing to the reader that the truth lies somewhere else: "I guessed that Laura was one of those people who preferred the music of a lie to the discordance of truth."

As the hints pile up, it becomes clear that darkness will soon be unleashed. Both in the present-day narrative and in Duro's reminiscences, tension slowly builds, so there's a sense of relief when the darkness suddenly spills over both past and present narratives at once. The baker and his family disappeared in the war because the word they used for bread was the Serb *hleb* instead of the Croat *kruh*. The Orthodox church closed because its members—Serbs again—were placed on a list and arrested. The fields are empty because of landmines. Laura's house was once Anka's, until she and her Serb husband were arrested by Fabjan, with some help from her vindictive brother, Krešimir.

In all of this, the words "Serb" and "Croat" are never used. It's a clever device, distancing readers from the preconceptions based on news reports and TV documentaries about the breakup of Yugoslavia. Readers are forced to look at the situation with fresh eyes, seeing not a Serb but a baker who made excellent *devrek* and meat pies and who supervised karate practice at the local sports club.

This is one of the strengths of the book: the way that it forces readers to discard learned truths and see a familiar conflict in a new way. War is a time when politicians and military leaders try

harder than ever to obscure the reality of human experience and clothe their actions in generalities, like 'fighting tyranny,' 'making sacrifices,' and 'protecting national security.' If novels have a 'job' at all, it's to excavate the real, individual human experiences that lie beneath the language of war. It's what Heller did in *Catch 22*, Vonnegut in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Hemingway in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and it's a job that still needs doing, perhaps more than ever, since the above examples were taken from Obama's recent speech urging a military strike on Syria. In an age of Predator Drones and Advanced Precision Kill Weapon Systems, the human impact of war can be distanced and sanitized, morality outsourced to a machine.

The Hired Man willingly and effectively works to dig beneath accepted truths. It explains almost nothing about the background or politics or military strategy of the Yugoslav Wars. But by discarding facts, it gains insight.

The detailed description of the house renovations acts as an extended metaphor for the way the past has been covered up and then rediscovered. Laura and Grace unearth a mosaic from underneath white plaster and restore a fountain in the courtyard. Emphasis on renovation could be interpreted as a heavy-handed metaphor, but Forna brings it off thanks to the trick of embedding it among a wealth of other detail on the work Duro is doing: tiling the roof, installing an electric pump on the well, painting the windows, and restoring the old car in one of the outbuildings.

In the town, as with the mosaic, it's really Duro who is doing the unearthing, using the English family as his unsuspecting tools. It's Duro who can't leave the past alone, who must keep picking at the scab. It's Duro who confronts Krešimir and the rest of the people in Gost with the truths they'd prefer to keep hidden:

> I again saw Krešimir, only this time he wasn't walking past on the other side of the road carrying his shopping home, this time he was storming across the road towards me. It gave me a thrill to see him so angry; my heart quickened, because Krešimir in a rage is capable of anything. I curled my fingers around my glass of wine.

The "thrill" is telling: Duro only seems to come alive when he's in conflict with somebody. He needs to excavate the past just as much as Krešimir and the others need to leave it buried.

In an interview with *The Times Live* in 2011, Forna said, "Creative writing students are often told: 'Write about what you know.' I prefer: 'Write about what you want to understand.'" This perhaps explains her decision to tackle such a complex topic and a completely different culture. She

lists in her acknowledgements an impressive array of writers, reporters and war survivors from the region whom she consulted, interviewed or asked to read the manuscript. The result is a book that rings true, that's packed with details on everything from which song was playing on the radio in 1990 ("*Hajde Da Ludujemo*") to the best month for picking *rujnika* mushrooms in the pine forest. Cultural authenticity can be bought, after all; the price to be paid is in hours spent in libraries and archives and in conversation with the people who really know.

One advantage of Forna's outsider status is that she has no axe to grind. Everyone in the book is afforded equal treatment; even those who betray their neighbours and steal their property are presented not as villains, but as shabby opportunists. Like Eichmann as seen by Hannah Arendt, they are banal, and their banality makes them easy to understand.

If there is a particular group that's targeted in *The Hired Man*, it's rich foreigners like Laura who fan out across the globe in search of sun and cheap property, viewing their surroundings as nothing more than an exotic backdrop for their own lives. Forna allows herself a few digs at Laura, describing her disappointment at finding in the local market not the vine-ripened tomatoes and succulent olives she'd expected, but "imitation leather jackets, mobile-phone covers and pickled vegetables." But even Laura and her somewhat brattish children are treated fairly, and never become mere figures of fun.

The continuity with Forna's previous books is not only in the theme of conflict, but also in the way that the story of the war itself is told through the lens of a later period. The question provoked by her books is not, "How could people do such terrible things?" but, "How do people live with each other, and with themselves, in the long years after the fighting has ended?"

It's a question explored by another recent release: Hanna Krall's Polish bestseller, *Chasing the King of Hearts*, now translated into English for the first time and published in the UK by Peirene Press. The story's heroine spends the entirety of World War II chasing around Europe trying to free her Jewish husband from German concentration camps, but when they are finally reunited, it is not the expected fairy-tale ending. The husband, like Duro, refuses to forget. He blames his wife for the death of his family, and blames himself for surviving when they all died. One day he leaves her a note saying he's going away and won't be back.

That's the price, it seems, of remembering too much. The present rushes on, and leaves you behind. Duro, too, is isolated and alone, stuck in the past and unable to give more than a small portion of himself to people in the present. His family either died in the war or moved away. His

friends are now his enemies. All he has are his two dogs. At one point, it seems as if he and Laura may become romantically involved, but he is too distant, still thinking of his friend Anka.

His brother-in-law Luka tells him there are flats available in Zagreb:

> There were hundreds going spare. You had to act fast for the good ones. Some people just moved in and claimed they'd been living there for years. Sometimes it worked.
>
> "What if the tenants come back?"
>
> "Too bad," he shrugged.

Even though Duro refuses, his sister Danica still occasionally tries to get him to move. When she finally tells him she and his mother are moving to New Zealand, she tells him, "Life goes on, Duro."

It's in scenes like this that the novel moves beyond the theme of war to enter more general territory. Danica's advice will, after all, be familiar to anyone who has experienced loss. Move on, start fresh, make a clean break, turn the page, start a new chapter. DSM-V, the latest version of the American Psychiatric Association's manual for diagnosing mental health conditions, now states that grief extending for more than two weeks can be diagnosed as major depressive disorder and medicated accordingly. Move on, turn the page. Even the very act of remembering is being devalued, as we increasingly trust Google and Wikipedia to do it for us.

But the problem with shedding the past so freely is that it renders meaningless such basic human principles as justice. Duro is the only person in the book who refuses to forget Anka and the baker and all the other ghosts of the war, the only one who refuses to acknowledge the right of their former friends and neighbours to be living in their houses and sitting on their furniture. He stands for the principle that injustice has no expiration date. This is why remembering is so important.

Big themes, but Forna pulls off the novelist's trick of making them appear to arise unbidden from the story itself. The result is an impressive, beautifully told story, dodging seamlessly between past and present, creating a vivid picture of life and loss and the refusal to forget.

ANDREW BLACKMAN is a fiction writer living in Crete. He's had two novels published in the UK: *A Virtual Love* and *On the Holloway Road*. He's also written extensively for magazines and newspapers, and blogs about writing and books at www.andrewblackman.net.

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Our Second Annual Thomas Morton Memorial Prize fiction winner, **AURORA BRACKETT** lives in Las Vegas, Nevada where she is a PhD fellow in fiction at University of Nevada, Las Vegas' Black Mountain Institute. She is a recipient of the San Francisco Browning Society's Dramatic Monologue Award, the Wilner Award for Short Fiction, a nominee for The Pushcart Prize and a 2013 Sozopol Fiction Seminar Fellow. Her work has appeared in *Nimrod Quarterly*, *Eleven Eleven*, *The Portland Review*, *Fourteen Hills*, and other magazines. She is currently fiction editor of *Witness Magazine* and was an associate editor of *Hope Deferred: Narratives of Zimbabwean Lives*, published by Voice of Witness/McSweeney's in 2010.

ATHENA G. CSUTI is a student, writer, and raging feminist from Edmonton. She's a post-secondary slave at the University of Calgary studying English Honours with Creative Writing & History. Her poetry, prose, and articles have been featured in *ditch,*, *carte blanche*, and *Fem2pt0*. Athena's goal is to one day become a cat.

KATIE FEWSTER-YAN lives and writes in Toronto. Having finally snagged her HBA in Literature and Philosophy from the University of Toronto in June, she now works as a cook and haunts the library as much as she can in her time off. She also co-runs The Ruckus Reading Series with her partner in literary crime, Kris Bone.

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ALISON HICKS's books include poetry collections *Kiss* and *Falling Dreams*, a novella, *Love: A Story of Images*, and an anthology, *Prompted*. Awards include the 2011 *Philadelphia City Paper* Poetry Prize and fellowships from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. Her work has appeared in *Blood Lotus*, *Caliban*, *Eclipse*, *Fifth Wednesday*, *Gargoyle*, *The Hollins Critic*, *The Louisville Review*, *Pearl*, *Permafrost*, *Quiddity*, and *Whiskey Island*, among other journals. She leads community-based writing workshops under the name Greater Philadelphia Wordshop Studio.

R. KOLEWE lives in Toronto. His work has appeared online at *ditch,* and *e-ratio*. A still untitled volume is forthcoming from BookThug in 2014. His ongoing project (two chapbooks, a website, and counting) concerning the continuing global crisis of capitalism can be seen at hudsonpoems.net. For the past few years he's had something to do with the online magazine of Canadian poetics, influencysalon.ca. He also takes photographs.

JOHN MCKERNAN—who grew up in Omaha, Nebraska—is now retired after teaching 41 years at Marshall University. He lives—mostly—in West Virginia, where he edits ABZ Press. His most recent book is a selected poems: *Resurrection of the Dust*. He has published poems in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Paris Review*, *The New Yorker*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *The Journal*, *Antioch Review*, *Guernica*, *Field*, and many other magazines.

WANDA O'CONNOR recently returned from a Banff writing residency, making friends with magpies and exploring fields of ornithology on the page. "how to enter a dress" is the first part of a series of poems about her Maliseet connection. Recent work was featured at the 2013 Frye Festival, Spoken Word Paris, and the Factory Reading Series. Her latest publication, *damascene road passaggio, selections* (above/ground press, 2013) is an excursus through Kafkaesque lettering, mysticism, and myth, with a little *sturm und drang* for good measure. Wanda is an editor at *Lemonhound.com*.

BOLA OPALEKE was born in Ede, a village on the banks of River Osun, in the western part of Nigeria. He graduated from Obafemi Awolowo University (Formerly University of Ife) in western Nigeria with honours in Environmental Planning. Bola relocated to Canada in 2011. A number of his poems and essays have appeared in a few print and e-magazines like *FIVE Poetry Magazine*, *Miracle E-zine*, *Poetry Pacific*, *Drunk Monkeys*, a League of Canadian Poets feature, the University of Saskatchewan's St. Peters College annual anthology (*the Society* Vol. 10, 2013), *UK Poetry Library*, and others. In August 2012, his first book of poetry, *A Note from Hell*, was published by an American publisher. In almost all of his work, the abject poverty of Africa, its eroded societal values and culture, and the political maneuvering of the ruling class feature prominently.

HANNAH PECK is a recovering philosophy student on her way to becoming a therapist. Her poetry has appeared in *Metazen*, *PressBoardPress*, and *The Ontarion*. She lives in Toronto, mostly for the traffic.

Born stateside in Cincinnati, Ohio, **ANTHONY RAMSTETTER, JR.** began studying singing at the age of eight, music history at the age of 15 and poetry at the age of 21. He is currently a graduate student in the Master of Fine Arts program in Creative Writing at Louisiana State University and he has earned Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Creative Writing from Miami University of Ohio where he was Editor-in-Chief of *Oxford Magazine*, Miami's literary publication, from 2012 to 2013. Anthony is continuing "Conscience Manifesto," an ongoing 50,000-word epic poem that he aspires to never finish. A recipient of the Betty Jane Abrahams Memorial Poetry Prize from the Academy of American Poets, Anthony's writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Drupe Fruits*, *HTMLGIANT*, *the Poetry Foundation*, and *Pork College*.

ADAM SEELIG is a poet, playwright, stage director, and the founder of One Little Goat Theatre Company in Toronto (OneLittleGoat.org), with which he has premiered works by poet-playwrights Yehuda Amichai, Thomas Bernhard, Jon Fosse, Claude Gauvreau, Luigi Pirandello, and himself. Seelig is the author of *Every Day in the Morning (slow)*, a fully continuous concrete-lyric-drop-poem-novella (New Star Books, shortlisted for the 2011 ReLit Award), and his plays include *All Is Almost Still* (New York, 2004), *Antigone:Insurgency* (Toronto, 2007), *Talking Masks: Oedipussy* (Toronto, 2009, published by BookThug) and *Like the First Time* (Toronto, 2011). Seelig's writings have appeared in various journals, including *World Literature Today*, *Open Letter* and *Poetry Magazine*. He is the recipient of a Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship for drama, and of a Stanford University Golden Award for his study of Samuel Beckett's original manuscripts (published in *Modern Drama*). Born and raised in Vancouver, Seelig has also lived in northern California, New York, England and Israel.

An award-winning journalist, **GARY SINGH** has published hundreds of articles as either a staff writer or freelancer, including travel essays, art and music criticism, profiles, business journalism, lifestyle articles, short fiction and now poetry. In addition, for 450 straight weeks he's also penned a creative newspaper column for *Metro*, San Jose's alt-weekly newspaper, an offbeat glimpse into the frontiers of the human condition in Silicon Valley. Gary's writing tends to merge the outer with the inner. He is an explorer of that which is hidden. Being half-eastern and half-western, Gary's work, art and life often exemplify a combination of opposites. Operating between established realms—creatively, geographically or even psychically—Gary is a sucker for anything that fogs the opposites of native and exotic, luxury and the gutter, academe and the street.

Winner of the Second Annual Thomas Morton Memorial Prize for poetry, **NATHAN SLINKER**'s other poems have recently appeared in, or are forthcoming from, *The Kenyon Review*, *Ninth Letter*, and *Hinchas de Poesia*. He was chosen by *Orion* editor Jennifer Sahn as a 2013 Fishtrap Fellow. Nathan lives in Tempe, Arizona and is an M.F.A. candidate at Arizona State University.

JIM SMITH is the author of 15 books and chapbooks published between 1979 and 2012, including *One Hundred Most Frightening Things* (blewointmentpress, 1985), *Convincing Americans* (Proper Tales Press, 1986), *The Schwarzenegger Poems* (Surrealist Poets Gardening Association, 1988), *Translating Sleep* (Wolsak & Wynn, 1989), *Leonel/Roque* (Coteau Books, 1998), *Back Off, Assassin! New and Selected*

Poems (Mansfield Press, 2009) and his new collection, *Happy Birthday, Nicanor Parra*, just released by Mansfield Press in November 2012. Jim's *Back Off, Assassin: New and Selected Poems* was long-listed (leaked list) for the 2010 Governor General's Award for Poetry. The book also made the Indigo/Chapters first-ever Top Ten Poetry Books for National Poetry Week in April, 2010. It garnered rave reviews in *Fiddlehead*, *Arc*, *Broken Pencil Magazine*, and a number of other blogs. *Happy Birthday, Nicanor Parra*, his new collection, is his most extreme book yet, both poetically and politically. The 98-year-old much-Nobel-nominated Chilean anti-poet Nicanor Parra told Jim that "translation is treason" during their meeting at Parra's home in Las Cruces, Chile last February.

KILBY SMITH-MCGREGOR reads and writes in Toronto. She has contributed both fiction and nonfiction to *Brick*, and published recent work in *Descant*, and online in *Conjunctions*. Kilby holds an MFA from the University of Guelph, where she has also taught creative writing through the centre for Open Learning. She has twice been long-listed for the CBC Poetry Prize, and was recognized by the Writers' Trust of Canada with the 2009 RBC Bronwen Wallace Award. You can hear an excerpt of her fiction at AuthorsAloud.

ADAM TAVEL received the 2010 Robert Frost Award, and his chapbook *Red Flag Up* was recently published by Kattywompus Press. He is also the author of *The Fawn Abyss* (Salmon, forthcoming 2014), and his recent poems appear or will soon appear in *Quarterly West*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Passages North*, *Southern Indiana Review*, *West Branch*, and *Crab Orchard Review*, among others. He is an associate professor of English at Wor-Wic Community College on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

PHOEBE WANG is a Toronto-based writer and reviewer whose work has appeared in *Arc*, *Canadian Literature*, *Descant*, *Grain*, *The Malahat Review*, and *Ricepaper Magazine*. She is a graduate of the U of T MA in Creative Writing program, and has been twice longlisted for the CBC Poetry Prize. A chapbook, *Occasional Emergencies*, is forthcoming from Odourless Press. More of her work can be found at www.alittleprint.com.

BÄNOO ZAN landed in Canada in 2010. In her country of origin, Iran, she used to teach English Literature at universities. She has been writing poetry since the age of ten and has published more than 80 poems, translations, biographies, and articles in print and online publications around the globe. She writes in Persian and English. She hosts Queen Gallery Poetry Night in Toronto and is a member of the TOPS (The Ontario Poetry Society) Executive. She believes that her politics is her poetry. As a political gesture, she ascribes whatever she writes to an inner voice or muse and does not accept responsibility for the statements in her poetry.