

The cover features a central circular graphic with a black border. Inside the circle, there are stylized grey wheat stalks on the left and right sides. The background of the circle is a soft-focus photograph of real wheat stalks. The title 'THE FIELDSTONE REVIEW' is centered within the circle in a black, sans-serif font.

THE
FIELDSTONE
REVIEW

ISSUE 10, 2017

FAMILY

Editor's Desk: Family Edition

by Jade McDougall

Greetings, readers, and welcome to the much awaited (and awaited and awaited) 2017 issue of The Fieldstone Review. 2017 presented us with some unique challenges, but as always, our contributors have provided us with a rich and fruitful set of submissions that we are delighted to include in Issue 10.

Family, in its many forms, seems to be a binding theme of this year's works, and our entries invite readers to ponder its varied and complex meanings. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Fieldstone family, especially our editors Jillian Baker (Fiction), Kayla McCutcheon (Nonfiction), and Shakti Brazier-Tompkins (Copy Editor) for their tireless dedication. Special mention goes to our current web co-editors and upgraders of the website, Tristan Taylor and Kyle Dase for their enthusiasm and vision. And we mustn't forget the wonderful team of readers: Elyn Achtymichuk-Hardy, Shakti Brazier-Tompkins, Tara Chambers, Kyle Dase, Mark Doerksen, Rob Imes, Liz Miller, Geoff Pevlin, Siarra Riehl, Tristan Taylor, Rhonda West, Andrew Wiebe, Renée Wiebe, Martin Winquist. Thank you all, you beautiful people, for your work in getting this issue out!

Finally, I'd like to acknowledge everyone who submitted to this year's issue, particularly those whose work is appearing here (Bertrand Bickersteth, Michelle Brown, Hejsa Christensen, Holly Day, Myrna Garanis, Trudy Grienauer, R. McCraw Helms, Naomi Lakritz, Rachel Laverdiere, Kyra MacFarlane, Douglas W. Milliken, Valerie Mills-Milde, Nicholas Olson, Nathan TeBokkel, James W. Wood, Amos Wright), who have courageously put their writing out into the world, and who have patiently waited to see their work on this site. We appreciate you.

Poetry

The Lens Grinder by Amos Wright

The publishers say my treatise on the rainbow
is selling a little better this year. And
with the royalties, we can live on more
than just bread and circuses alone.
The Alhambra Decree passed
with a majority vote
and my family was pushed from country to country,

from diaspora to diaspora
like a gypsy caravan captained by Ahasuerus,
all of Europe an anti-Semitic basket case.
I rented a room with a harpsichord
whose keys I never fingered,
and shelved the laws of Hebrew grammar,
Talmudic scholia, the geometric textbook;

determined as I was
to defy the determinism of my race,

cursed with all curses of Deuteronomy.
No war between the mind and the body
except that which the mind wages
against its own body.
The sun looks the same
whether from prison or from a palace
and we too need resistance
to fly like the albatross.
The Collegiants agreed
that God might inhabit the substance of a stone,
the mode of a mountain, the attribute of an angle.

Grind a lens so large, they urged me,
that even the myopic, who can buy nothing
with their frugal thoughts, could see
the armigerous affections of a determinist
in cloud formations – that circus of pareidolia –
reflected in the linished surfaces of Amsterdam's canals.

Like Nero straining through the green
of an emerald to glimpse a favorite gladiator

just before he is devoured by a female bear.
Then a bureaucratic snail knocked
and produced a writ of cherem:
Elisha's curse reversed upon me,
for teaching the unity of convex and concave,
the refracted real image and its virtual other,
for identifying the shadow of the light with the thing itself.

Rather to wear the foreskin of a Gentile like a death mask
than to have my visage printed on their Dutch guilders.

If you don't like it here, I said with blue lips,
the early onset of Potter's Rot,
you are always free to go.

So, what keeps you here,
when the door is wide open
like the mouth of one sleeping?

God has unloaded the gun of stars.

If you smell roses, the corpse cannot be too far.

Even mechanics do metaphysics.

The Cheshire cat's smile is no accident.

What are we human machines then
but uncanny swine satisfied?

And then I returned to my lens-grinding.

The lens grew until it filled the entire room,
pressing me against the wall.

I slept under its convex penumbra,
like a glass tent pitched upon the deserts of the
moon
among the silica dust of ground lenses,
and every morning I polished it
with the white rags of Maimonides' turban
and a few glasses of canal water
until the forty-two she-bears danced to my door,
ready with the laughter of devoured children.

The Bird
by Holly Day

The tiny bird flaps in the grass near me
watches my approach with eyes like glass beads
opens its mouth as if expecting
random acts of maternal kindness from everything
around it, even me. Overhead
the mother catbird peeps in distress, also
watching me with shiny eyes
a look of resolution on its face as if
it's already decided I am incapable of love.

Apotropaic
by James W. Wood

I
Into the magic circle,
the alchemist and his pentacle
to propagate wealth,
turn dross to gold.
His mixture of merds,
blood and leaves, potions
and spells all fell
to nothing more
than ridicule and scorn.

II

Into the magic circle,
the professors and their particles
to dominate: *I am death,*
destroyer of worlds.

Their sky-burst ripped
Earth a new sun, gave motion
to fiends in hell, boiled
skin, faith and bone. Their laws
conjured Mammon to be born.

**Triptych of Crayon Man on
Tight Rope**

by Valerie Mills-Milde

Frame 1:

Vitreous
on Pink ball of foot/ spliced by
Quicksilver wire
figure grips horizontal
pole
Vermillion Red
(Slipping next picture from wool Fawn
coat your castanet hands quiver.
Must be lithium, I think.)

Frame 2:

Figure leaps defiant
Thrusts open Gold rays
his heart Crimson.
Orange propulsion
to Violet apex one
sharp, flared

stop.

(You cannot help it/ gravity will.

(I am not blind to the density of red,

I say. I know the weight.)

Frame 3:

I see

you strung high in

ragged photons.

The terrible sway of colour, I muse

Beneath you, a pool of Midnight Black

Above, an Indigo sky littered

with darting Yellow birds.

Potion Against Heart-Ache
by Randel McCraw Helms

Take thee nut of hickory,
Root of chicory, parsnip, purslane and dock.
Add parsley and roses, salsify, samphire and thyme,
And roast it or toast it and steep it in brandy
With oris-root candy
Twelve hours straight by the clock.
Then drain it and strain it and keep it from fire;
As slowly it mellows, chill it with bellows
And coat it with frosting of rime.
To keep the taste true, fine it with rue
Then age it in cellars like wine.
At least for a season live thee by reason,
Keep thee from sin or gambling den,
And avoid all manner of ire.
Then give thee the liquor, this magical ichor,
To pure lady whose love you desire,
And her heart shall ever be true.
Thy babies need never fear rabies nor scabies,
Scrofula, glanders, nor pox,
If thou blend thee this potion into a lotion
And rub on their feeties each day.
Thy hens will all lay, thy lambkins shall play
And give thee gold nuggets for rocks,
Thy heifers give milk, thy worms make thee silk,
All creatures shall love thee at sight,
If six drops in water thou add to their fodder
And knead it and feed it each night.
Keep thou this potion and magical lotion
Ever beside thee, no night-mare shall ride thee,
No ill fate betide thee, nor eye-worm trouble thy
sight.

No wife shall beshrew thee no bailiff shall rue thee;
Just care thou to muse thee and always to choose thee
Daily to use it aright.

Hemingway's Beard
by Myrna Garanis

El Floridita Bar, Havana

The barman ignores us, just another tour group,
camera phones flashing, rubbing the fabled
bronze beard for luck

Young man with a shiner turns up in every shot
having the drink we've no time for, nursing
his hurts at the bar as Hemingway must have,
taking time out from novel production,
downing a fifth *mojito*, joking with his sparring
partner friends, only one not smoking.

Plenty of Cohibas in Havana, a plethora
of famous beards worth stroking in a city
marking revolution's anniversary
tee-shirts and postcards exclusively exhibit
Che Guevara's death grimace, his sacrifice
for a nation not his own. Fidel's face absent
from the giant billboards masking
hurricane-damaged fields. Our shiny
Chinese bus passes ancient Cuban trucks.
History disconcerting for the tourist,
not one black eye amongst us, none
sent reeling from the ropes.

Accidental Agriculture
by Bertrand Bickersteth

The bruising beginning
face rubbed in
central Alberta's finest
Orthic Dark Brown Chernozem
where wheat flourishes
and barley wails
After the fight
we congregate in the principal's office:
punishments
meted out to him
the aggressor
who impugned my face against the ground
because its darkness inspired
a simile
part-time prairie poet that he was
And punishments
meted out to me
the victim so called
Well, why did you fight back?
Why do you people
always fight?
Now I have to punish you
too
The principal glared at me
his eyes a shock
of literal blue
Outside
on my way home
I pondered the view
from the top of a rare hill
a field spilled
with dandelions splayed out below
This accidental agriculture
will be swallowed
by an instantaneous city with
its blindness
its inevitability
I saw the whole against the horizon
A nine-year-old
a timeless landscape
a flatness ensuing
My tender head still throbbing
from the blunt encounter
I reached with a quiet fist
to rub at the soreness swelling
around my eyes

Well
why *did* you fight back?
When the black child is six years old
in Harlem
he suddenly sees everything he has been before
and all that is to come laid out before him and
how
it has been laid out before him and this
muses James Baldwin
is the fundamental difference between
any child growing anywhere
in Alberta
and every child that must see things
through black eyes

Hidden Message
by Trudy Griener

that moment
when I leave the pulp on the stove
and step into the hallway
to take your lab coat from the closet
your presence is palpable
not just because your name
is printed in the collar
in your self-confident hand lettering
you've been using these coats
around the house
painting walls, making jam
ever since
you left your career
to raise me
and my sister
I have this one
that you shortened to the skirt length
fashionable in '71
and then let out again
to put on now
to briefly feel that I am you
thirty years ago
and while I step over to the linen closet
and get the spill cloth
for wiping the jars' rims
I feel that quite possibly
it was more than an apron
every day in the kitchen
when we came home from school
you were always standing
apron-wrapped
and I can see that sometimes
you needed that coat
to make you feel professional
competent
and respected
and the work worthwhile
like paid work
the pulp is simmering
and starting to bubble up
it will make new stains
on the coat
fresh stains layered over washed out ones
my cooking layered over yours
almost as bizarre
as the views you had in '71
through your electron microscope

Fiction

Mildred Mendelson
by Naomi LaKritz

“How are we doing today?”

“I’m fine. However, I can’t answer for you. You’ll have to decide for yourself how you are. I’m no judge of that. What’s your name? I can’t read it. They make these name tags so tiny nowadays.”

“Kayleigh.”

“I cannot imagine a future populated by people named Kayleigh or Breanne or Jayden. Those are names for perpetual children. My name is Mildred Mendelson. That is an adult’s name. Yes, yes, I know what you’re thinking. You’re thinking, ‘I’m glad I’m only twenty-two and not her.’ Don’t tell me different.

If I were twenty-two and looking at me, I’d be thinking the same thing. The only reason I’m here, you know, is that the doctors think I have dementia. Just the early stages, mind you. They asked me who the prime minister is, and I said R. B. Bennett so they put me in here. But that’s because I was thinking back to when I was just a little girl and my grandmother, Anna, was a friend of R. B. Bennett. He had one of the first cars in Calgary and he crashed it into a pole right near Isaac Freeze’s store on Stephen Avenue.

He said he would never drive again. He was so embarrassed at all the crowds that gathered. That car, I believe it was a McLaughlin. That was before he became prime minister, though

“But they pounce on every little thing, these doctors. They just want to put me away to make room in the world for younger people. I was taking up too much space, breathing too much of the air they had appropriated for themselves. The doctor asked me to draw a clock, but I didn’t do it well because I’m not an artist, not because there’s anything wrong with my mind. I got poor grades in art all through school. I couldn’t draw a ball properly in those days, but they didn’t put me away for it back then, did they?”

“Do you know where you are, Mrs. Mendelson?”

“I’m in this chair, for heaven’s sake. I’m in Lilac Haven. Why do they call it Lilac Haven when there isn’t a lilac bush on the property and it’s certainly no haven, either? Such trivia. I was talking about something else. You should have seen the fuss my niece, Stefanie, made because I drove my car off the road one time. It was only because I was distracted. I was thinking of my first crush, this boy named Barry with black hair and blue eyes, who sat next to me in Grade Nine science class. And suddenly, while I was driving, I thought about Barry and wondered where he is today.”

“What did he end up doing?”

“If I knew that, I wouldn’t have driven off the road, would I? For all I know, he’s been taking the big dirt nap all these years. Maybe an aneurysm got him at fifty. Oh, and then Stefanie got mad at me because my house was a little untidy. She practically shouted at me, ‘You can’t live alone anymore!’ I said, ‘Stefanie, if I were forty and my house were a little messy, you would be polite

enough to keep your mouth shut about it. But because I'm ninety, you think I've gone flakey.' Stefanie is definitely my late sister's child. Sonia was always very brusque like that. She and I didn't get along much. But I've always hated housework anyway. Ask Jack."

"Mildred, Jack is no longer with us."

"Who's he with?"

"He passed on fifteen years ago."

"What did he pass on? His chance to continue living with me? Well, I'm not crazy. You know who is, though? Minna Lowenstein. Every Friday, she would bake a challah for her husband, Max, who is dead. And then one day, the rabbi came by for Shabbat services and she told him, 'Rabbi, I need advice. Every Friday, I bake a challah for my late husband, Max. But now Max has told me he's met another woman in the world to come. Tell me, Rabbi, should I keep baking challahs for him?' And the rabbi said, 'Yes, you should, because it might not work out between them.' So she baked challahs. Two Fridays later, the rabbi is here again and Minna rushes over to him. 'Rabbi,' she says, 'you were right! It didn't work out! He's back with me!' She was glad she hadn't deprived that cheating Max of his challahs after all."

"I'm sure Max is watching over her from heaven. Just as Jack is watching over you."

"I certainly hope not! There are certain of my bodily functions I wouldn't want Jack to see me performing, dead or alive. You know who else is crazy? Mary Turner. She said to me yesterday, 'Mildred, do you think I'm going flakey? I saw these little men all dressed in red like the guards at Buckingham Palace, and they came in under the doorsill and cleaned up my whole room! Mildred, am I flakey?' I said, 'Who cares if you're flakey, Mary? Your room is clean!'" "Do you know what day it is today, Mildred?" "No. Nor does it matter. All the days are the same in here."

"It's Wednesday. We're going to be making Hanukkah decorations in the social hall."

"What makes you think I want to do that kindergarten stuff just because I'm old? I never liked it even when I was in kindergarten. Why would I like it now? I don't want to be infantilized. I want to read *The Economist*. Jack always subscribed."

"Stefanie will bring it when she comes."

"I think it was in *The Economist* that I read this story about the latest study on aging. These scientists asked a group of people in their seventies to think of themselves as thirty-five. And when they did, their bodies actually became healthier, their aches and pains went away, and they visited the doctor much less often than another group of seventy-year-olds who were told to think of themselves as being their right age."

"Do you want to try it?"

"Well, if I could start over in my memory thinking of myself as going through my life all over again, day by day, I could make my body believe it's at all those ages. Then, I could live to one hundred and eighty because it would take me another ninety years to imagine myself in my life over again."

"Where would you start?"

“At age one. That’s my first memory. I was at my grandmother’s apartment. She lived in the Hillhurst neighbourhood. That was practically the outskirts of the city then. You could smell the Bow River from the open windows. Some other people were there, too. Don’t ask me who they were. Nobody introduces guests to a child of one. The carpet was a drab yellow-gold, and I was standing up, clutching the edge of a bloated and very ugly purple chair. I was so little that I could see straight underneath the hanging folds of the white cloth on the dining room table. I saw ladies’ legs in high heels on the other side. My father was kneeling down, beckoning to me to walk to him: ‘Walk to me. Come on. You can do it.’ I didn’t think I could do it. The carpet was a dizzy desert of yellow. But I let go of the chair, took two shaky steps, was suddenly overwhelmed with vertigo from that carpet, and fell forward on my hands as babies do. Everyone in the room laughed at me, and I felt my face burn with humiliation and shame.”

“That sounds like a cool memory. Very few people can remember back that far. I know I can’t.”

“It is *not* a ‘cool’ memory. It’s a devastating one. It shows you that babies have feelings nobody gives them any credit for having. Remember that, next time you laugh at a baby who’s trying to walk.”

“Why are you crying? What’s the matter? Here, would you like a tissue?”

“It suddenly struck me. It was the first devastating moment in a world of hurt piled on hurt, humiliation on humiliation. My introduction to the world of my fellow human beings, aged only one.”

“Is there something happier that you can think of instead?”

“You start out alone and you end alone.”

“Life is like that for everyone, Mildred.”

“Yes, but it’s happening to me. To *me*, you understand. It has happened to millions of people before me, but I wasn’t experiencing their pain. Do you know what the children in my grade school class called me? The science teacher, Mrs. Gold, was talking to us about mildew, and so my friend, Shirley, started calling me ‘Mildew’ instead of Mildred. I was never Millie, by the way. I always hated that sobriquet. My best friend turned on me, and all the children took it up! I was forever ‘Mildew’ after that. My sister, Sonia, had a much prettier name than I did.”

“That was cruel of those children.”

“Don’t just parrot things. Say something original, if you’re capable of it. Then, in high school, oh, the girls were so mean to one another. How can anybody think that if women were in charge, they’d fix everything that’s wrong with governments and the world? They wouldn’t! They’d scratch each other’s eyes out, they’d backstab, they’d do each other dirt.”

“But you got married and had children. Those were happy times!”

“You are mistaking me for someone else in here. Do all old ladies look alike? Do you mix us up? I had four miscarriages. I never had any children who survived. And now Jack is gone, too. Maybe if I’d married Barry, things would have been different.”

“Everybody wonders those things.”

“No, everybody does *not* wonder those things. They don’t wonder what would have happened if I’d married Barry instead of Jack. Nobody’s ever heard of me or Jack or Barry. And soon, we’ll all be forgotten. Do you know I used to drive my friends to the Foothills Hospital, and one day Stefanie took me there because I sprained my ankle. The nurse saw that I was old. I was eighty-seven. She said, ‘Do you come here often?’ I said, ‘No, but I bring my friends here a lot.’ And now, look at me, look where I am.”

“Would you like me to bring something to calm you? The doctor left a note on your chart that you could have Ativan if you need it.”

“There is nothing that can calm me. Life isn’t calm. Kayleigh, have you ever looked around and wondered how you got to be where you are? Sometimes, I do. Why am I living in Calgary? Because my parents immigrated here from Russia. Because they believed what Clifford Sifton told them about Canada being a golden land. I know you’ve never heard of Clifford Sifton. Nobody has anymore. Nobody knows history from borscht, as my father used to say. My parents ran a grocery store. Kids used to phone the store. They’d say, ‘Have you got Prince Albert in a can?’ My father would say, ‘Yes, we do’ and the kids would say, ‘Well, let him out!’ But why wasn’t I born the daughter of rich horse breeders in Virginia? Or someone in a shanty in Appalachia? Or Mary Pickford? I’m sure you’ve never heard of her, either. Where are all these dead people now? Where did they go, Clifford Sifton, R. B. Bennett, my parents, Jack? It must be very crowded and noisy wherever they are, there are so many people there.

“Although, I don’t think I’d like to be one of the people in those crowds of thousands of protesters in Third World countries. I see pictures in magazines of people and I think, ‘Who are those people, what are their names, what are their lives about?’ And why wasn’t I born one of them, instead of ending up as Mildred Mendelson? Just what the mercy is going on with all that? Who decides such things?”

“That’s the big mystery of all time.”

“What an inadequate thing to say. You are only twenty-two, so you can’t possibly understand. I was already old when you were born. Do you know who I am, who all of us are in this place? We are people from a few years ago. That’s who we are. Do you know that Clifford Sifton was Minister of the Interior under Laurier? Surely to God you know who Laurier was.”

“Wouldn’t you like to help make Hanukkah decorations? It might take your mind off things.”

“That is a very hard thing to task Hanukkah decorations with – the duty of taking my mind off the great mysteries of life. Is Stefanie coming today?” “I’m sure she will. She’ll bring you *The Economist*. Do you want me to wheel you back to your room, so you can rest up for her visit?”

“No. Wheel me to the social hall. I had better help with Hanukkah decorations, just in case Jack is watching me from the world to come. He might think it would do me good. I don’t want to upset him, if he is somehow alive somewhere. I don’t want to hurt him. There’s already too much hurt in the world. I want them to be able to say of me that I didn’t cause more hurt and more pain. Do you think I’ve achieved that?”

“Of course you have. Why, what’s the matter all of a sudden? We are going to have a lot of fun decorating for Hanukkah. Aren’t we?”

“We, we, we. Who are we?”

Lonesome Jubilee
by Douglas W. Milliken

Yeah, sure, I could start off saying something real weighted and purposefully misleading, like winter was the easy hunting, but man, fuck that, Ro and I were just bored. I mean, stacking wood in the cellar could only hold so much appeal, right? As long as our dickhead stepdad wasn't around, we pretty much could do whatever we pleased. So what we'd do is, my brother and I'd creep out of the cellar and walk guileless as a senator to any afternoon-bright kitchen window and pluck a fat housefly doped-up on January from the glass, deposit the buzzing cretin in a plastic sandwich baggie and fold it into the freezer. Because obviously that's where one keeps a filthy bug. Just pork chunks and ice cubes and a baggie full of fly. While we were waiting, Ro and I'd sneak up to our weird plaid couch the colour of old meat in the den and extract a single straightened hair from the crown of our post-work-napping mother's head, and in some ways, that was the best part: giving Mom a sharp zing while she was so sweetly helpless and asleep. But mostly it was how we'd be trying our best not to laugh that made it so damn funny, you know, snorting and choking our giggles behind our palms. She'd wince but never wake up. Like a couple of Pink Panthers we'd tiptoe backwards from the den and by then, our fly'd be frozen. We'd shake it out from its plastic baggie onto the kitchen table, then noose the stolen hair around its tiny neck, careful not to cinch too tightly lest we pop off its puny bug head. I mean, it didn't need its head. It just looked weird without one. After that, we'd usually have to wait a bit more – just two patient boys with the scent of cellar and wood in our hair – while above and behind us, Mom's favourite poster of John Cougar Mellencamp made his mouth real hard-looking in silvery black and white and tiredly looked away, embodying too perfectly the silent disappointment of working men everywhere. The Lonesome Jubilee. Not even really that bad of a record, to be honest. But what I think Mom liked best was how the man looked in a white T. Anyway. In a minute, the fly'd thaw out – sometimes with the assistance of some hot, basking breaths – and in another minute, it'd fly, droning in pissed-off orbits at the end of a seven-inch tether of hair. Usually with its head still on. But not always. With Mom snoring loudly and our stepdad who-gives-a-shit-where, Ro and I would watch the fly turn and turn, we each taking turns holding its hair, and neither one of us would say a word. So chalk this up among the good times of '87, '88, '89. Americana pop stars and bored farm boys making do. Sleeping mother you can torture. Fly on a leash.

Ray's Rocket **by Nathan TeBokkel**

"For every sensible line of straightforward statement there are leagues of senseless cacophonies. . ." – Jorge Luis Borges, "The Library of Babel"

There was a small man named Ray who lived in a two-story house by himself at the corner of a subdivision south of Kamsack. There wasn't a lot of brick in the area, or a lot of cement, so most of the houses were made of wood, insulated with fiberglass, and covered in siding. Many people had painted their siding a bright colour – for the winter, to cheer each other up. But not Ray. His house was a drab grey. He didn't really believe in winter, and he didn't need cheering up in it, that's for sure. He had a warm parka, a stack of Xbox 360 games and a flat screen TV, a garage, a snowmobile, and a large collection of magnifying glasses.

These weren't historically interesting magnifying glasses, or scientifically interesting magnifying glasses. The collection wasn't so much a collection of different things as it was a collection because it was a lot of the same thing. They were mostly duplicates of the same magnifying glasses that Ray had bought at the nearby Dollar Mart for \$1.20—more than a dollar, as usual. Ray used these magnifying glasses to look at the bugs in his house: silverfish, carpenter ants, centipedes, greenbottle flies, mosquitoes, wasps, bedbugs, ladybugs, and – once – a praying mantis. He didn't clean his house very much, but he left at least three magnifying glasses in each room. That way, he couldn't miss anything. The only problem was that the magnifying glasses, being uninteresting historically and scientifically, had an unduly intense focal point, so if Ray looked at a bug too long, the light of the sun or his lamps passing through would become so concentrated that it would heat up the bug and sometimes kill it. Often kill it – Ray wasn't too careful about how long he was looking at bugs, or from how far away, or with what light.

Ray also had a penchant for telling tall tales. One of his neighbours, Mrs. Donna Zwick, condescendingly asked him one day how the devil the slats on his shutters had gotten so disjointed, and whatever was he going to do about it, and he informed Mrs. Zwick, solemnly, that the damage was the work of a freak windstorm, a windstorm so powerful that it tore the glass panes out of his windows, and on their way out they jostled the shutters. Mrs. Zwick wondered what windstorm this was, and Ray said that it was an isolated windstorm, the kind that only strikes a small radius, and very rarely. Like a windstorm in your brain, said Ray, playing on her skepticism. Not a surprise you wouldn't notice it, said Ray, the master of noticing things. Mrs. Zwick didn't talk to him anymore.

Ray could remember as a boy watching jittery black and white news reports of the moon landing. He never bothered himself with the conspiracy theories or the reality of the situation. What he perceived was real enough to him and so, he presumed, real enough for everyone else. Alternative explanations were not Ray's strength, unless he was the one doing the alternative explaining. He could also remember as a young man seeing images of shuttle launches in technicolor, and wondering what was up there beyond the nose of the shuttle. A great vastness, nothingness unbound, tiny flecks of light in the darkness, tiny specks of something in all that nothing. Unless it was all nothing, which, thought young Ray to himself, it probably was. Even the stars. Imaginary foci of light from some distant observer's magnifying glass, trying to burn him up. He watched the Challenger burn up fuel and smoke up the launch pad, and then burn up itself. He thought that was fitting, a journey into nothingness ending with burning up. Sad, avoidably sad, but fitting.

The little flicker of this memory stayed with Ray as he grew up. He thought he had stolen it, perhaps, or that it was his duty to bring it to all mankind. It sometimes ignited in his dreams, sometimes in his daydreams. Naturally, he got it into his head that he would explore the nothingness of space. He was retired now, so he had the spare time. He skimmed some old books the library had discarded for details on how rockets were built, and while he may not have been a rocket scientist, he certainly got the gist of what the books were trying to say.

Luckily, Ray's town had a large hardware store that specialised in second-hand goods. That meant it was cheap, which suited Ray. He bought a stack of offcut spruce, a bucket of reused roofing nails, a hammer, measuring tape, and saw, and went to work. After all was said and done, Ray spent \$214.52 on wood, \$43.88 on nails, and \$17.95 on tools. For an engine, he paid two of his neighbours each \$50 for their old snowmobiles, which with global warming they said they wouldn't be needing this winter, or something. He modified the snowmobile engines after browsing some instructions he found online and ordering some casing, tubing, valves, and sprockets online for \$189.99.

The same online instructions told him how to make fuel, and may have warned him to be extra cautious when making fuel, but Ray knew how to be extra cautious, and so he was. He bought a barrel of diesel from the hardware store for \$201.30, and while wearing the ventilator his father, who had spraypainted car doors on a Ford assembly line that was now in Mexico, had given him, he mixed that diesel with three bags of fertilizer and a can of nitroglycerin he had purchased online for \$121.40. The fertilizer and the nitroglycerin arrived with a special investigator from the RCMP, who, after annoying Ray with questions about his intentions and demands to see every square inch of his two-story house, finally left shaking her head.

The rocket was almost done. It had taken seventeen months, three days, and nine hours, including breaks and sleeping time and one two-week vacation to Meadow Portage where Ray stood on a pebble beach every night and grinned smugly at the stars over Lake Winnipegosis. With the \$346.21 for chrome and special wide-headed chrome tacks, which Ray used to cover the entire rocket to make it the kind of rocket that could punch through the upper atmosphere, it had cost \$1,235.25. But that was nothing compared to the beauty of the thing now. A whole greater than the sum of its parts, said Ray to himself. A sight to behold.

Ray phoned up NASA, to let them know what he was doing and that they should look to him in the future for guidance, but a patronizing receptionist passed him off to something called the CSA. So he told the Canadian Space Agency everything he had planned to tell NASA. The guy on the end of the line sounded tired and bored and, after trying to dissuade Ray from launching his rocket, hung up. Ray called again and got a different guy, who told him that he was insane before Ray asked to be passed to somebody who actually built rockets instead of answering phones all day. He turned a magnifying glass over in his hand as he waited, burnt a groggy fly to a crisp in light stolen from his spotted kitchen window. Finally Ray was on the line with the CSA's chief engineer.

"I hear you're building a rocket," said the engineer, whose voice sounded like a befuddled housewife from an infomercial, opening her pantry and knocking medicine bottles all over herself because she didn't have the right shelf organizer for only \$19.99. "You should've called us sooner. Why – how can I help you?"

"I don't need your help," said Ray, "and I want you to know that you people have no idea how to build rockets."

The engineer was quiet for a moment, and Ray imagined her nodding as this cold realization washed over her and images of the Challenger seared through her mind. Then the line went dead.

His neighbours, even Mrs. Zwick, had grown restlessly curious, the kind of curious that makes you frustrated and itchy, and they chucked glances into his garage whenever he had it open even a crack. Mrs. Zwick snuck up behind Ray one day and asked if that thing in his garage was, in fact, a rocket. It was hard to tell, she said, because it was lying on its side. She seemed nervous. Ray said yes, it was, and he was going to outer space very soon.

Mrs. Zwick asked him how, and Ray slid his handwritten notes, based on the website that had told him how to make rocket fuel, out of his pocket with an illusionist's flourish. He flashed it at Mrs. Zwick, insinuating that whether a flash or a prolonged study, no look was going to be enough for her to understand this stuff anyway. He crunched it back into his pocket to her stifled sigh. She said that he was something, really something, but that everyone in the subdivision wished him the best. Ray thanked her with two cold pebble words like the beach on Lake Winnipegosis.

It was time. Ray wheeled the rocket out of his garage on the two disassembled snowmobile treads he had bought from his neighbours. He pulled it upright using a pulley he had made from his clothesline, and fastened it to a temporary stand he had made from the skis of the snowmobiles. Mrs. Zwick looked out her window from across the street and then closed the curtain. Hartford Nolan walked past with his girl Jamie and shook his head. Ray nodded at them ceremoniously, grabbed a match, and then stuffed himself into his rocket like he had stuffed his almost forgotten parka into his suitcase for his trip to Meadow Portage. The sun shone through his porthole and made his armpits sweat. He lit the match on his seventeen-month-old stubble and dropped it beneath him, into the top of the engine.

Happy 40th Jen by Nicholas Olson

Kyle had a can of white paint in his left hand, a can of red barn paint in his right, brushes under his left armpit, a step ladder under his right armpit. He had on his monogrammed work coveralls. Kyle walked out past his garage and past his pasture that just had broken-down cars and no horses. They'd sold the horses and couldn't sell the cars if they'd tried. He walked through the rusted gate, past the slumping fence, around the leaking slough, all the way to the edge of the highway where there stood a professionally painted sign, the only advertisement that Kyle's small business had ever had. Emblazoned with an angled script, the sign read "Kyle's Towing, 24HRS, AAA Approved," plus his phone number, and on the bottom left, "Kyle'll treat you fair."

Kyle opened the can of white paint with a nail that he found at the foot of the sign. He stepped up three rungs of his ladder, rested the paint on the top step, dipped his brush in, and started slopping paint over the wavy flaking plywood board. He whitewashed the company name, whitewashed the information. The only thing he left unpainted was his name in the bottom left corner. He put a second coat on the sign and after an hour and a half of morning work, he stepped back to adore his whitewashed masterpiece.

After a coffee break in the house, Kyle took out the bucket of red barn paint and his second paint brush. He took care with his six-inch horsehair brush, like he was painting the Sistine Chapel or like he was being paid a million dollars to stay within the lines that existed only in his head. He painted and moved his ladder, painted and moved his ladder, so that the fifteen-foot-long sign was covered in red letters flanked by two stars. On the bottom right corner, he painted a birthday cake which looked like a birthday cake but just slightly more than it looked like a coal-fired power plant complete with smokestacks and smoke. What a thoughtful gift, Kyle thought to himself.

* * *

Jen sat in the driver's seat of the Ford Aerostar family van in the J&L Insurance Brokers parking lot, hands gripping the steering wheel at ten and two, teeth clenched. "One more time, just one more time and I'll punch that Jerry square in the teeth." She knew she'd never do it. He was her boss. Though she and every other woman in the office, and several men for different reasons, would come to understand the truest meaning of the word "joy" if she slugged him. This time Jerry hadn't even done anything to Jen. But poor Lucy. Sweetheart.

Jerry opened the door of his lipstick-red Mazda Miata convertible parked next to Jen's van, pushed the button that mechanically put the soft-top down, waved his big dumb hand at Jen with his chin pushed out like he was waving at his dog on the driveway. Jen thought about getting out of her van and grabbing one of the decorative landscaping bricks with two hands. "This is for the time I asked for a raise and you told me that I was getting paid enough for a woman." She'd drop it right in the middle of the hood so it rolled down and scraped the chrome M hood ornament.

Jerry would sit there frozen in fear. He'd push the button to close the soft top. Jen looked through the van's passenger window. Jerry was still waving; he honked, and then drove away.

* * *

Jen took off down the 55 with a slightly loosened grip. She was listening to Beyoncé loud enough for her ears to hurt and passing cars to hear, so her jaw had eventually allowed her teeth to separate, and now her hands were relaxed at nine and three. Queen B. All hail. She'd told Kyle she'd be there by 6:30. They were to go for dinner at Kyle's favourite restaurant, Grumpy's Steakhouse and Grill, for her 39th birthday that she didn't much feel like celebrating.

Kyle sat at home during the day watching game shows from the seventies, waiting for customers to call his tow truck company, but no one ever called because his only advertisement was a crumbling hand-painted sign on the highway and a small decal on the Aerostar. Not even a phonebook ad. The three times a month he did get a call were from the payphone at Grumpy's when vehicles broke down within ten miles of his sign, because, like he'd somehow planned it, there was no cell reception and no other tow truck signs for ten miles in either direction. Or he'd get calls from the payphone at Grumpy's when someone drove off in their Chevrolet Tahoe, pissed up after happy hour, and didn't make it past the first set of lights before flattening a tire on the median.

They first met when Kyle worked at Jerry's Auto Body, and Jen started at Jerry's new insurance office. Kyle would call the office often to report claims, and eventually he took each claim in by hand, and eventually he got Jen to go for a drink, and eventually there was a pregnancy scare, and eventually they were together for ten years. Kyle was fine. Except for the times he drank at parties. Or the times he patted her on the ass in public. Or most times during sex. Or the time he'd found her photos.

"Jen, what the hell are these?" he'd shouted from the computer room.

"What are what?" Jen was at the kitchen sink, scrubbing potatoes with a glove made specifically for scrubbing potatoes that he'd got her for Christmas the year before.

"These – these photos. Your nudes! What the hell? There's like ten of them!" Jen panicked and then remembered that the photos he was talking about were likely tame ones, and were sent years before they'd ever accidentally hooked up. Kyle came out of the computer room, having printed out one of the colour photos on a full piece of paper for some reason.

"They're old. Before we were even together."

"But you sent them. To who?" Kyle put the photo on top of the unwashed potatoes. Jen crumpled it up.

"I don't remember. They're old, Kyle, and they're just photos, for God's sake."

"Just photos? That's my – that's your body. These are probably all over the internet by now. The guys at Jerry's have probably seen all these and talk about them when I'm not around." Later that week, Kyle quit at Jerry's and, a year later, started Kyle's Towing. "You know what kinda girl sends out nudes? Girls like Lucy, at the office. The new one who's always after Jerry."

"Oh shit, Kyle, she's not after Jerry, he's always looking down her shirt and acting like he's not forty five years older than her and not her boss and not a creep." The argument continued for several hours or possibly days, Kyle spending the whole time in the computer room trying to see if her photos were on any websites, simultaneously looking at nudes of other girls he went to high school with.

* * *

“We should have kids now that we’re ready. Before you’re too old to,” he’d told her when he finally started talking to her again the week after. Jen said she wasn’t sure, but the next day he had already traded in her small truck for a 1991 Ford Aerostar without asking. The truck had been in great shape and the Aerostar had what Kyle called “minor transmission problems.”

But really, Kyle was fine. He was relatively clean, said please and thank you, remembered her birthday.

Jen realized that she’d been driving for sixty-six minutes when Beyoncé shouted about passionate drunk sex for the second time on the drive. Jen snapped out of her restorative Beyoncé meditation and looked up to see the pro-life billboards that she passed every day that made her think of Kyle and made her feel nothing. Right after a series of those godforsaken signs, and a few beer ads with chesty women holding pints as though they were delicious organs, was the one and only advertisement for Kyle’s Towing. Today the sign looked different. Jen lifted her sunglasses from her eyes, squinted to see a sloppy, hand-painted sign that read HAPPY 40TH JEN. ♥ KYLE, with the KYLE part leftover from the original design. On the bottom was what might have been a birthday cake or an iron maiden. Jen checked the date and year on her phone. She did the math again in her head. She was turning thirty-nine. He confused her age for his own.

Jen signalled to exit off the highway to their acreage, shoulder-checked, and a red convertible blasted past her van in the other lane. Top down, there was Jerry waving and smiling as if he hadn’t stopped doing so since he left the parking lot. Jerry hit the gas and zoomed on by. Jen saw Lucy at her computer at the office.

“Lucy, sweetheart, look here.” He pointed at the computer screen and leaned over her shoulder, obviously smelling her hair. He put his hairy knuckles on her hand on top of the mouse, moved the pointer without hurrying to some figure on the screen. He inhaled deeply through his nose. “See, thaaaaat’s what we were talking about. The Accounts Payable, right?” He put his hand on her shoulder and Jen squirmed while she helped her customer. “Good on ya, Lu. Come to my office any time you have any other questions.”

Jen pushed on the gas pedal as hard as she could. She adjusted the seat so she could push it to the floor. The family van howled and chased the convertible down the 55, passing cars and coughing smoke. The turnoff to Jen and Kyle’s acreage flew by, the turnoff to Grumpy’s Steakhouse and Grill flew by, the next exit off the freeway flew by. Jen kept the gas pinned. She would catch him and bop him a good one in the nose. She wouldn’t even need everyone to be there to see it. She would take his convertible keys and throw them in the bog. She’d push him over and slowly, but deliberately and repeatedly, step on his face. She’d do all this when she caught up with the Mazda Miata, but it had already turned into little more than a tiny red ant biting the horizon.

Jen clenched the steering wheel at ten and two. Her foot kept the gas pedal pinned to the rubber mat until the van began to chug and groan. She let the gas off slowly but held the steering wheel. She gave it gas and the engine didn’t respond. The van dash lights dimmed, the Beyoncé CD ejected itself, the power steering died. Jen guided it to the side of the road and clicked on the blinkers, which happened to be broken also. Jen got out of the van, put her hand to her forehead to see if she could make out the red convertible, but it had turned the corner towards the golden horizon some time ago. She thought maybe Jerry would check his phone

messages just at the same time there was a train crossing on the freeway. Jerry would get T-boned, obliterating his red convertible, sparing his life, but forever taking away his sense of smell and gift of speech. Jen checked her phone. There were two bars. She called Kyle's Towing.

* * *

Kyle's truck pulled up and he parked it in front of the van. He got out wearing his monogrammed coveralls that had red paint stains, and his embroidered business ball cap.

"What happened? I bet it was the tranny," Kyle said when he first pulled up. Jen just shrugged and looked at the tires of the van, then the horizon.

"What are you doing out here anyway? You passed the turn off nearly ten miles back. We're gonna miss our dinner reservation," Kyle exclaimed. "That's alright, I'm just glad you're ok. The van, however..." Kyle bent down, dipped his fingers in the fluid that poured out the bottom, smelled it.

"Yeah, that's tranny fluid. Remember, I told you to keep this thing below sixty. You remember how I explained the transmission? It's like bike gears on that old granny bike of yours. Anyway, that's alright, we'll get Jerry to look at it." Kyle gave Jen a half hug, patted her on the ass, told her to get in the truck while he loaded up the van. Kyle hooked up the van, shook his head a few times and smiled to himself. He made sure the chains were secure and got in the truck. He looked at Jen and smiled. "All done."

They drove back towards the turnoff to the restaurant in silence. Kyle's hand tapped the steering wheel impatiently. He smiled and couldn't help himself from asking. "Hey hon, did you see my sign?"

Kyle turned off the freeway towards Grumpy's Steakhouse and Grill. They ate steaks and drank wine and Kyle got the servers and cooks to sing "Happy Birthday" to Jen with a free piece of brownie and sparklers after their meals.

Later that week, Jen took the van into Jerry's Auto Body. Jerry's intact Mazda Miata was parked out front. It looked waxed. As she walked in to pick up the van, she noticed someone had keyed "Sweetheart" in angry angled letters into the driver's side door with an arrow that pointed up to the face of Jerry, who sat in his car frowning while talking on his cellphone. Jen felt light on her feet and then remembered that she'd likely have to file his insurance claim Monday morning.

The mechanic at Jerry's told her that it was actually the radiator hose that blew, and coincidentally a fan belt snapped and the CD player just happened to become nauseous. A spark plug was fried and the tires were low. Several fuses were out. The engine light was on and actually needed maintenance. But the transmission was in top working shape.

Anxious Moon
by Kyra MacFarlane

“Four happy days bring in
Another moon. But O, methinks, how slow
This old moon [waned!] She lingers my desires
Like to a step-dame or a dowager
Long withering out a young man’s revenue.”

— William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer’s Night Dream*

“I’m tellin’ you for one last time
It’s not just you
The problem’s mine to hide
I waited as long as I could
If you need it, sure I would
That’s fine”

— Dinosaur, Jr., “Start Choppin”

The cracks in the road look like the vase I once smashed in the throes of tinnitus. I still have tinnitus – this aching, echoing, pulsation where I hear nothing and everything all at once (that’s what I get for turning the stereo up to eleven to drown out my nerves one too many times). The vase is long gone, though. I spent two months working on it in my ceramics class. I remember seeing the world through antique sixties-era druggie sunglasses in my oversized apron, a tangible aura of angst radiating from my scrawny limbs. Not a lot has changed. I reach for a cigarette deep in the pockets of my ratty trench coat and then remember that I don’t smoke – I’ve never smoked.

Ovid’s probably out of his mind right now, twitching on my scratchy, plaid couch and staring at static on the TV. I remember when I told him that I liked him – this teenage confession, with butterflies escaping my mouth. I remember when he played me the song he’d written about me: two chords and a voice so loud the lyrics were a blur. His archaic punk shirt folded and left his scrawny body a mystery underneath his front of arrogance and self-assurance. His glasses kept falling down and I wanted to push them up to his myopic eyes, to make him see what I’m only beginning to see now.

I walk past Seventieth Street, which is one of my all time favourites. There’s a record store, and a pawn shop. I sit there beside buskers and cry for a few hours a week. It’s cheaper than therapy. I imagine concepts for experimental films and freak myself out, staring out into the rain. It’s always raining in this city. Not that I’m complaining; it’s just that it’s hard to see things in the light when the sun forgets you exist. I squint at my wreck of an apartment building. I didn’t have a lot of options for locales really; my budget was meager. Plus, I (actually Ovid) needed a landlord who wasn’t always on our back about smells. That sounds a lot more suggestive than it is. Ovid likes pot. A lot. He also likes to play his contrived, volume-reliant sleaze when he gets messed up on pot or something stronger. We used to listen to stuff together, until I pushed too hard on trying to get him to appreciate John Lennon.

I sit in my room most nights and listen to three-dollar cassettes and pretend I’m Steve Albini or someone who can cash in on their nihilism. I often sit on my saggy bed staring out at the sliver of the moon and wonder when I became encased in this world of “almosts.” When I started

making compromises about whom and what I felt comfortable with. What I felt safe around. My room's got these really great wooden floors and there's one floorboard I can lift up and hide stuff under: my old reading glasses, some change, and a manuscript that will never be published.

* * *

The morning tugs at my chest and allows the worries that have stirred around my sternum to rise, stagnant and rotten and personified by heartburn. I stare at my floor, covered with ripped up clothes and sub-par shoes that have all lasted way longer than conceivable.

One of my Doc Martens is covered in white paint. A reminder of when Ovid and I first moved in together. We were smitten with each other's sarcasm, twin cynics, forever indebted to the writings of those fed up with life when we hadn't lived much of a life at all. Now the boots strike me as a smirking symbol – my life suddenly fitting the codes and conventions of a sappy novella.

I often spend my mornings like this. Staring at the spackled ceiling and reeling from stale psychedelic music still playing in the living room from Ovid's pawn shop stereo. Then I realize that I have to go outside, to brave the looks of the people who just instinctively know that I'm pretending; people who classify me as just another failed punker wandering around aimlessly – probably on drugs. A month ago, I was. But now my heart sags like a menopausal breast because a decision has been lingering around my migraine mind, refusing to spill out like word vomit.

* * *

Paul Westerberg is the King of Heartache, so I drop the needle on an old Replacements gem and breathe in. Today's the day that I tell him. It's easier thought than said, of course, as I see him slink into the room, his shoulders sloping downwards like my confidence.

"Ovid!" I call out with all the grace and elegance of a drunkard.

"Ye-ah" he answers, breaking up monosyllabic noises into complicated stains.

"I'm going."

"Going? Where?" His eyes are shrunken, dark pools that reflect his jaded morning ill.

"Seattle or someplace different than this."

"I thought that you said you were okay with things. You know? How I make a living and all."

That kills me. How I make a living. He makes the opposite of a living. Funneling all of his money into his drug enterprise, awful rap records, shirts he spends way too much money on. I love his vigour, his youthful jump and enthusiasm. The way he never says no, but that's also what I can't stand about him. How he orders his values. How he pretends that he's okay when he's definitely not okay and neither am I. How he shrugs an ethereal shrug at a truly fucked up situation that could not only get one arrested but could also drive any plans for the future into the ground, creating the cracks in the asphalt like the ones on Seventieth Street.

* * *

The rest of the night is anti-climactic. I say goodbye and I could swear that Ovid shrugs. He digs around in the pantry for some shitty breakfast cereal and murmurs, "I'll miss you."

The really sad thing is that I'll really miss him. I'll miss the Ovid that I created – the one I wrote about in my manuscript, the one that was only revealed slowly and never wholly.

He had a smile that flooded me with glee and optimism and, once, purposeful direction that was going to land us somewhere on the giant map of musical success.

I'm never publishing that manuscript because I hope that someday Ovid will find it – with all of its errors and doodles, with all of its regrets and hopes – and read it and cry like I've cried with buskers who sing dime-a-dozen Oasis songs to help quell the pain. I'm also never going to publish it because it's a story that belongs to us – one riddled with the nuisance of drugs and misfortune and other things that should be illegal.

I leave the reading glasses too, for two reasons: firstly, because they look very Lennon and I hope someday he'll come to his senses about the Beatles' talent and influence, and secondly because I'm not really looking forward to seeing a world where he is only in the foreground, a memory.

I'm not excited about reading books about love and the flourishing of new relationships. The sting of one that could have been – had Ovid been the permanent version of his werewolf charmer self will linger like the full moon I see through the bus window. Funny, it's serene out with the swelling craterous presence in the sky, familiar like Ovid's big brown eyes, but somehow foreign and promising. I've got a lot of phases left, that's for sure.

Non-fiction

The House on Strathnaver Avenue by Michelle Brown

Ambition

I could pass an hour or more on a summer afternoon practicing the bouncing ball game *One Two Three Alairy* on the driveway. The basic routine for the fourline nonsense poem involved four bounces a line, the end of each line complicated by swinging a leg between hand and ball on the last bounce. If I made it through the poem with my right hand, I'd repeat the routine on the left. With a successful performance on the left, I allowed myself to proceed to the next, more difficult execution: clapping my hands between each bounce, clapping behind me, over my head, beneath my leg, jumping both legs over the ball. Sometimes I would demand of myself a flawless routine, starting again at the very beginning if I hit the ball with my leg or failed to catch it.

Disillusionment

My father worked in the sewers of a steel mill and my mother asked for our new house to include a separate room for him to shower in when he got home. In addition to the shower, the room had a toilet, simple sink, and mirrored medicine cabinet. The cabinet had little in it. A toothbrush for dentures, some toothpaste, a safety razor, shaving soap, and a bottle of Gripe Water my older sister had brought home from a babysitting job with the recommendation that it was useful for curing hiccups. I don't recall it ever working. During one episode of hiccups, I concentrated on just how much I disliked the taste of Gripe Water on the theory that my aversion to taking a dose could motivate a breath held long enough to defeat the malady.

Independence

The first meal I made for myself was lunch: a lettuce sandwich. White bread. Mayonnaise. Iceberg lettuce. And a glass of milk.

Intimacy

"Don't you think I know none of you like me?"

It seems unjust that this is the only line I can remember from a fight I had with my sister in the middle of an afternoon. It would have been either July or August, the months she was home from boarding school. I stood at one end of the sofa, the end her feet pointed towards. She had been propped against a pillow, reading, but by the time she cried out this truth, she was lying on her side and sobbing.

Satisfaction

My parents took in boarders, a series of female first grade teachers who lived in a main floor bedroom and ate meals at the same time as the family and Selkirk Steeler hockey players who slept in the basement and didn't.

Once, my parents were away for a week and I was left in the care of the teacher. I do not remember why they were away, only that we wanted the house to look beautiful on their return. I brushed the entire wall to wall carpet in the living room with a palm-sized clothes brush. It looked perfect. It showed every footstep.

Play

One year, there wasn't enough money for a Christmas tree. Santa left the presents lined along the living room wall. I received an Ootpiik, a stuffed toy replica of a long-haired, arctic comic strip character I enjoyed. It's felt nose reminded me of a carrot. I dutifully slept with it.

Denial

I stood at the top of the steps in our bare and empty garage and read from my mother's bedside book of daily devotionals as though they were sermons and the rake and the snow shovel congregants. The floor was cement, the acoustics excellent.

I wanted to be a preacher. With solemnity, I confessed my dream to my father. He was watching television and recording church offerings, entering numbers off offering plate envelopes onto the pages of a ledger. My idea pleased him. I could tell it made sense to him. It was the one time I landed on a spot on the pretend-the-future game board that seemed to make him proud. I heard it as a note in his voice when he said, "I think we should tell Pastor Kornfeld." Heard it again, Sunday morning, at the door to the church, shaking hands with the minister: "Pastor Kornfeld, Michelle has something to tell you." Proud. Pleased with me.

This is it, I thought. This is how good things begin. This is how you start to shape your life. You begin when you are ten. You start your studies when you are ten. Then you can make your dream come true.

Or not.

Pastor Kornfeld's face transformed before my uplifted one.

"You couldn't possibly become a minister. That would be heresy. You're a girl."

Telling

I drew courage from the silence, the absence of laughter. My mother was still at the dining room table. The teacher and my father had gone to bed, no evidence left in sight of the supply of construction paper circles they'd all been creating for a classroom project. My mother worked alone, papers and envelopes in stacks before her. The kitchen behind her was in darkness, the light above the table the only one on. I stood at the end of the hall, next to the built-in mahogany china cabinet, wearing a filmy, layered nylon nighty with lace straps. My feet were bare. I held my elbows for warmth.

My mother neither got up nor called me to her. When I was finished, she said simply, "Ok, now you've told me. Go back to bed."

Defeat

My brother slept in what had been intended to be a sewing room. It was a doorless space at the far end of our long house, on the other side of the doors to the garage and the backyard, on the other side of my father's shower room. The closet in this room was designed for storing winter clothes. It was lined with cedar and airless. I hid there once in a game of hide and seek. The seeker tattled and my triumph was marred by rebuke. I was never to hide there again.

Performance

After watching gymnasts on television in the basement family room, I set two wooden chairs facing each other, stripped to my tights and undershirt, and leapt over them. I made it three times. Tired, I caught my foot on the fourth leap and hit my head on the cement floor. My father called my bruise a beauty of a goose egg.

Boundaries

My brother thought it would be helpful to use lubricant. The first product he tried was Vicks VapoRub. Although he kept it on his windowsill, I asked him the next time not to use it.

Aspiration

The bedroom closets had wooden folding doors. The teacher kept a carton of cigarettes in blue packages on the right corner of the shelf and often left an open pack on her dresser.

In the evening, the teacher and my mother would work together at the dining room table, my mother preparing for the kindergarten class she taught, the teacher marking awkward printing guided by solid and dotted lines. My father was often with them, making cigarettes by filling filtered paper tubes with tobacco with a hand operated machine. They talked and joked together as they worked.

I began with the open pack and wasn't accused until I'd taken from the closet.

Determination

When the hair on my legs grew dark, I shaved during a bath using the blade in my mother's sewing kit, holding it by the edge covered with electrical tape.

On Family by Hejsa Christensen

Family

Noun

1. *The children of a person or couple.*

My sister's first child was a dog. One hundred and sixty pounds of mastiff. Jowls hung to her throat, oozing slobber tentacles that reached out and grabbed my calves with each swing of her head. A full shake extended their reach to disturbing places. The dinner table. My cheek. I suppressed gags as my sister laughed and handed me tissues. To her, everything the dog did was adorable.

In December the dog, Marlowe, came to stay with me. Her parents were going away. They stuffed her into their hatchback and drove out of the city, past the glass-walled high-rises, past the commercial buildings that claimed the first edges of farmland. Exiting the highway, they took narrow roads that wound around half-frozen lakes and through small towns dusted in snow until they arrived at my house. Our twelve acres include a small lake, but the rest is mostly forested, rendering the neighbours, who had left to spend the winter in Florida, and our dead-end road out of sight. It is a peaceful place. Secluded.

The dog lumbered from my sister's car while my sister unloaded Marlowe's things (favourite blanket, special ball). Marlowe spotted my four-year-old daughter, Taia, and hurried to her. The dog had a strange gait when she rushed, like an elephant seal thundering across the ground. She thrust her front legs forward, then her rear half followed, careening into the front half, causing her fat to ripple in waves. Her tongue lolled out of her mouth by the time she covered the short distance.

"I don't know." My sister pursed her lips as she surveyed the area. "She's never been somewhere unfenced before. What if she runs away?" Now playing, Taia ran in wide circles and Marlowe panted and slobbered and elephant-seal-thumped after her, unable to keep up. The dog looked ready to keel over already. She was too big to run around, never mind run away.

"Don't worry," I said. "I'll take good care of her." On Marlowe's third day with us, I stood inside the kitchen, watching through the glass door to the backyard as Marlowe and Taia played next to the lake. Taia made a snowball and threw it. Marlowe thumped after it and stuck her face in the snow, looking for the ball that had crumbled on impact. The lake stretched out behind them, its surface a mixture of slush and ice. Dark water rimmed its edge, the ice not having yet grabbed hold of the land. A stream entered it from marshland on the eastern edge and its flow had kept that area from freezing. Where the stream joined the lake, black fingers of water spread out through the ice to the lake's centre, holding on to the last remnants of autumn. But between the fingers and the edge, winter had laid claim.

Not having found the snowball, Marlowe turned back to Taia and barrelled forward, picking up speed. For a moment I thought she might careen into Taia, but her course was to my daughter's side. She was making a break for the lake.

I was on the back porch before she hit the ice.

“No, Marlowe. Stop!”

Taia was shouting too.

Marlowe elephant-seal-thumped onto the ice and kept barreling across it. The ice held. We shouted. Marlowe ran. Over and over again, her movements made her folds of fat and loose skin stretch taut then ripple together like a giant accordion.

Ten metres from shore. Twenty. Thirty.

That was my sister’s baby out there.

“Come, Marlowe. Come!”

Then, crack.

I was standing in the snow at the edge of the pond with only my socks on my feet when Marlowe went through the ice.

Family

Noun

2. A person or people to be treated with a special loyalty or intimacy because of their relation to one another.

Marlowe’s head popped up through the hole in the ice. Jowls and slobber and eyes wide open. We called to her from shore. Her front paws frantically clawed the ice, but grabbed hold of nothing.

Taia lurched forward. I grabbed her arm and pulled her back. She looked up at me. “She’s going to die, Mommy. You can’t let her die.”

I rushed Taia back to the kitchen, told her to stay inside, stuffed my wet feet into my boots, and raced to the garage. Our canoe spent its winters there. I grabbed the canoe by its sides, hoisted it over my head and ran with it back to the lake. The ice held the weight of the canoe and I clambered in. Using the paddle, I pushed the boat along the surface of the ice until I reached Marlowe. Leaning over the edge of the canoe, I reached into the water, grabbed the dog’s collar, and pulled. That was when the canoe broke through the ice and I found myself, still in the boat, stuck in the same water pocket as the dog. I tried again to pull Marlowe up, but couldn’t raise her even a smidge. She was so heavy that the action only teetered the canoe and I knew it would flip over if I pulled harder.

I paused and realized what I had done. It was ten degrees below freezing. I was wearing a t-shirt, jeans and boots. My hands were losing mobility from the icy water. I couldn’t get the canoe back onto the ice and I couldn’t get the dog into the canoe. The only person around to help was the four-year-old staring at me through the kitchen door.

Family

Noun

3. *A group consisting of parents and children living together in a household.*

I motioned to Taia and she stepped outside.

“Everything is going great,” I said. “But I need you to help me with something. Okay?”

She nodded her head.

“I need you to phone 9-1-1. Tell them that a dog has fallen through the ice and that your mom is stuck in a canoe.”

Taia disappeared back into the house. I started thinking about our phones. They were all cordless and fancy with flat screens instead of buttons. The numbers seemed to bleed together. Taia had never made a phone call before.

I had another idea. Wrapping my stiff fingers around the handle of the paddle, I held it up in the air and then thrust it down against the ice on the edge of the opening that led to shore. Vibrations surged through me as the paddle bounced off the surface. I tried again and again, determined to chisel a channel from our water pocket to shore, thinking Marlowe and I could follow it to land. But the ice fought back, sending needles into my numbing hands with each clash between it and the paddle.

Our isolation struck me. Not only would no one happen past, but my husband would neither arrive home nor call. My husband, Giles, captained a ship. He sailed the world and Taia I joined him frequently in foreign ports. But he didn’t live with us. He lived at sea. We would “meet up” every day for our video computer chat, using Skype. We had a great family, but it didn’t fit conventional models. “Unorthodox,” my great-aunt had called it with a tight-lipped smile. “Not really a family,” she said. “Because families live together, under the same roof.”

My effort to dig the channel seemed futile, but still, I raised the paddle to strike again. I thrust down with all my strength. At that moment, the idea of someone else living under the same roof had an appeal. The paddle cracked on impact and a chip of its wood shot across the ice towards that unreachable shore.

Taia emerged onto the porch. “I can’t make the phone work.”

I laid the paddle down in the canoe, defeated. “It’s okay.”

“Mommy,” she said. “Where’s Marlowe?”

Family

Adjective

4. *Designed to be suitable for children as well as adults.*

The mass under the surface was descending. Leaning over the edge of the canoe, I plunged my arm into the water. Grabbing Marlowe’s collar, I pulled her to the surface. She breathed immediately. A good sign. Her eyes were scared and her gaze clung to mine.

“Marlowe, you must stay up. You can do this.”

When I released her collar, she slipped under the surface again. She had given up. I pulled her up and repeated the same process. I could feel Taia watching. I didn’t want her to see this. This wasn’t for a child to witness.

“Taia, go back inside. Call Daddy on Skype.”

She couldn’t operate a telephone, but she knew well how to call Giles on Skype. That was her normal. Giles would be nearing the western coast of Africa on his ship. He could do nothing for Marlowe, but he could buffer Taia from the unfolding of events.

Marlowe’s loss of hope sent panic through me. I attempted again to heave her from the water. I pulled and pulled as the canoe tipped and dipped beneath me.

In the kitchen, Taia called Giles, who later relayed to me the following conversation:

“Hi, Taia.”

“Hi.” Her voice was calm and matter-of-fact.

“Marlowe is in the lake. She fell through the ice.”

“What?”

“Mommy is there too.”

“Where?”

“In the lake.”

“Did Mommy fall through the ice?”

“Yes.”

“Mommy fell through the ice and is in the lake?”

“Yes.”

“Taia, look out the window and tell me exactly what you see.”

“Okay.” Long seconds pass. “I see Marlowe’s head sticking through the ice and Mommy’s bum in the air and her face almost in the water and the canoe almost tipped over.”

“Mommy is in the canoe?”

“Yes. She is trying to pull Marlowe out.”

“Okay. I need you to go outside and tell her to stop doing that. Tell her that I said she needs to stop doing that right now.”

Taia did as he instructed and the voice of my husband, relayed through our child, stopped my panic. I heard him like he was there with me. Yes, I had to stop. Whatever happened, I couldn't allow myself to fall in. For Taia's sake.

I looked at the stream that flowed into the lake from the marsh. That bank was farther from us than the one we had set off from, but it seemed plausible that the ice would be thinner on that side. Could I chisel a channel in that direction and reach that more distant shore? I wanted to try, but first I needed to let go of Marlowe's collar.

I told Marlowe I needed to let go, told her I needed her to stay up on her own. Slowly, I released her collar. She stayed up. I praised her and her head lifted higher above the surface. I picked up the paddle, but as soon as I stopped talking to her, she began to sink. I called to her again – "You can do this!" – and she struggled her head up higher. To keep fighting, she needed our connection, but I needed to turn and try to break the ice. And so I sang.

It was a ridiculous song that came to mind– the theme song from Taia's favourite TV show, The Wonder Pets. In the cartoon, three talking animals set off to rescue other animals. As Long as I kept singing, Marlowe's head stayed above the surface.

I sang and lifted my paddle into the air. I thrust it down against the edge of the ice that led towards the marsh. The ice cracked. I sang and thrust again and again. Chunks broke off.

Still on Skype with Taia, Giles phoned my mother, who was an hour away from our location. My mother called 911. The 911 operator called our house. Taia answered the phone and managed to put it on speakerphone. Taia held the phone up to the laptop and Giles relayed what he knew to the operator. My mother has a farm ten minutes from our house. She called her farmhand to see if he was in the area. He wasn't, but he called a friend who worked as a farmhand nearby. I kept chiselling and singing and singing and chiselling. Marlowe kept her head up.

Taia stepped onto the porch with the laptop. She heard the song and joined in. ". . . and Ming-Ming, too! We're the Wonder Pets and we'll help you!"

Giles started singing, too. "What's gonna work? Teamwork!"

The farther I got into the channel, the thinner the ice. It broke apart easily as we bellowed the song together. "Wonder Pets! We're on our way, to help a dog and save the day! We're not too big and we're not too tough, but when we work together we've got the right stuff!"

I had lost so much mobility in my hands from the cold that, by the time I made my last strike against the ice, finishing the channel, I was operating the paddle by using one arm in a wing-like fashion and the other hand as a club.

Marlowe had stayed put, so I paddled back to her. I called for her to follow me through the channel. She wouldn't. I pleaded, but Marlowe wouldn't follow and I couldn't pull her and paddle at the same time. She didn't understand that all she had to do to live was swim that channel. After everything, I couldn't do it alone. I needed someone else to be physically there.

As I faced that impasse, a truck drove down our driveway. A man I had never seen before raced from the truck to the lake. I paddled to him. There were no greetings or introductions. Tears welled in my eyes as he climbed into the canoe.

“She won’t swim it,” I said, canoeing back to Marlowe.

“Pull her by the collar and I’ll paddle.”

And he did. And I did. We hit the bottom close to shore. The stranger jumped straight into the icy water, scooped Marlowe’s massive body up in his arms and carried her the final steps. On shore, we threw our arms around her and each other.

The fire truck, police car and ambulance arrived.

Paramedics tended to Marlowe. She had spent over thirty-five minutes in the icy lake and she was okay.

Her big, blubbery body had protected her. My great-aunt came to stay with us that Christmas and my mother recounted the story of Marlowe’s misadventure, marvelling at how many people came together to help.

My great-aunt turned to me and said, “You shouldn’t have done that.”

I knew what she meant. “But I had to,” I said. “What else could I have done?”

“You should have left the dog there.”

We looked at each other in silence. I couldn’t respond. She wouldn’t understand. She was telling me that it would have been wrong to die saving a dog. It wasn’t that I disagreed with her. I just knew that family meant something bigger.

Orange Soda Paradise by Rachel Laverdiere

Orange soda slides down my parched throat – each fizzy bubble burns and prickles. In my seven-year-old mind, these are tiny starbursts; I imagine the bright colours erupting in my throat like the sprinkles Maman put on my birthday cake in March. Later, I will associate the sensation with fireworks splaying fingers on the first of July. But not yet.

Right now, Maman, my brothers, my sister, and I are sitting in the shade of the tall shelterbelt that protects us from the wind that's raging across southern Saskatchewan. We rarely see Lassie during the day, yet here he is panting at our feet. Even he has grown weary of the heat.

"It'd better rain soon, or we're gonna have another goddamn drought," I overheard Papa say to Maman in the kitchen this morning. Her cigarette was trembling between her lips; I was about to spring up and warn her, afraid the ash might fall into her lap, and she would burn herself. "And there'd better not be another goddamn hailstorm!" Papa slammed his angry fist onto the table, and the cups and plates danced a little. Maman flinched; her eyes looked frightened as she cowered closer to her side of the narrow kitchen, and I pushed myself deeper into the tight space between the cupboard and the stove.

With each slurp of sweetened citrus, it feels as though the bursting flavour creeps up my nose and then back down my throat to forge furrows through dust dunes piled high. The soda pop is a prize awarded for days of rock picking in the fields. For at least a week we crouched low to the earth, bent like the scrub brush, fighting to stay vertical in a relentless wind, tossing rock after rock into the box of our rusted-out pick-up truck. Maman had coaxed my brother, Lynn, to stop throwing the rocks *out* of the truck.

"You said five more!" he screamed back at her. His red hair, matted with dirt, stood up in a mass of stiff snarls. The freckles glowed almost greenish on the bridge of his nose and across his cheeks and forehead.

Maman sighed and rolled her shoulders a few times. "Okay." She tried to reason with him, her eyes downcast. "This time, I *really* promise, but we need to finish, or Papa will be very upset." Did I imagine a shadow passing over her face? I looked up to the sky, but there was nothing but a glaring sun in a cerulean sky. "Maybe I'll get you and Rachel your own bottles. I'll share one with the little ones," Maman negotiated.

The mention of Papa's name was enough to silence Lynn. He hopped down from the box, and we kept filling the back until Maman signalled we'd done enough. We drove to the rock pile, Lynn and I each sitting on a wheel hub in the back, and unloaded. The sun beat down on my back, on my dark hair. Then we all piled into the cab of the truck, and Maman took us all the way to the tiny store in town.

On the way home, the wind blew through the open windows of the cab and we held the cold bottles to our blazing cheeks, anticipating the moment when Maman would fetch the bottle opener and pry off the metal caps. Lynn and I would make sure to catch them as they fell to the concrete pad in the shade of the elm trees.

We've started a bottle cap collection, but we don't have very many, mostly just Papa's beer caps we pluck from under the couch in the mornings when we stealthily creep about until he disappears to the fields.

As I run my fingers over the scarred bark of the trunk I'm leaning against, I imagine I'd be happy never to see another rock again. I lean against the wide trunk and squish my bare feet into cool leaf mulch that's accumulated beneath the trees over the years. I do not realize it, but one day I will yearn to see the rock piles dotting our fields. I will crave the reward of hurling one rock from the top of the pile onto another, far below. I will mentally wait for the crack that neatly splits the rock in two, revealing jewelled worlds within.

As we sip orange soda in the heavenly shade, we are satisfied. This afternoon, there is neither heat baking our backs nor wind whipping through our hair. The orange soda is rare, and today, for the first time in our lives, Lynn and I have our own glass bottles to drink from. I tilt the bottle, swirl down the last swig and wait for the dregs to puddle on my tongue.

Contributors

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Bertrand Bickersteth writes and researches on Alberta's black history. His poetry has appeared in *Kola*, *Freefall*, and the anthology, *The Great Black North: Contemporary African Canadian Poetry*. He was born in Sierra Leone, educated in the UK, resident in the US, but raised all over Alberta. He currently teaches Communications at Olds College and is editing an anthology of black literature from Alberta.

Douglas W. Milliken

Douglas W. Milliken is the author of the novel *To Sleep as Animals* and several chapbooks, most recently the collection *Cream River* and the forthcoming pocket-sized edition *One Thousand Owls Behind Your Chest*. His stories have been honored by the Maine Literary Awards, the Pushcart Prize, and *Glimmer Train*, and have been published in *Slice*, *The Collagist*, and *The Believer*, among others. His website is www.douglaswmilliken.com.

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Hejsa Christensen completed her MFA in Creative Writing at the University of British Columbia (2016) and was awarded the 2014 Random House/Hazlitt Award in Creative Writing. She has written features for *Canoe and Kayak* and *Outpost* magazines.

Holly Day

Holly Day has taught writing classes at the Loft Literary Center in Minnesota since 2000. Her published books include *Music Theory for Dummies*, *Music Composition for Dummies*, *Guitar All-in-One for Dummies*, *Piano All-in-One for Dummies*, *Walking Twin Cities*, *Insider's Guide to the Twin Cities*, *Northeast Minneapolis: A History*, and *The Book Of*, while her poetry has recently appeared in *New Ohio Review*, *SLAB*, and *Gargoyle*. Her newest poetry book, *Ugly Girl*, just came out from Shoe Music Press. *The Bird*

James W. Wood

James W. Wood's recent work has appeared in *Vallum*, *PRISM International*, *The Vancouver Sun*, *Stand (USA)*, *The North (UK)* and *The Interpreter's House (US/UK)*. He is the author of six books of poetry, most recently *The Emigrant's Farewell* (The High Window Press, Leeds, UK, 2016) and grew up in Canada, becoming a citizen in 1981. He now lives in the Gulf Islands off the coast of British Columbia with his wife, son and dog.

Kyra MacFarlane

Kyra MacFarlane is a young poet and fiction writer originally from Spiritwood, Saskatchewan. Two of her poems are to be published in Saskatchewan publications - *isms* zine, and the *Tonight It's Poetry* anthology, *Poetry All Over the Floor*, vol. 1. She is currently pursuing an English degree at the University of Saskatchewan. Her interests include music (both playing and listening to it), reading, writing, and cuddling with her dogs. MacFarlane is a feminist, volunteering at the University of Saskatchewan's USSU Women's Centre. You can find her at music venues,

feminist rallies, and the library. MacFarlane also operates "Timely Tinnitus," a blog where she posts music reviews.

Michelle Brown

Michelle Brown is again writing poetry, essays, and creative nonfiction after a detour into law and treaty negotiations. Her work has been heard on CBC Radio1 and she has performed at The Flame in both Vancouver and Victoria. She was long listed for the 2015 PRISM International creative nonfiction competition and received an Honourable Mention in the Canadian Authors Association Victoria 2016 Flash Fiction contest. Her website www.skyblanket.ca features photo essays written while she was in South America and Turkey. She is working on a memoir, *Coming Out Sane*, about living with PTSD. She is Cree from the Métis Nation.

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Myrna Garanis is an Edmonton poet/essayist. Her essay "All Tied Up" was recently shortlisted for the Edna Staebler personal essay contest and is published in *The New Quarterly*, Spring 2017.

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Naomi LaKritz lives in Calgary and is a former columnist and editorial writer at the *Calgary Herald*. Her work has also been published in the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, the *Montreal Gazette*, the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, and other Canadian papers.

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Nathan TeBokkel is a PhD student at the University of British Columbia, where he studies poet-farmers and the intersections of agriculture and aesthetics, drawing on his background in genetics, melon farming, and food safety audits. He has published articles in *Word Hoard*, *PostScriptum*, and *The Apollonian*, has a book chapter and a review in press, and has disseminated poems in *Propaganda* and a chapbook held together by dental floss.

Nicholas Olson

Nicholas Olson is the author of *The Adirondack Haystack Still Floats*, a collection of short stories studying the North American working-class, released in 2014. Olson curates his own series of essays at www.ballsofrice.com. He lives in Regina, Saskatchewan on Treaty 4 Land.

Rachel Laverdiere

Rachel Laverdiere writes and teaches in Saskatoon. She has worked as a language teacher in South Korea, Quebec, and Saskatchewan. Read Rachel's short fiction and creative nonfiction in the most recent issues of *Filling Station*, *FreeFall*, *Dime Show Review*, and *Soliloquies Anthology*. You can follow her on Twitter @[r_laverdiere](https://twitter.com/r_laverdiere) or learn more about her at www.rachellaverdiere.com.

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Randel McCraw Helms was, until his retirement, professor of English at Arizona State University. Making poems is his vocation. His work has recently appeared in such venues as Coe Review, Avis, Sicklit, Pilgrim, and TXTOBJX.

Trudy Grienauer

Trudy Grienauer is a writer and translator based in Edmonton, Alberta. Recently, she had a poem published on Edmonton transit buses and another performed by a local choir. She is a regular contributor to readings and anthologies of the Edmonton Stroll of Poets and is currently working on a longer manuscript about the history of her Austrian grandparents.

Valerie Mills-Milde

Valerie Mills-Milde lives, works and writes in London, Ontario. She is the author of the novel *After Drowning*, (Inanna Publications and Education) which won the 2017 Silver Ippy (Independent Publisher Books Award) for Contemporary Fiction. Her short fiction has appeared in numerous literary journals across the country. A collection of these pieces was short-listed for the Black Lawrence Book Award. *The Land's Long Reach* (Inanna Publications, 2018), is her second novel.