



THE
FIELDSTONE
REVIEW

ISSUE 3, 2008

Poetry & Prose

Sand Messages **Lynn Cecil**

Somewhere, hiding, shores sand-sloped,
windless, ageless without weather:

I could carve you messages, heart-hidden
secrets, animals sleeping cave-crushed,
gnawing energy from within, and still
you could read them, awakening hollow-boned,
bird-winged, a million years later.

Dream Room **Jennifer Still**

I.
Piano keys are bone. This is how the dead sing.
Something's coming, the birds are starting up again.

On the steps under the pine the rain fingers our socked feet.
I want wine, smoke in my mouth, a cheeky response.

The girl fills her sleeves with rubber frogs.
"I wasn't smiling at you, mom. I was smiling because I was happy."

Thanks for never reading my diary, for giving me that space
for secrets. I trust too much and never lose anything.

The amber ring buried two years in a garden glove.
Sun caught 90 million years in a wing.

II.

Trying not to watch you while you play. Not to take too many pictures.
The light afghan stitches out. Somewhere, a chained brightening.

"Anything is possible" you told me. That's all
the religion I needed. To love the world so much

I can no longer visit the zoo. Pink snouts petalling out.
Palms pressed to the window.
To air a bed. To care for garbage-cans. To open fruit jars.
There's a rule for everything.

For the pale stone it all comes down to background.
Skull darkening the rain. Queer smile of the jaw.

III.

My daughter draws a line through the letters of her name.
The difference between crossing out and connecting.

Two snowmen and three sticks.
Two snowmen holding hands.

Timing snow, a slowdance in streetlight.
Prove that water is not listening.

Places the deer hide in rain. Willow's mammalian bloom.
Atom built in snow's bone light. Synapse webbed in the grass.

Home-made fly traps. Syrup-ripple wing.
The slow-motion dying.

IV.

To bare face
in the silhouette hills.

When the fat birds love
the world close to the ground.

The way fur gives up bone, sockets
formed in their final seeing.

Antler buds, roman candles, the pearled
waxing.

I share a cigarette with you, blow a moon
through your eye. Smoke branches

the corners of my mouth, and the tongue,
the tongue is climbing.

V.

As I meet you I am closing in on it,
the love that will walk us to the end.

And there you are with trees breathing,
a shoe in your hand. Going somewhere?

You knew and you were touching it.
The chance of a dust mote catching this light.

Or not. I'm too sentimental for this. Juice glasses,
forks, china flourishes.

Underwater angels serving teacups of air.
Clear feather bone.

VI.

Skirt-twirl of the glassed-in light. Porch dust float,
empty aquarium, feathery finned

ghosts of kissing-fish, tetras, dime-waisted
angels. A pinch of milk testing the wrist,

a nest of blood testing her tongue. Dreaming
a green woolen coat, a pocket of

cut hair. Silence
upon silence.

Her feet growing beyond my hand.
Even fields have their narrowings.

VII.

Our daughter asks why things are dirty and why dirty things die.
She wants a flapper, the things you flap flies with.

Canvas door partings of fur, amber rooms, ancient
light. Fur that has just shook out its water,

the thought of each drop
falling into place.

I have not many stars
but these crosses are coming close.

White paint cracks, the walls hatch from wallness.
Blackflies in the ruby water. The joyous dead afloat.

Ali the Truck Driver

Simon Barker

Up ahead at the intersection the soldiers are stopping all vehicles. You are glad you decided not to drive your truck. The roadblock is even further forward today. It is only because the driver of your minibus is known to the local police that they let him through. He has to talk fast all the same. How could you have done that? Today your laryngitis is so bad that you can hardly make yourself heard. Your nephews had been wise to suggest the mini-bus, even though it had cost you a bribe. If only the air wasn't so hot and dusty and the queue so long. And now what's this? A wedding procession. Incredible. Your driver tries to join in the festivities by pressing his hand down on the horn, but it doesn't make any noise.

Maybe this will be your last trip. It is one of the many you have made since the death of your brother-in-law, Hasan. Poor Hasan. One evening three car loads of soldiers had come looking for him. When he'd kicked up a fuss they had shot him, right there at his own dinner table, in his own house, in front of his whole family. And what had he done? Nothing. He had been given the wrong name, that's all. The soldiers had been hunting for another Hasan in another street, a completely unrelated individual. But that was how things happened now. There had been no apology, no compensation, not even a newspaper report. It made up your mind. At Hasan's chaotic funeral you had decided to emigrate, regardless of what ill feeling it caused. Your cousins had migrated to Australia many years ago and there had been a scandal at the time. But now they were citizens there. They had a good business. Their daughter had been to a university. They sent videos.

So at Hasan's funeral you had decided you would join them. But there were now many obstacles that your cousins had not encountered. After the truck bomb in the market the foreign embassies had moved to a fortified part of the city, highly inaccessible. You had queued innumerable times before submitting your application and then months had passed with no word until you had received a letter informing you that you had been rejected. Apparently you were too old. You needed to be under thirty five. Also you were unskilled. Driving trucks was not a skill. And finally your cousins were not able to act as security for you because, according to Australian law, they were not your cousins at all. And there was one more thing—you were too fat. In God's name! Of course, if you had been a rich business man matters would have been different. A rich business man, such as that man Ayoub with the importing business, would be permitted to be as old and as fat and to have as many cousins as he wanted. But you were not a business man. You were a truck driver. It seemed that Australian trucks were driven by men who were young and below average weight.

You had not known what to do until your nephews had brought to your door a young acquaintance of theirs who claimed to have taken an interest in your affairs. He had scoffed at your application forms. He had told you that what you needed was an agent. Such a rude and obnoxious person he had been and you had sent him packing. But you had hung onto the phone number he provided and when the phones resumed working for the few minutes they did each day you'd arranged to meet the young man's agent, which is how you come to find yourself on the minibus.

You trip and stumble as you descend the bus's faulty stairs and you wonder how you will recognize this agent. Will he display a hand-lettered sign like an airport chauffeur? Surely not. But you recognise him straight away. He is the only one in the café who is not a foreigner. He is drinking tea at his own table watching a little television. You sit with him and try to explain the situation, but your throat burns and your voice is hardly audible. He keeps watching his

television while you whisper your story. When you have finished he says nothing. You wait while he holds up his finger for the waiter to bring him a plate of pastries. He eats two of them and makes you wait. Whatever it is he is watching on the small television you can't see. It has no sound except a tiny hiss. Like you it appears to have laryngitis. The man breathes deeply through his black nostrils and wipes his fingers. "Ten thousand," he says finally, rolling his bottom lip with his forefinger. That's all he says, ten thousand. For a moment you are confused because ten thousand was not a figure that was mentioned in your telephone conversation. Does he mean ten thousand for all of you? "No," he says crossly, "ten thousand for one." For one. How can that be possible? You cannot afford to pay for four at that price. At ten thousand you can afford to pay for one, that's all. The man shrugs.

What are you to do? You have the money with you, in the envelope. You are ready. You have sold your truck. You have signed over the lease of your house. You did not expect this. What is to become of you now? The agent watches his miniature tv while your head spins.

One is no use, you tell him. You have a wife and two children. What use can one be to you? He shrugs again. It's not his concern. As he watches his miniature television you try to think of what you can say to persuade him. Your voice is about to give out completely. Before you can come up with anything he sees something on the screen that pleases him greatly. He smiles at the television and turns to you with an unexpected offer: he is feeling generous; he will take ten thousand for two of you, one adult and one child. "What?" you say to him, so on edge you hardly comprehend. He repeats his offer: one adult and one child.

You think. How can this help you? One adult, yes, because if necessary you can leave your wife behind. The truth is she complains bitterly about leaving her mother. So it would be easy to let her stay. The old woman will not last forever and soon your wife will see how well you are living in a new country. She will come to her senses. But the two children, what on earth are you to do about them? How can you leave one of them behind? And which one? Your daughter or your son? No good asking for advice. You know what people will say. Your brothers will not hesitate: take your son, take the ten year old. Leave the daughter behind. She will soon be looking for a husband. She is already fourteen. Leave her with her mother to watch her and they will bargain about a dowry on your behalf. Then she will not need to come at all.

That is what they will say, isn't it, because your brothers think sons are more important than daughters. But your brothers aren't thinking of leaving. Your brothers do not see things as you do. What do you think? You try to imagine what would be best. You try to picture in your mind your son in another country. In Australia. But you can't. You can only picture your son as he is, playing on his GameBoy all day, eating sweets he's stolen from the kitchen. When you try to picture your daughter you see in your mind the video your cousins sent to you, the video of their daughter graduating from the university dressed in her gown and her strange hat on top of her headscarf. She is an engineer now. How your wife scoffed at this, saying your cousins were fools to let their daughter do such things. You told her to mind her own business and she had responded, banging the pot of coffee loudly on the table, "And what would you do, husband? Would you have our daughter study engineering?" And you had found yourself shouting back, "Yes, if it please God!"

And why wouldn't it please God, you think. Your daughter is no different from your cousins' daughter. She does well at her schoolwork. She is a good girl. She respects her parents and listens to what they say. So then and there you decide. You pay your ten thousand to the agent and you put your son's papers and your wife's back into your pocket. You are resolved. It is the best you can do. If you left your daughter behind who would keep her away from the meddling

influence of your nephews? They have already tried to fill her head with their nonsense about religion and sacrifice and piety. You have already had to speak to her about it because you feared they were turning her into a zealot. Australia would be a good place for her. And even if you leave your idle, lazy son behind for a while there is no fear that he will become a zealot.

The minibus has vanished when you leave the café and you set off on foot along the hot pavement. It will be quite a walk home but you will stop and drink tea on the way to ease your throat. You plan your announcements, what to tell your wife, your brothers, your son. Then you turn the corner and before you realise, bang, you are in the thick of it. The dust has hardly settled. People are crying. The occupying soldiers are leaping from vehicles along with the local police. You are herded into an alley and made to wait. The word goes round that you must show your identity papers. "Your papers!" the unshaven police officer asks you. "What is going on?" he demands. "Why have you got these people's papers? Where are your papers?" With your final ration of voice you explain that you have been to the embassy so your wife and your son can visit their relatives in Australia. You must have left your own papers by mistake. But this story is not good enough. They manhandle you into a truck and drive off.

The police station where they question you is foul and dirty. You are there for hours. There has been another suicide bomber, someone tells you, another young woman. You have no voice left to retell your story. The soldiers offer you nothing to drink. They point their guns at you and make you lie flat on the floor. For a moment you think they are going to shoot you, as they shot Hasan. But you force yourself not to panic. There is a small shifty man who is translating. You do not like him and he does not like you. He claims he cannot hear what you are trying to say. He claims he cannot read what you write down for him. But when you offer him your gold wristwatch his hearing and his reading suddenly improve. He remonstrates with the soldiers and you are released. As you leave the police station another poor soul is dragged in. His hands are tied together with plastic rope. He is bleeding. His family is with him. They are crying and tugging at the hands of the soldiers. Another Hasan. As you hurry home your throat is searing. It begs you to pass by the stall where you can drink Sahlep. You ignore it. You hurry home to prepare for tomorrow, for your journey, for your new life. When you have those things your voice will return of its own.

But as you approach your house you find everything in uproar. It is like a hot wind blowing in from the desert. You can hear your wife and your mother-in-law from down the street. People are blocking the doorway, neighbours, your wife's relatives. There are dozens. Your wife is wailing. What is going on? You take hold of the woman and try to get sense out of her. But she pays no attention. There must be another death, you think to yourself, another relative, another Hasan. From out of the throng your nephew paces towards you bearing the news. All this uproar, all this commotion, he tells you, is because it is your daughter's wedding day, because she has become a bride. He seems intoxicated. You look at him dumbfounded, lost for words. What does he mean, your daughter's wedding day? What is he talking about? How can she possibly have been married while you were gone? Who is her husband? Why were you not told of this? Your mind spins out of control and you no longer register the distress and hubbub about you. You suddenly have a vision of your daughter in a wedding dress, not a traditional wedding dress, but the white one of the West and on her head you see the black cap of your niece, the engineer, in her graduation video.

Then abruptly there is a detonation in your dream. You realise, but you don't want to realise. Your nephew is spouting a great diatribe into your face. It is your daughter's wedding day because your daughter has gone to join the band of martyrs, the occupiers are your enemies,

the West is your enemy, they will be thrown out, they will be crushed. And your wife is wailing. The women from your family are wailing and tearing their hair.

You return to the agent the next day. Or maybe it is the day after, you are not sure anymore. You come to tell him that you no longer require papers for your daughter. Instead you need papers for your son. But he tells you that your daughter's money is already spent. It was her bride price.

Jesus at Ten
Dave Margoshes

My father is a carpenter, a simple man,
my mother a good woman with a clear idea
of who she is, but there is something unsaid
between them, something unfinished.

A boy I know, a little older, John is his name,
can see the future, he does it for a shekel. He says
I'll have joys and sorrow, as many doubters
as followers, have sacrifices to make.

I tell this to my father who pauses at his bench,
his mouth bristling with nails of his own design.
He nods his head, says nothing. I have the feeling
sacrifice is something he knows of.

The Shell Collection
Joanna M. Weston

three empty shells furred
curled and locked
exposing pearled interior

caressed by water
which pushed the tripling
against driftwood

suction of sand and current
layered weed and polished stone
about the fused shells
that waited moons until
the child found them

Bat Mitzvah
Dave Margoshes

(for Alexis)

The way the sun slants across
your breath-stained window, the way
a heart fills up with summer rain,
the way the moon rises at its jaunty angle,
tipping its hat, the way a certain
hand falls a certain way, filling
your eyes with longing. All these things
change as of today, opening themselves
up the way a flower reveals its sex
to the sun, the rain, the moon,

to the bee, its buzzing a stone
on your eyelids, pulling you down
to fathomless sleep in the arms
of a beloved you are yet to meet.

This way
the world
turns to
its own bidding, flinging
your heart to the sky
like a promise.

The Point of Learning Ukrainian Laurie Graham

Because of you, Grannie, the night you knelt,
put your hand on my shoulder, hand that knew wet soil
and crochet hooks, asked *Do you have to piss or shit before bed?*
Maybe those words weren't bad in your language.

You made me a strange girl, a child with a Scottish
family name and a longing for boxy Cyrillic,
rolling the sounds past the tongue, then the meanings,
the places where bad words might become a choice.

The children in the old readers had sleds and ponies
and didn't talk at all about pissing, shitting, only
about drinking water from the stream with a cupped hand,
juice from apples from angry Farmer Ivan's tree.

На щазя на сторовя на новей рік, I threw wheat in your doorway
both new years, Gregorian and Julian. You told me
you were born on the coldest day of the year,
New Year's Eve, according to the old calendar.*

Your hand was steady around the stylus in the spring,
deep stink of beeswax, farmer symbols everywhere on the писанки,†
eternity in your thin wax lines, wheat sheaves for bounty, curls of protection,
green dye for hope and the new crop, no piss, no shit,

you would've scolded me for asking, for causing збитки.‡
Years later, the professor taught Kiev Ukrainian, clean S sounds, weightless V's.
I'd visit, speak S's the width of toothpicks. You'd smile, wave your arm,
my proper words converting the kitchen, you'd say, *What's the point. It's a dying
language.*

Then the letters came. Foreign cousins starving in L'viv.
Photos of a baby. You rolled dollar bills into the fingers
of gloves and mailed them and your notes,
which you traced until they were perfect,

described your children, sisters, grandchildren,
never yourself, and you said Ми сильний тому що ми родина.°

* Pronounced *Na shcha-shchya na storovya na novei rik*, and means "To your health, to your happiness, in the new year." These words are the beginning of the new year's greeting.

† Pronounced *pysanky*. The name for Ukrainian easter eggs.

‡ Pronounced *zbytky*. Means "pranks" or "mischief."

° Pronounced *Mih sylny tomü shcho mih rodyna*. Means "We are strong because we are family."

I Never Knew When I Arrived in this Country
Shauna Singh Baldwin

That my pillow might hold your scent
As I tried to sleep, beginning to know
you were with your first wife and son

That my dowry bought
you and your parents
a larger house in Richmond.

That if I believed you each time you warned
you'd hurt me and our baby if I left,
I would only feed the rakshas inside you.

That our elders' protests, our daughter's
brimming eyes, and my shame
might mean nothing to you

That I did not have to live
with a man shouting,
"I didn't choose to marry you!"

That the library and internet
are such private places
to find shelters and friends

That if I threatened to show your boss
my bruises, it could stop you, mid-strike
and I'd smell your thwarted breath

That I wouldn't be raped
by a policeman or prostituted
in a shelter, if I called for help.

That other women have seen
the noose of Yama move behind
their husbands' eyes, and survived

That I wouldn't have to take
my three-year-old girl and leave
our home --- instead, you would.

That if I did decide to leave and divorce,
someone in this country
would pay fairly for my work

That I could find one room with a stove
And a fridge, and live with
my daughter, on my own.

But I know now.

Hewn

Ariel Gordon

1.

She was a dead-header that believed
in orderly beds a woman that wore crisp denim shirts
on cool days and kept her white hair
bobbed
and this was her territory: when a squirrel
wouldn't stay away from her birdfeeder she uprooted it
turned the page in the catalogue
and planted things that drew
butterflies instead

He was a pruner
that otherwise stayed out
of the garden
a man that semi-annually grasped
the telescoping arms of his tool
the clean edges
of cut

2.

He was a lawn-mower who insisted
on planting a tree for his first grandchild
in his wife's garden
and heaving the root ball into the hole
alone his wife
watching from the living room
window his legs bowing
around the weight (the nap of the burlap
like the first hair)
and panting feet planted
on either side of the hole
he knew this was as close
as he'd ever got
to birth

The first year the tree flourished
the way the tumour in the brain
of the over-the-fence neighbour flourished
and when the leaves
that reached impertinent for his sunlight
all the unfurling fingers
pointed at him
the overhanging anger of trespass
made him wrench off

a branch the way you might
wrench off
an arm

The next week his wife tsked
on the bedroom phone: *he's sick!* as she reported on the rough edges
of the torn thing tossed over the fence
into her yard
said *but you know how your father is*
he won't do anything
then went quiet

3.

She was a mulch-digger familiar with orderly
disruption of pest life cycles her notebook full
of dilutions applications doses all in her careful hand
but when she came upon her husband still
watching a raccoon fish in her koi pond
swiping at the water
brushing aside
her special-order plants for the fish
they carefully sifted into tanks in the fall
so they wouldn't freeze (the fish
swarming the murky light
of the basement all winter)
she watched him watch
then grabbed a rake
and took
a swipe

4.

He was a kitchen-scrap composter who came out
one morning with his margarine tub
full of rot
to find the three-year old tree stripped
the winter-sick lips of deer
shredding the limbs bare
all for the glazed shoots
the goddamn
tenderness
of leaves
springing from bud
after the long drift of winter
after that it was blight
and apples worm-eaten
even on the highest branches

5.

He was a pruner

and by year five it was clear: the tree hadn't staked
out a domain wouldn't branch out
into this sky these breezes: *it's sick...* she noted
every day for a month
you've got to do something
and when she finally sent him out
with the axe he stood under the spindly branches
dreaded the bleeding seep
of cut

She was a ruthless dibber
but she didn't stand by
the window when he took down the tree
he'd wanted his clean edges his crisp provocateur
but instead he had to pace off
the square footage of their house
find her
on the floor
of their bedroom
and he stood over her clumsy
with sawdust and soil him scared and her
so still

And when she pulled him down
pressed her wet cheeks her creased forehead
to his he buried his nose in her
but had to ask: *are you sick?*
is there anything I can do?
she looked wild at him then sat up
scowling at the upturned tip of his pink golf shirt
the collar about to lick his ear lobe
or speak
and was about to assume the day push off into the afternoon
errands the suckers even now
lining up to be pinched off
until he squeezed her again
felt her steel her moment
of resistance
before she laid back into the dust
aloft in the moving patch
of sunlight

IUDs
Kim Roberts

Dittrick Medical History Center, Cleveland

Wheels, whisks, wishbones,
silhouette of a tiny pine.

Birds in flight and fiddlehead ferns.
The uterus is a magic place:

dark as a cave, it accommodates
any shape we insert:

circles and snakes, beetles
and bows, fossils and fleurs de lis.

Some are even shaped like a uterus
in miniature, amulets for warding off

miniatures of ourselves. Leaves
of a plastic ginko tree unfurl—

no end to our genius, its infinite contours.
On this scaffold we build

a barren language in plastic letters:
expandable O's, flying V's,

X's like antlers, and a range
of two-handed T's, eager to get to work.

Before the Gravity Stopped

Jason Young

The last green chopper is dragging in another survivor as I float in silence, Girl at my side. She hasn't spoken to me since I told her about my cousin and how I'd watched him drift into the pull of a giant refrigeration fan outside of Saskatoon. Pieces of Benny, littering the evening sky, coating the clouds blood-red. Leaving me, safe. Me, a survivor.

Drifting sideways over the sand, Girl can't form a word. But her eyes speak volumes; she paints the void with looks. Not at me, but not away, her gaze is aimed right through me. Between the hanging ribs, the feet dangling beneath.

"When?" she finally asks.

I don't want to talk about Benny anymore. I want to forget him, it, everything. I want to start again.

"Yesterday."

She's crying now. And it's funny, it really is. Ever since gravity stopped I've been accepting it—coping with the change. But as her tears break free, bend the lashes, lift off and swirl around her eyes, I realize how truly bizarre this is. Such a pretty girl, such a pretty sky. We should be parked above the cliffs, counting the pinhole stars, holding each other close. Not wondering whether the last chopper will save us or not.

I steady her; the extension cord I tied between us grows limp. It was the only thing I had time to grab as my feet left the lawn seven days ago. Benny and I were mowing the lawn at my auntie's place before the gravity stopped. As we drifted up over the rooftops, Benny hollered: "Tie it around me—it'll keep us together!"

That was a week ago. The end of the extension cord tied through Girl's belt loop is now frayed where it got sucked into the fan with Benny. I just finished telling her about him; she just started to cry. Probably not for Benny, though. Probably for the ones she knew.

I turn around so she can be alone.

I catch a floating chocolate bar and unwrap it. Above me, the helicopter retrieves a baby from an airborne crib. Girl has stopped crying; maybe she'll tell me her name now.

The other day, when I managed to grab onto her right foot, she seemed alarmed that a stranger would do something like that. Then I explained it to her, said we'd have a better chance of surviving if we both held on together. I told her my name. She said she was scared, angry, cold. Thirsty. I gave her a sip of the water bottle I found floating in a stack of low clouds.

After she'd wiped her lips dry, she told me about her mother, her father, her sister, her boyfriend. Her car, her job, her tennis awards, her books.

But I didn't get her name.

It's night time now; we're all alone. The chopper took off a couple of hours ago, its belly full of people. I wonder where they're being taken. Hopefully somewhere with a roof.

Girl told me her name—it's Ashley. I caught hold of a floating soda machine (its cord frayed just like ours) and managed to pull a can out for her. She finished off the warm Sprite as though it were her last, sipping it slowly, gratefully.

That was a couple of hours ago. The chopper pulled away just after she finished.

We haven't said too much since.

"Ashley," I say, nudging her awake. "Look!"

It must have something to do with the earth's rotation, causing us to float not just upwards but a bit to the side as well. We must have floated over a lake during the night. The air around us has turned to water: tiny, turning circles of not-rain.

My hair is wet and so is Ashley's as she says: "I don't think we're going to make it."

"We won't drown up here," I say quickly, fanning my arms to show her how much air there still is. "It's just a little damp, that's all. Look—it's gonna' help us keep cool!"

Ashley looks down at my arms, sees the moisture coating my sun-burned flesh. "Apollo 13 in frame-by-frame rewind," she says softly. "That's what we're gonna' be. Apollo 13 in frame-by-frame rewind."

I grab her arms and yell, "We're not gonna' burn up, Ashley! We're not gonna' die!"

I think she hears me—maybe she even believes me. But if we die tomorrow, then I'm a liar twice. Once because I promised Benny he'd be okay, twice because I told Ashley the same. But it's not all that important anyways. Even if the gravity hadn't failed, we still would have died.

Just not together.

As her tears begin floating again, joining the circling droplets of ground-water, I slowly reach down and untie my end of the cord—putting things back to where they were before the gravity stopped.

"Goodbye, Girl," I say, "I should never have grabbed on."

She begins to say something, but by then there's so much water between us.

End.

Chrysalis

T. Berto

HAWLIS, midthirties-early forties. RYAN, 18. Should be delivered as monologues.

HAWLIS: I couldn't believe it, the stones on this kid. He just bashes into my room, looks at me like to say 'you'll do'. Not that guys aren't, uh, forceful round here. I mean you gotta meet the muster of the ape at the cash-window, just to get buzzed in, and pass the trolls and freaks, just to get to the rooms. Can't be shy. But he was just so damn, well, gunnin'. I mean it's no place for manners. Just a place of business to get done what you gotta do. And this kid's like, 'let's get to it'.

I like that. He don't want my name, or (laughs) my number. Like I wanna see him or sumthin. Phht. But it's a bit more than that maybe. I'm curious, I mean when they're so young, he looks bout twenny, they're not like that. I should jus' let it go. But no, stupid me, too late now. I just had to ask him, what got the fire goin'? Well, who knew? Jeeezus.

RYAN:

They were moving around and saying things too loud—trying to get me out of my room. It's hot-tub night. Dad couldn't stop getting up from dinner and checking things, the temperature, the chlorine. Like it's rocket science. And Robbie's got Dwayne over from school. Dwayne's had the same jacket, three winters in a row now—you can tell his mom's trash. He puts up with Robbie's whining—probably for the pork chops and the pool and the hot-tub.

He seems ok. He's got about twice the size of Robbie this last year. He doesn't shave yet though—so he's got that fungus-sy shit on his face. I've seen the other hair growing though... Mom's fuckin' do-gooder charity won't get him way out here much longer, hot-tub and pork-chops be damned.

Dad's beena total pain in the ass just cause Dwayne's over. Like we're some Christian family that does shit together? Least it's better than him trying to make me listen to his lame lps. I donno what he's trying to do to me with that.

But at least that's not as bad as the 'Man' thing. With his musclehead buds Cory and Pete, from his building site. Like having a beer in the truck with them before some lame-ass hockey game's gonna make me... I dunno, cut my hair, wear a jean jacket? I should do that but sew a swastika on it. Just look at him and say 'What?' I mean isn't that where stuff like that leads to?

Fuck he's even got Robbie onto his schtick now.

'We're pouring the pop now, you want coke or fanta?' and 'If you don't come down, I'm gonna get the whirlpool seat' ... I wish I had a brother I could hit. The fucking little gimp. I can't slam my door any louder or turn up tunes enough to give me some distance. I'd turn out the light but when the ape sees it dark under my door that gives him an excuse to stomp in and ask some totally transparent stupidity.

I know now why Scroope sits in his basement doing hot-knives every night, getting stupider but at least getting away from it. He's even farther out. Two school buses every morning, and no car to borrow at night. No escape at all. Fours months til the end of semestre and I'm so outta here.

Now they've even got Tracker into it. Christ he's 14 years old, just leave him alone. But no, Robbie's retard-giddy-fun-fun-fun crap gets him excited and he circles, barking, down below my

door. But even Tracker figures it's fake by the time he's at the stairs, and gives a last huff, pissed he hobbled up for nothing. And Robbie hops over and fake consoles him, like it's my fault he got up for nothing.
Peckerhead.

Finally they're into the back, changing. And then out. Just a couple of thuds from outside. Thank Christ.
Headphones. Marilyn Manson cd. Pillow. Fuck yas.

(long pause)

I'm on the bed. The cd's stopped. Dark. Tracker's having a fit. I'm gonna kill Robbie one day if he doesn't stop harassing that dog, I don't give a shit that he's a gimp. I open my eyes, and my light's out. Out in the hall too. Just what I fuckin' need.

'Hey get the dog!' Nothing, just the dog wailing.

'Will somebody please take care of the goddamn dog!' Tracker's yowling even louder.

'Tracker, shut-up!'

Down the stairs, to the light-switch and everything's out. Shit. I can hear Tracker still freaking, and see the back door's open a bit. 'Tracker, get the fuck in here, you stupid mutt.'

But he's pulling on something. I'm gonna break Robbie's good leg if he tied him up. He's not gonna bolt. Christ, all he wants is his cushion in the kitchen. The door's moving a bit. And I can see a power-cord going out onto the deck.

Where the fuck is everyone. 'Tracker, get in here! Now!' He just yowls some more. I get to the door and it's just black as shit out. Tracker freaks huge as I step out. He's like caught up in the power-cord. I can see that from the snow reflecting. And the cord's pulling. And I grab it... where it's wrapped up in his fur. and find the other end, coming off him and it goes over towards the tub. And I can just see the ... shapes *(very quickly)* So I yank it. And yank it so friggin' hard the dog drops. And I'm pulling it as hard as I can and Tracker's freaking and lifting up and twirling and hurting and falling and I get it so tight and it's worked into his fur and I'm feeling all around untying him and he wants to bite me and so I pull the other end coming offa him... hand over hand and it's straight into the tub and it's stuck. I pull it so hard I hear the splash and out comes fucking Robbie's stupid ghetto-blaster.

(slowly)

And I can see the shapes. Of them. And then everything slows down. I can see it all. Exactly. Mom's face down, only the back of her head above the surface. And she's so fat... there's no chance.

Dad's leaning back, one of his arms pulled back by the cord. Two hundred twenty foreman pounds. No way.

Robbie's under, all the way. I know 'cause that's his corner and there's nothing there.

And Dwayne's lying with only his thighs and his lower legs in. Like he saw it all, a second before. Tried to get out.

I see it all just as it happened. Robbie had to hear that stupid cd the billionth time, 'cause it's cool for him even though I told him it was fucking lame. Tracker. Had to get him riled. Why couldn't he just...

And I know I got to choose. Mom and Robbie are already gone. So it's Dad or Dwayne. But I gotta nine-one-one. But... no power. Dad's cell. Front pocket. His pants. In the back. OK. What now? Tilt the head back. Clear the airway—Cub-scout lessons come racing back. Brains without oxygen for four and a half minutes... turn to soup. Pictures. Diagrams. Brent Garvin's snotty nose from swim lessons.

And I've got the phone in my hand. But I'm on the deck. The numbers are in but it's hours before it answers. I pull Dad's head back. I take a breath. Slow and even. But it's... something's wrong. The air won't go in. I can't get his neck, his tube, his pipe, it's kinked.

And the seconds are ticking. I gotta choose. And I see Dwayne lying there—Dad's old Hawaiian shorts on him. And the phone lady's talking to me like I'm retarded. Don't they have a fucking map? I choose. I go over and pull back Dwayne's neck. I'm yelling at the phone between breaths. 'You try to stay calm you stunned cunt!' And I breathe warm air into his pork-chop mouth. I forgot the chest rises and, for a billionth of a sec, it's like I cured him.

But then it sags again. That's when it gets bad. I start saying things, sort of. 'It's not my fault' and 'I can't help them all' and 'I'm just one guy' and 'The driveway's not ploughed.' I don't even hear the phone lady anymore.

And all I can think is what it's gonna look like when somebody gets a light on.

and I see my stupid relatives from Winnipeg not being able to talk to me, and stupid Uncle Fred trying to take over the house, and people trying to make me move. Some apartment, or worse, in with them.

I breathe into him again. I see the dark corner of the tub. I've got to get Robbie above the surface, I don't know why. Some death etiquette. So I breathe into Dwayne real quick like four times and then push real hard on his heart and get up.

Over to the dark corner, and I put my arm down under and there's his leg. The gimped one. I'm gonna pull him up by it, but you don't do that. We never spoke, or touched, or looked at his gimped leg. I feel up to his hips and pull on his shorts. But he's stuck. It's Mom. Heaped on him. I'm up to my shoulders on the edge and just... fuck it.

Fuck it all. I get in, and step on... his shoulder maybe, and bubbles of death fart up to the surface. I grab and pull. Mom slides forward and under. Fuck. I finally get him to the edge and flop him over, like a broken robot, all joints and hinges.

But I can feel Dwayne's chest emptying. All the way from over here. And there's chlorine in my eye now. I crawl over Robbie and grope, feel my way back to Dwayne. He feels cold.

(pause)

I guess that's when they got there, but I never heard sirens. They said I was still CPRing when they arrived. Cunt-lady on the phone said I wasn't following her. But the rescue guys. They were ok. They took over on Dwayne.

They took me to a hospital for some dumb-fuck reason. But I got outta there. And then I'm in the cop shop. Questions. But they're all so stupid. And asking me if I want co-co, hamburgers? Like I'm hungry, stunned fucks. All I can think about is that stupid dog. And then some idiot detective says my whole family's gone.

I mean, how stupid...? I was there! It hits me then. And I know what I gotta do.

(pause)

(very calmly)

I go in the front. Through the main hall into the garage. The power's back on. Thanks guys. I get Dad's aluminium baseball bat down from the shelves. I go into the kitchen and there he is, the dumb-fuck, on his cushion. Guess he came back, when the rescue guys were still here. He's looking bad. Remembers. I'll raise the bat up, I'll aim just for the head. Right there. And in one quick thunk, he'll be done. It's what he deserves. What needs to be done. And then I'll...and then...I'll carry him out back and put him in the pines. And that'll be the end of it. It's what's gotta be. 'You ready, you fucker? Huh? Huh!' And he lifts his eyes, they look sore. And I raise the bat. And I think of everything I've ever thought. Where I am and who I am. All the things that are, and all the things that just became history. Everything is so tight like time is frozen up like granite. The bat's cool in my hands.

And Tracker puts his head on his paws. Lets out this little whimper.

And then something lets go. Inside. Me. And this long breath comes out.

I put down the bat. I pet his head. He moans, like guilt, like redemption. He has no idea.

I grab their clothes from out of the back. I go upstairs. I take Dad's car keys out and I put their clothes in each person's room. I shower. I close Robbie's door and Mom and Dad's door. I close the sewing room door. I close the family room door. I close the back and the French doors on the living room and dining room and the rec room. I take out a scoop of food and fill Tracker's bowls. I turn out the lights. I'm leaving and the phone rings.

I know I'm not answering. But the machine...It's Dwayne's mom from the hospital. Blubbering and trash—I knew it. Thanking me for saving him. Spewing on some gibberish about always 'being there' for me. I shut the door.

Dad's truck always starts warm. I know where I'm going. What I'm gonna do. There's five of them downtown. In the city. Saunas, baths. I know where they are. That was an hour and a half ago. And now I'm here.

HAWLIS:

Shit. I wouldn't give a damn normal-like. I don't wanna talk. Not to...But, for some reason I'm soakin' up ev'ry word, watching the bugs go round inside his head. Why he's tellin' me? I must look like some dumbass muscle-head. I mean I know I gots the meat on my bones that they like, causa the gym, but I'm practically droolin' from all the whisky it takes. But he ain't even lookin' at me, just through me while he's spillin' it all.

(pause)

I mean, he ain't even got a towel on yet, or a locker. He's just smushed up small, there, at the end of the mattress. You can tell it's real hard for him, just tryin' to talk. Words are comin' out like they're pulled with fishhooks. Slow, and wrestled with.

And for some, weird reason I want to go over and touch him... not like you're thinkin'. I don't do that. I think I wanna touch him with my eyes, on his head, or his hair, maybe on those wide cheekbones. You know like, for someone, who needs it. Not like I'm one of them. Fuck no. Parades and shit. But like a person. Hell, I don't even know if he's one of them. He seems just normal, but like, fucked up. But I mean hey. You would be wouldn't ya? So I wanna try. To, you know. Make him... feel ok. Ya know?

And lookin' at him, I'm thinkin' I see two kids. One this, like Goliath of will, and the other, this... lamb. This knowing lamb, that sees the blade on the stone, but lies beside it anyway. I'm thinkin' I'm runnin' this show, hey, it's my room, but allova sudden I'm not so sure. This kid knows what it is he's here for, who he is, what he wants.

I got tons of questions but he stands up and he's totally Goliath now. Like a, I donno, a statue, standing over the bed. I mean I'm twice his size, but still, you had to see him movin'.

He takes his clothes off like a man shedding his skin. He knows what's he's doing, and for the first time, I got no idea what I'm in for. I never had this. This is two... men. And his will, his will is so... I can't take it on. Must be what it's like when...

And what can I do? He's done sumthin to me. I can't stop the... pieces from falling in place. And he's gonna touch me and really, like, feel me. I mean in here. (touches his head) And me him. And here he comes.

He's naked and ready, and he bends down to me and moves my shoulders aside, moves me up and around behind. He says it's gonna hurt and he wants it to. He starts to put a safe on me and I just... take it from there. But he grabs my hand and pulls my look into his eyes and tells me.

RYAN:

Like you've never done before, like your life depends on it. You're gonna fuck me into someone else now; someone completely new.

This Road
Laurie Graham

its onion layers of gravel,
quackgrass, blanket flowers
stitching roots into its ditches,
barn swallows tethered
to strings of startled grasshoppers,
tire tracks aimed
at the frog blink lights
on the horizon, it didn't have
a prayer, all that wind migrating
the topsoil in tangled threads,
coyote running head
down along the shoulder
steam huffing from his nostrils
and the barbed wire strung
parallel to keep the cattle out
or in, spread carcasses of trees
from tornado seasons,
all those rocks pilgriming
back to the field, the same
damn thing every year.

This backroad to where
the grain elevator was,
over land sliced
into thinkable grids
and made to work.
Split souls not knowing
the earth's tongue
but plunging seeds into it
anyway, water oozing a map
too deep to understand,
ghost-thuds of bison,
worms and cities of ants
in those hard-packed
onion layers, high combines
running numbers across
the stubbled surface,
the road as abacus, assuming
something thin, brief, something
that resembles prosperity.

So Sweet
Claire Haist

I am food-wise.
A guru in the ways of the plum;
A sorceress of the aroma spells
Which lure you to my cookery.
Pickling your anger bitter
Has never been so succulent.
I chutnify the discs in your spine
To mould you over like a fork,
Curved and ominous,
And stare at you with gluttonous eyes
As you let steam from this room,
Which is hot with your craving.

And oh god if I could only
Find such a release, I would
Spread you across me like butter;
And surely I'd taste the fruit of our labour
Sweet on my tongue:
The acid-sucrose-salt-y melee
Salving me with its disaccharides
When my lips are dry with thirst.
But instead I can only imagine
This full-up satisfaction. Instead I
Breathe in your fragrance,
Pretzel your vision,
And make you another essence
To distract my famished soul.

Boathouse
Jennifer Still

Enter where the breath is held
in cautionary devices:
the save-your-life red
of a buoy-o-buoyant chest,

walls that can't be trusted
if you stumble -- they are hooked
hung on nailheads that are backing out.

Where the planks are built on silk
nurseries, the slung gaps
of waves, dark as eggspill
held in the cracks.

Where an outboard turns
its stemless garden

petrol iridescences,
oil lilies, leech bodies
curled up like seed.

And at the centre
a tin boat bobs
in the metric give
of housed water, grandpa's
pale blue knees, the soft chalk
of a wet dock
about to crumble.

Light rots
a dirty net
cast
flared gill
of the pickerel
dying
around a small toothed
hole. Sun

fins under
the door, a guillotine
dripping
its soaked, twisted

rope, the age-spotted
strain
of an entire lake
veined
through your fist,
a 70-year-old
knot.

Wrapped in the Arms of the Holy Land

Alice Kuipers

There is sun coming slantwise through the window on the day I notice the dead woman outside. Her body is slumped over the grassy verge, her face obscured, her long dark hair fanning out like raven feathers which have fallen to the ground. The light plays with her hair and I wonder for a moment if I am wrong and she is, in fact, alive. Her fingers are curled in that way the dead have, unmoving, rigid, and from those fingers it is clear that her soul is gone. If she ever had one.

She is obese; rolls of fat billow up like pillows stuffed under her black clothes. Her healthy appetite is a cruel irony, heavy on her body in the whitening sun. Shaking my head in disgust, I wonder who starved in order for her to be able to eat. Her killer? Sophia calls me from the kitchen and I sigh and go to her, my disgust turning to pity as if I have somehow inhaled a tiny stone and it has become lodged in my lung.

"Eddie, there is bread," she says.

I look at her long face, her gaunt eyes, her thin, thin arms. She has placed a slice of bread on the centre of the table next to a white daisy. I do not ask her where she found a daisy. I do not kiss her as I sit down. I do not tell her about the dead woman outside the window. Instead, the tiny stone clatters as it slips from my lung into my heart and lands with all the other stones inside me.

"I've been painting," says Sophia.

I am thinking about my name, how it sounds like water, how the water floods and swirls and eddies along the river and does not stop to quench our thirst, how it does not stop to save us. The woman in the street has gotten to me, I cannot focus. Sophia has her worried eyes on me but I can't look back at her.

"What is it, darling?" she says. "You look like you've seen a ghost."

There is a rattle of machine-gun fire. It is like music to me now. I count the dum da da da dum dum in my head. The harmony reaches a crescendo and I can see madness like sunlight at the edge of my vision. I drag myself back. "I'm fine, I'm OK."

"You have to be," she says, so firmly that I concentrate on her more.

"I am. I am."

"Listen to me. I'm telling you about my painting. Don't think about what's out there."

I know from how she says this that she has seen the woman too. The woman who is no longer a woman. The woman who is a fat, wobbly shell. "Someone should move her," I say.

"No one will move her. It's too dangerous. Eddie, listen to me."

I nod abruptly. "Yes, I must," I say.

"I finished a painting today. I looked at it and I saw that it was finished. There was a final line, a final feather stroke of pale blue, a final signing of my name and that was it. I knew it was finished."

"What did you call it?"

"I haven't given it a name yet. I thought you'd like to help me."

The machine-gun fire stops and starts again and I hardly notice. I am looking at motes of dust, dancing in a sunbeam, and they are like billions of tiny lives—frenetic, purposeless, beautiful. Sophia is right. Her painting is what's important. Although I still feel like my body is weighed down, I remind myself that Sophia could be dead by tomorrow. This thought releases an atom of pain and, for a moment, my heart feels like it's beating.

As the evening collapses upon us and the machine-guns stop for the night, I watch the shape of the woman in the dark. Soon I cannot make out where she ends and the night begins. There is something beautiful in this and I admire the imagination of the world in the night. I duck when a last burst of gunfire cuts through my thoughts and shatters the window of our neighbours. Not that our neighbours live there anymore.

"Eddie," Sophia calls, her voice strained. "Come away from the window. I do not want to watch you fall into this room with a bullet in your skull." She speaks slowly, as if I'm a child. "I'm worried about you, love. I do not need something else to worry about."

We sit together on the floor and play our game. She describes the place she would most like to be. Tonight she's in the far north. She talks about the wide empty spaces, the aurora, the cold cutting through her bones like she was made of paper and the cold was a pair of scissors. I wonder at the dark side of her thoughts. Once she would never have thought like this. Or maybe she would and she never would have told me. I imagine her cut into little pieces by cold shiny scissors.

"I would like to be in the Holy Land," I say, "fallen on my knees in a church, listening to the muezzin call and watching an orthodox Jew walking down the street. I would like to feel the heat on my back as I come out the church and stroll past the jumbled fabrics and shoes and souvenirs stacked up in dark openings along the Via Dolorosa, imagining Jesus carrying his cross. I would like to drink orange juice, which has been freshly squeezed by an Arab and brought to my table by his eager son. I would like to press my face to the Western Wall and accidentally brush my face against those tiny pieces of paper prayers stuffed into the nooks and crannies and wonder at what they have asked God for. I would like to admire the Dome of the Rock, watching the glint of blue and gold in the blazing sun, then I would like to walk to Jaffa Gate where the tourists weep pilgrim's tears and clutch cameras and argue with taxi drivers and climb to stand on the walls and look over Jerusalem and wonder at the future," I say.

Sophia interrupts me. "I want to feel the vast empty sky like a weight upon me, the cold like a knife inside me, taste mukluk and sit by a fire shivering and listening to tales of how the world was made. As I fall asleep, I want to feel the raven's wings against my cheeks and be blanketed in blubber and fur. In the middle of the night, which could be the middle of the day, I'll awake and watch glorious green Northern Lights undulate across the sky."

"Why green?" I ask.

"First they'll be green," says Sophia, her face lit momentarily by the indirect pearlglow of a searchlight, "then slowly the undulations will become blue and then purple and I will feel like I'm dancing with the sky."

I put my arm around her and she is so frail that I am afraid I will break her. "It will get better," I say.

I feel her eyes on me in the dark.

"Shut up, Eddie," she says and pulls roughly away.

By morning, I expect the body to be gone. But as I rub sleep from my eyes and yawn and stretch my limbs, I remember that nothing is as I expect anymore. Unless I expect everything to be the same. There she is, fat and wet, dew sticking to her hair and making her black clothes slick. Her fingers are blue and a large bird hops on the ground near her until it is shot. Its body flicks up into the air momentarily and thuds to the ground.

Those who wear black are those who live in the shadows. They live in this city and hope for the day when it will become what it once was. They live in the past, a place of half remembered truths and nostalgia, when this city was a place like any other, when the war that tears us into insignificant pieces was the fantasy of anarchists and dreamers. Now we flutter, these insignificant pieces of torn up lives, and the anarchists and dreamers live their reality and the rest of us wear black and struggle and wheeze and claw our way through every day, expecting a different tomorrow.

There is no reason that I remember for this war. The government wanted one thing, the citizens another. Money and greed, personal pride, race and religion, land, these reasons stripped our country of its dignity and left it rotting in the sun. And now, even though the sun warms my face as I stand at the window, it feels like the sun has left us too.

How can that be? How can the sun be on my face, yet so far away that I can't feel hope coming from it anymore? I want to ask Sophia but I don't dare. She is angry with me. Her anger freezes her shoulders and stiffens her face. Although she slept wrapped in my arms, no matter how angry we are with each other we are careful always to hold each other at night—it might be the last time—as soon as we awoke she retreated to the kitchen and closed the door.

I chide myself for letting the fat, wet woman get to me like this. I open the door to the kitchen and find Sophia weeping with her head on the table, cosseted by her arms. I go to her. I am a fool. What do the dead have over the tears of the living? She puts her face against mine and I feel her tears. She says, "Don't make this harder."

I ask to look at her painting and together we go to the only other room. Our bathroom has become a shrine to Sophia's artwork. Piled up in the bath are paintings, and sculptures lurk under the cupboards and from behind the toilet. The new painting lies like a recently birthed child, glistening and vulnerable, on top of the others. It is a painting of a window and a man stares from the other side of the window back at me. It is my own face and the sun is upon it. The man, me, he is looking at something but you cannot tell what he is looking at from his expression. He could be terrified or ecstatic. The fact that you cannot tell is beautiful. There are gunshot wounds in the wood of the window, so that the frame is pockmarked and fragmented.

"Call it, There is a Dead Woman Lying in the Street," I say, before I can stop myself.

"Don't do this, Eddie," Sophia says.

"Put the subtitle as She's been there for two days and she'll be there until she rots."
My voice rises.

"What is wrong with you? Nothing's changed," yells Sophia.

"That's exactly what's wrong. Nothing's changed. She's dead and she's just lying there in the street and nobody gives a damn—"

"You do. You can't stop yourself and I don't know what's wrong with you. I'm alive and I'm here and I'm in this room and I need you to get it together."

"She must have had friends, a family, people who cared about her, passions, dreams, hopes."

"She must have had more to eat than the rest of us," yells Sophia, and she's hysterical.

"She deserved to die: she's been feeding herself while the rest of us starve."

"How can you say that?"

Sophia looks at me and her eyes are black like the raven's wings. "She deserved it and we have to get on with our lives and get over it."

"What's happened to you? Where's your compassion? How can you look out the window at a dead woman and tell me that she deserved it? You never met her." I feel alive as I'm shouting and relief breaks through me. My heart is beating hard.

"I'm still here," Sophia screams. She's sobbing and her tiny body shakes with effort.

I look at my wife. "You cannot lose your compassion, Sophia." I am calmer and I patronise her with the voice of someone who knows he is in the right.

"You cannot keep yours," she replies and pushes her way out of the room.

I am left looking at the painting and feeling like a jerk. But at least I am feeling something and I am not numb.

While Sophie is sleeping, I steal toward the apartment door. If she woke now, I would tell her I was going for bread. She would look at me with her heart breaking in her eyes, like two tiny windows shattering. Outside it is cool, moonless, and I feel the breeze playing against the fine hairs on my arms. I stay crouched and look constantly around. As I get closer to the woman, I can smell her, and I put one hand to my nose to stop myself from gagging. There is no one around. I take a deep breath and push against the woman's body. She is cold and heavy, like meat from the freezer, and within seconds I am coated in sweat. I push and shove with both hands, rolling her first to her side, then to her front, to her side, onto her back. After a while, I put both my arms under hers, and try dragging her. Her head lolls against my chest. Now her face is bloated and bruised, as if she drowned and was not shot. But there, at her forehead, is the dark hole of someone's flippant moment with a gun.

The sound she makes being pulled across the grass is a dull swishing. I wonder for how many nights it will haunt me. Then I begin to feel strong, my steps are less unsteady, and the dead woman and I get into a motion. We are moving forward, whilst both of us moving backward. I get to the edge of the grass and collapse suddenly underneath her. She falls on my legs and I shudder, wanting to push her off but unable to. All my strength is gone.

A shot breaks the night and I hear the bullet ricochet close by. I put my hand briefly to the woman's cheek. I want to tell her I am sorry, but I do not have time. I fight her dead weight off and slope into the shadows. There is another shot. I have been seen and I must now stand still. I must wait until the sniper gives up. The woman is slumped now, half seated. I wonder what she used to do, what she wanted with her life, who she was. Many minutes go by before I take cautious steps back to where Sophie sleeps. She will be angry if she knows I have done this. She will not understand.

As I reach the stairway, I look back. I cannot make out the woman in the darkness. There is another shot, not so close by. I am inside before the sniper gets another chance.

I look out the window the next morning. There is a slight flattening of the grass where she lay and a curving trail in the grass where I dragged her, but other than that no sign that someone dead was once there. I hope that one day there will be no signs that our city was ravaged by war other than a slight flattening of the grass and a beautiful painting in a gallery on the other side of the world. The war will be over and it will be a dust mote in the memory of the future.

Sophia conceded and told me that she would call the painting by the title I suggested. I call out to her. "I was wrong," I say. "She didn't rot."

"Someone took her away," says Sophia, coming up behind me to the window.

"Sometimes this is the place I most want to be in the world," I say, softly.

"That's why I painted you here," says Sophia.

I think of our city in the future. A slick, shiny place with mobile phones and neon advertisements. Shops and shoppers, theatres and restaurants, clubs and bars and people drinking and tiny pockmarks on the frames of the windows, like the scars on a person's face from adolescence. "Nothing has changed, yet," I say.

And Sophia says something so beautiful that one day I'll have to ask her to paint it for me, one day when all this is over.

"Specks of dust in a sunbeam," she says, "when there is no wind."

Non-Fiction

Q and A

Nick Pincumbe

Nick Pincumbe recently didn't sit down with one of his personal heroes, Gregory Pincumbe, and didn't ask him this series of burning questions.

Q: Did you like your haircut?

A:

Q: I mean, swept to one side like that, dark, progressively graying? It never really changed much. Was that more of a utilitarian thing? I know it was longer when you were young. I've seen the pictures, but that just doesn't look right to me. It was before my time. Did that style stop looking right to you after you cut it? Or is that why you cut it in the first place? Because it had stopped looking right?

A:

Q: Let's shift topics a bit. Did it annoy you that my best friend is a Republican? And a boisterous Republican no less? Did it grate on you at all when Dubya was re-elected? I can't say as I liked it myself and I know that you were into Poli-Sci, and in your failed attempts to run for office, you were always the liberal candidate. Did you want to save the world? I did. Did you give up on it, like me, while you were still a kid?

A:

Q: And all those times when we drove two days, in the sweatsock of a red Omni with its perpetual French fry stink and that little plastic bucket we were young enough to pee in without embarrassment when it was too inconvenient to stop, down to Orlando for tromps through the corporate jungle of fake felt mouse ears and unenlightening parades of fairy tale icons in oversized, overstuffed costumes, would you rather have been kayaking on the chocolate mousse smooth lakes of northern Minnesota, not always flat on top but usually easy enough to glide through, or hiking wide canyons in Utah that look like some Ancient God's foot prints? Did you get enough chances to experience the deer and the antelope while you were young enough to give them a good chase? Was my childhood a waste to you? You've never given me a reason to think so, and I'm mostly certain it wasn't a waste to me, but I still wonder. Was your childhood a waste to you? Did you ever look back and wonder? Do you still?

A:

Q: All right, how about this? What did you talk to your friends about when you were a kid? I've seen you put on that fake smile and make small talk at parties, but it always seems so small—did you think that was your real self, or was the real you the one I saw so many times happily minding your own business reading a book until the book turned into an eye mask and you'd turned into a nap on your favorite recliner?

A:

Q: And did you ever want to be the guy with the loafer soles propped up on a footrest while you read the Times and puffed on Indian tobacco? Should I have gotten you a smoking jacket, dark blue silk with your monogrammed initials embroidered in silver thread on the front pocket? No, you never smoked and you never subscribed to the Times, preferring the local paper, and I never saw you use a footrest, but would you have liked to sometime? Would you have liked to have, just once, run off to Thailand and collected hookers at five American dollars a piece?

A:

Q: And who was your crush in first grade? Who was the first girl you kissed? The first girl you loved? The last girl you loved? The first or last or only one you ever dropped a tiny frog or slimy toad or grimy worm down the back of the blouse of? Did you still love your wife after twenty years? After five? Do you still love her now?

A:

Q: When I was young, did I ever tell you I wanted to become a writer? Did you and your wife ever argue about this, when I was alone in bed at night—my bedroom just below yours—exchanging heated whispers about whether or not to squelch my dream for my own good? Or was it enough for you to remind me that you expected better than A-minuses and that I needed a college degree and things to fall back on? I remember you always said that a lot: Something to "fall back on". Did it embarrass you when I saw your old report cards at your mom and dad's house and let you know I knew that most of the time A-minuses would've been impressive for you? Is that why you mentioned that the nuns graded harder?

A:

Q: And would you have been embarrassed if I'd ever told you how many times I thought in my moments of fear after bedtime prayers that I would have to fall back on you? Would it have made your cheeks flush red to know that just knowing you were there to fall back on was enough to bring on sleep?

A:

Q: Did you ever stand in front of the closed door of the dishwasher, blink for a second, and forget who you were or what day or year or reality it was, or what you thought was the meaning of life, the universe, and everything, and feel really broken out of everything for a second or maybe, maybe for a second broken into something beyond anything you'd ever known?

A:

Q: And when I was born, did you ever think "hey, he kind of reminds me of someone I've seen before"?

A:

Q: Did you ever like anything I wrote? I saw the books you read—the political thrillers, the nonfiction tomes on history and policy—not quite in the same world as my soft sci-fi and absurd experimentalism. I know sometimes you read them, but I never really got to hear what you thought. What did you think? Was I wrong when I started figuring they just weren't your thing?

A:

Q: Come to think of it, I can't even remember now if those report cards I saw were from a Catholic school or a public one—which was it? I know you moved around a lot as a kid—is that why you stayed in your last house almost as long as I've been alive? Is that why you spent your career at the place you worked at after college? Is that why you've stayed loyal to your wife?

A:

Q: Did you know, even as a kid, even as an adult, I could hear you argue? Did you know how many times I took your side in my head before I could remind myself not to take sides? Did you ever think we thought a lot alike? I noticed my sister thinking like you more than once. Did you know that to me, thinking like you always meant being "logical"?

A:

Q: Did you know I like Batman comic books so much because in a way that grim and silent avenger in the night, who is so often all business, but remains quietly devoted, always getting the job done, is not Bruce Wayne so much as you in my head? And did you think I got obsessively into basketball and football because the sports are that interesting? Did you notice me bringing them up all the times when we ate alone at Boston Market? The Detroit Lions have always sucked and probably always will, but didn't you feel that new free agent acquisitions were better than the silence after how's school, how's work, how are your finances, how long has your car been making that sound?

A:

Q: Did you ever hear me order something? Like a mushroom and pineapple pizza on the phone or a six-inch roast chicken breast on wheat at a Subway sandwich shop? Did you ever notice, like I did one day, that my formal, "taking care of business" voice, while perhaps not the same pitch, does take on the same tone and inflection I heard so many times in your own?

A:

Q: What did you tell people about me, at parties? Or even at the office cooler at work? What did you say when they asked how I was doing? Did you ever flip out a wallet with a string of photos as long as your arm detailing all the important birthdays and faux paws of my toddlerhood? Did you ever say you're proud of me? Did you ever tell them how much you worry? Or did you just say I was doing fine, I was down at so-and-so now, doing such-and-such, and leave it at that?

A:

Q: And what was your favorite book? What was your favorite movie? What was your favorite color? I think I might know that it was green.

A:

Q: Was your heart ever broken? I know mine was—did you know that? I suppose you must have noticed me, from time to time growing up, as I whined or pined after one girl or another. You never seemed the pining sort to me though – did I strike you as young and foolish or

immature and weak? Were you ever young and foolish? Ever immature and weak? Did you understand where my pining was coming from? When I hurt, did you hurt? I could never tell.

A:

Q: And what did you dream of being when you were growing up? I can't seem to imagine a time before you were well-versed in auto fluid changes and the tax code—did such a time exist? Are those stories of you mopping beer off the floor with your brothers before your parents could get home really true? Were you ever the dreaming sort? I'm a skeptic.

A:

Q: And did you know that I found a letter you wrote to your daughter, Angela, once? A letter saying what a good job she did of—of all things—reorganizing the linen closet? A letter saying how hard she'd been working at home and at school and how pleased you were with her maturity and her manners and all the rest? Did you know how much your writing was like an office memo? Did you know how many times I read that memo, again and again? How proud you really seemed to be? How proud I felt of her by relation and how proud I felt to know you were a guy who could write such memos?

A:

Q: Somewhere in that stage where hugs became warm handshakes and "take care", did you forget that I was an overstuffed, oversized version of the little boy that became an airplane when you lifted me by the waist and spun? Or was that kind of info like DVD extras to you? You always went to bed after the movie was over, and it was your wife and Angela and I laughing at the deleted scenes—didn't you like deleted scenes?

A:

Q: I mean, who doesn't like deleted scenes?

A:

Q: Maybe you prefer things the simple way? You never seemed like an overly complex man to me, but I could never tell for sure. Did you consider yourself overly complex? Did you have secrets I'll never understand? Things you always wished you'd said?

A:

Q: Or, things maybe, you wished you'd always said?

A:

Q: You're not dead, but these are things I know I'll never ask you. Are they things you wanted to ask your father too? Are they things you would have even answered?

A:

Moose Thoughts Fred Meissner

A Little Meditation on Writer's Block (in various voices)

"But, what the moose did think was

Well?

"But, what the moose did think was that

Hm.

"But, what the moose did think was

Oh, come on. What's he thinking? 8 pages, 3,131 words, and you're stuck here! You wrote the beginning no problem. You like the way the boy has made his way into this world and how he interacts with the moose he's met. You wrote those parts like gangbusters. Now there's a poor simile. Simile. It looks so much like smile. Is there any more ginger ale in the fridge? Why does gingerale get underlined in red when I make it one word? It's one word, isn't it?

"But, what the moose did think was that

Damn. Come on, moose, think. I know where the story needs to go; I know that the moose is going to ask the boy to help the animals in this world to get out of a dilemma; the problem is that wolverine has stolen the magic and the world has come to a stop and if it doesn't start again the world is going to really stop, as in die. How ironic, given my dilemma. I just need to make a transition, that little leap, a few sentences, and then I can carry on.

"But, what the writer of the story did think was that he needed to find out what the moose was thinking in order to get the story moving again. He didn't, however, know how to do that. Then he had an idea. *Just relax*, he told himself. *Imagine that you're the boy trying to figure out what the moose might be thinking; don't think about it, just do what an imaginative kid might do to try and figure out a problem.* Okay: The boy looked up at the moose. It was a big moose. "Boy," whispered the boy, "that's a big moose. I wonder what it's thinking. Let me just get my handy-dandy ladder here," the boy continued, speaking to himself as he was wont to do. "Can I just lean this here? Right. Thanks. One two up we goo. There. Whoa," he said, using his favourite interjection, "that canal's as dirty as the old Love. Hey, Moose Moose Moose Moose Moose Moose, what the heck are you thinking? Anybody home?"

Just a few words. Something. Anything. But the hard part is that it needs to be more than something; it needs to be right. Even if it's just a little part. It needs to be like what Maria does to Malvolio with her letter. She's just a minor character, but her words find their way into Malvolio's head, into his heart—they transform him, make him her puppet. She had to know her audience; she had to have the insight into how to write the words so that he wouldn't see her trick, and when he finds the letter, he believes! Even when the words don't quite make sense, they make him want to believe them. That's good writing. No, that's great writing because the author doesn't even seem to be a part of the equation any more. It's just the reader and the text. It's the reason, and now I see it, why Terry doesn't want to see a picture of the author on the jacket of the novel she's reading. She doesn't want to know that someone's created the text; the text needs to create the reader, or, maybe, at least, recreate the reader. That's the beauty an author

strives for. It's marvelous if the writer can get it right. Like when Alden Nowlan says in his poem, An Exchange of Gifts:

As long as you read this poem
I will be writing it.
I am writing it here and now
before your eyes,
although you can't see me.
Perhaps you'll dismiss this
as a verbal trick,
the joke is you're wrong;
the real trick
is your pretending
this is something
fixed and solid,
external to us both.
I tell you better:
I will keep on
writing this poem for you
even after I'm dead.

That's what I'm looking for. To create something. Alive and beautiful. To have my audience hear the skitter of autumn leaves playing like puppies on the newly paved road as I walk home from work; to see the desperate elegance in that man plodding awkwardly along the sidewalk, his right arm curled up cruelly by his side, his cane leading his way shaking like a sapling in a storm; to smell cigarette smoke on a cold day and turn and be surprised not to see my grandmother, dead now these past seven years; to hear the staccato tap of footsteps outside the window on a rainy night; to taste lemons jigging in the bubbles of a glass of soda water while geese honk on the pond. But it's all got to come together and put the reader someplace he or she doesn't quite remember being before. So.

"But, what the moose did think was that *No one said this was going to be easy.*

Exposition Park

John Matthew Fox

When I'm in my bedroom, which is connected to the living room and one bedroom away from the bathroom, I can hear the growls. They start low, then grow menacing, until climaxing in a snarl. They sound as if they're in the room, although they're coming from the floorboards. There's a two-foot crawl space beneath the house where the dogs Tigger and Starlet sleep, and sometime cats or even other dogs end up in their makeshift beds and a standoff ensues. If hissing and growling doesn't settle the issue, they start clawing and biting, and the sound of wounds wakes me. Sometimes I've imagined that it's the house that's making the noise, it's so unearthly and frightening, or that this is the neighborhood's way of telling me I don't belong here, of trying to frighten me off, send me packing. 'Cause sometimes this neighborhood growls at me, you know, it growls.

I've lived in this Los Angeles neighborhood of Exposition Park for two months now, a neighborhood of cholos and niggas, and with my cracker skin I don't fit in. Not colorwise, that's for sure. Or in terms of education. Or economics. First night that I moved in, someone helped themselves to the CD player and two bottles of water in my car. I came out to my Mazda the next morning and before I opened the door I saw crumpled papers on the front seat and felt sick 'cause I knew I didn't leave them there. Inside the car it looked like the trash bag sneezed—they rooted through every piece of trash, just to make sure, I suppose, that I wasn't hiding jewelry or rolls of cash underneath used Kleenex and orange peels.

No marks on the door very clean job. It looked like they saw a new car on the street, or saw me hauling all my stuff out at eleven last night, and went to the garage and fetched the jimmy, hanging between the hammer and the wrench. Maybe the new kid left something in there, they thought. Maybe the new kid doesn't realize what type of neighborhood this is. The job, it was a Welcome To The Neighborhood kind of thing. Guess they hadn't heard about leaving a basket of cookies and coffee on the front porch. Or maybe that's the style of welcome that I was used to, back in suburbia land with identical houses and upper-class folks.

I've been parking in back since then, next to the concrete wall spray painted JESUS in blue and green bubble letters. Jesus saves, I know, and I also hope he protects from burglary.

I forgot to tell you my street—it's 37th Place, which is between 37th Street and 37th Avenue. You'll get lost finding it—everyone does, even when I tell them it's the middle 37th. Right outside my front door are two burly Juniper bushes, like bouncers guarding the door to the club, and apparently they do a good job because whoever tried to break in the month before I moved in wasn't able to crack the deadlock, although they splintered all the wood around it.

If you walk out a bit farther, past the stubbly grass out to the potholed street, you can see the beer triangle. Three metal bottle caps pressed deep into the asphalt— Michelob Light, Corona, and a blank silver unknown, arranged like the Bermuda, saying, you walk in here, new kid, you might never be found again. So I stay outside the lines and gawk, smoke a clove, watch the planes. The LAX planes fly low, directly over us, as though they're using this street for a navigational marker, and their underbellies are perfectly exposed. At night their headlights shoot out funnels or make clouds glow like lampshades. But enough scenery. You want to know more about robberies, about my safety, about how I kept my eye out for the shifty eyed and quick fingered. I'll tell you.

A week after my vehicle was looted, I was washing cutlery in the morning, staring out between the Basil and Aloe Vera plants, when a man walked up next to my car. I dropped the sponge and pressed closer to the glass. Tigger and Starlet were at the fence, but wagging their tails, not barking. Some security. Then the man reached over the fence and dropped something into our yard that the dogs immediately scarfed. He's drugging them, I thought, and my next thought contained the words "idiot" and "I am a". The man walked back to the blue dumpster and stood on his shopping cart to vault himself back in. Boy, once you get your car broken into, you're suspicious of everybody.

Twice a week I received emails from the university's local list serve, detailing crimes in the neighborhood. Armed Robbery: Suspect Hispanic, late 20s, wearing sweatpants and a sweatshirt, because baggy clothes hid body type and didn't hinder running. Corner of Mercer and 28th Street, because university kids hung out there. 12:08 p.m., because every single crime in the neighborhood occurs directly after midnight, like witching hour turned robbing hour. The funny ones were when the student was alone, intoxicated, and had counted all the way down to 42 Bottles Of Beer On The Wall. The scary ones were when the student was bashed in the face, kicked in the ribs, left gasping for breath on the ground while the blurry figure ran away under the streetlamps. File a report, cancel the credit cards, buy a new phone, live in fear.

I thought these kids were stupid for being out so late, but then one night I went to fraternize with professors and colleagues over cocktails at Brandy's. I stayed too long, and by the time I left, I had to walk four blocks back in the dark and walk fast to get there sooner and to burn off my buzz. As much as I'd condemned those disembodied "complainants" in the crime reports, you can blame me for this trip. Hazy from alcohol, on foot, at robbing hour.

A block and a half in, three black men were hanging out on the sidewalk, across from the construction site where the streetlamp was out, talking quietly. I didn't want to cross the street, because it would seem too obvious, and the last thing you want to do in these situations is attract attention. So I kept walking, tried not to walk slow, tried not to walk fast. They stopped talking when I came near, and two of them looked at me while the other one fingered something in both hands. I walked past them and could feel the weight of a gaze on my back, dreaded the sound of quick footsteps rapping the pavement behind me. Fear burned my chest like a hundred proof shot.

You want to know what happened? Nothing happened. A car pulled up beside them and they all got in. They were waiting for a friend, nothing more, nothing less. I got home, turned in with the covers pulled up over my head. Slept like I was dead.

Next week, I got an email every day from the university security, detailing crimes, robberies, beatings, extortions, threats. Sites: seven blocks away from my house, five blocks away from my house, four blocks, three blocks, at an intersection I pass every day. The Trojan paper headline covered the crime wave, interviewed the hapless victims, offered suggestions to keep safe. Appeared to be two sets of robbers, one working solo, the other in a team. Both armed. Considered dangerous... blah, blah, duh.

On the back of our toilet seat one of my roommates left a sporting store advertisement. I flipped through all the guns while on the pot—purse pistols, .22's, shotguns, magnums, big-game rifles with scopes and shoulder pads, semiautomatics that look as though they could mow down crowds with feather-trigger ease, military rifles that you have to wear a ghillie suit just to buy. On the back cover were two kinds of Tasers, which were attractive barring the price—\$650 and \$950. It'd be a hell of a lot cheaper to be robbed and beaten. They didn't advertise mace, but it

was what I wanted, not only because it was cheaper but because it was lighter and I could carry it in my backpack.

Found a sporting goods store, walked back to the weapons section. Three kinds of mace available, and I read the packaging and the price. Picked out the cheapest one, and bought it from a bored overweight woman who didn't say a word.

That night I dreamed violent fantasies. Walking down 37th between streetlamps, man approached, demanded my wallet. I told him it was in my bag, pulled out the mace and sprayed him. While he was down, tried to pull out a gun, I kicked him in the ribs, wrestled it away, called the cops, and got the guy who has been robbing all my friends and colleagues locked in the slammer. Or: woke up at 2 a.m. to get a drink of water and saw the guy who's been robbing cars out by my vehicle, helping himself again. I walked out, he started running, I tackled him and when he pulled a knife I maced him right in the eyes, called the cops. Good citizen's win. Houses protected, fear abated.

Few weeks went by. Started riding a bike: BMX Stalker, 18 speed, saddle-seat, all black. So now I could bike to Brandy's, have a couple, pull a BUI on the way home. Nobody robs a man on a bike, especially when he's on the highest gears going thirty down the middle of the street. So nothing could happen until I got home, got off the bike, and fumbled with my keys in front of the door. Because then, behind the cover of the Juniper bushes, which provide a screen between the street and the house, a man with a bat or a gun or a knife could hide in the shadow and come up behind me and not be seen or heard.

I fumbled with the keys. Turned around, saw a man walking down the street. He was a Hispanic man, early 40s. He was carrying a bag. He casually checked the back door of a parked Honda civic. He walked forward and checked the front door. I put the kickstand down on my bike. Thought: it's only his car, he's just checking to make sure he locked the doors. He walked to the next car on the street, tried the rear door, locked. Tried the front door, locked. Thought: Maybe he owns two cars. Maybe it's his and his wife's. He walked to the third car, pulled the door handle and it snapped back as well. I stepped off the porch and walked down our sidewalk. My hand was in my bag, grabbing for the mace. "Sir, what are you doing?" I asked. He said: "I live there." He pointed to the house next to mine. "Oh." "These are my cars. Mine. Wife's. Son's." He pointed to each one. I let go of the mace, took my hand out, wiped off the sweat on my jeans. "Sorry," I said, "I was just checking, you know, to make sure." "They not lock them, often," he said. "I make sure are locked. Many people steal." "Yes, I know." I said. "I was broken into." "Well, I live there," he said. "We are neighbors." "Nice to meet you," I said, and shake his hand with the hand that didn't grab the mace.

I walked back into my house feeling small.

Now I know what you want. You want me to go back into my room and have some kind of epiphany or grand realization. You want a lesson I've learned. That's how it's supposed to work, right? A reader's-digest bildungsroman? Protagonist grows, changes, advances to next stage of the seven-story mountain. Maybe something vanilla, like I learned not to generalize according to race, or I learned that violence wasn't the answer and threw away my mace.

Well, I'll tell you what actually happened. I went back into my room and went to bed. I didn't even think about my neighbor again. Late at night, growling half woke me up —sounded like dog on dog tonight, menacing growls in a canine O.K. Corral. But this time I didn't get all metaphorical and crap—I didn't imagine it was some anthropomorphized voice of the house, or

the neighborhood that was against the white kid and his hegemonic power, or a representation of impending violence hanging over my head like Damocles sword, oh no. Just got tired of the damn dogs and growled back. Well, it was more of a growl/yell. And you know what? They quieted down.

Reviews

'The Music That Thinking is': *Every Inadequate Name* by Nick Thran Craig Harkema

Every Inadequate Name. Nick Thran. Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2006. ISBN 1-897178-27-1

Every Inadequate Name opens with a quotation from Jack Gilbert: "It was not the bell he was trying to find, but the angel lost in our bodies. The music that thinking is. He wanted to know what he had heard, not to get closer". Nick Thran explores this music without attempting to force his will upon it, and this is one of the most important accomplishments of his debut collection. At its best, the book is cool and subtle with Thran displaying considerable skill in the dualities of rural and urban themes, technology and nature, and "high" and "low" art. The finish product is a group of poems that are flawed, vital, immediate, and mostly a pleasure to read.

Before really delving into the collection, I assumed it would be more experimental, perhaps like one of the Radiohead albums Thran refers to in "Isolation Camp, A Letter", or like Daniel Scott Tysdal's unusual debut collection. But his work is largely conservative and shows little concern for the visual potential of the genre. While this may leave him free to focus more on the subject matter and tone, the poems are more alluring and often more efficient when he slips out of the predictable formatting as he does in "Monday In The World Of Beauty". Interestingly, this is a poem that not only looks a tad more interesting on the page, but it is also one of the best sounding pieces of the lot (sure, the half-rhymes help):

Staring at your stylists black eye
in the mirror
While she struggles
to make you appear
beautiful,
You slowly become
comfortable with it.
Elvis on the stereo croons,
Oh Moody Blue,
Tell me am I getting through.

Every Inadequate Name has been given something of a pop culture tag by some readers. This is likely the result of Thran's decision to include the various inadequate names of things like Radiohead, Mr. T, and In Style magazine. Elizabeth Bachinsky's endorsement on the back cover refers to his poetry "permeating [in the same way] a Top 40 hit finds us anywhere we travel". While Thran does bring pop music into play in "How Pop Sounds" (parts one and two), it seems a mistake to suggest this collection of poems contains anything a reader might find rhythmically magnetic, any musicality that sticks in the head like a good pop song. Thran's voice is clunkier, more Indy Rock than Pop. And the so-labeled "pop sensibility" is, in this reader's opinion, less popular than it is uniquely observant of the minutiae, an expression of the narrator's specific subtle emotions. In "The Coin O'Rama Laundromat, A Dedication" the small details of life, the subtle and delicate, are what fuel the poem:

the Korean woman with slender fingers
picking lint and old dryer sheets deep
from the bowels—

how the final moment must feel
when she closes the lid
of the trash can
filled with clouds.

Overall there are lines in this poem and others that could have been weeded, that crowd out some of the beauty of Thran's acute, almost Imagistic observations. Nevertheless, these observations are still relevant and he paints them wonderfully in cool blues and off-whites. While Thran's poetry is electric at times, it doesn't throw off much heat—frustration and intensity rarely move these poems. He is a cool poet, someone most comfortable seeking out the beauty of this existence: "In this light, it feels good just to lie like that / for an entire afternoon" (Coastline Variation # 19).

This volume also has geographic and topical range, perhaps a product of his upbringing in Canada, Spain, and California. The first section, "The Blank Leaved Book", hones in on urban/suburban subject matter: suburban sprall, design, Pee Wee football, laudromat and pop music. "The Backwards Music", the second section, is more sensual and focused on travel with a few of his Coastline Variation poems. "Edgewater" finishes it off with a good mix. In it, Thran combines things like tree planting ("Isolation Camp, A Letter") with television (Coastline Variation #86). "Bird Time" is well placed to conclude the book, managing to synthesize many of the book's themes and use language that is somehow immediate and timeless, urban and rural. The lines are blurred here, leaving the reader a sense of what Thran, at his best, is capable of:

It's almost Bird Time. The name you gave
to when even the trucks racing on Burden Street

quiet their engines;
to when the glow-stick's impossible green

flickers out, and the hard-house,
the break-beats, the trance

grind their teeth into silence.

Occasionally, one does get the sense that he is precipitously close to edge of legitimate sentimentality. But as Robert Lowell once said in an interview with *The Paris Review*: "There's some way of distinguishing between false sentimentality, which is blowing up a subject and giving emotions that you don't feel, and using whimsical, minute, tender, small emotions that most people don't feel". Not all readers will feel all of these small emotions, but it is important that Thran does, even if it means falling over the edge in poems like "Coastline Variation #76". I will gladly take such missteps if the end result is a poem like "Coastline Variation #3" with the beautiful lines "The name is the wake that the flesh leaves behind. / The flesh is a visible shiver". Again, it is Thran's ability to quietly tint the most tenuous and essential of human occurrences that make him a writer deserving of attention. No doubt he has shown but a glimpse of his potential and readers should look forward to more of these explorations into the music of thinking.

**Breaking Open the Heart in *Bix's Trumpet and other stories* by Dave Margoshes
Kate Cushon**

Bix's Trumpet and other stories. Dave Margoshes. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2007. ISBN 1897126182

David Margoshes' 2007 collection of short stories *Bix's Trumpet and other stories* is a satisfyingly subtle and nuanced examination of the ways individuals reach out to others, and the obstacles that can prevent them from truly knowing one another. There are no answers in these short stories, no simple ways to successfully interact with people. Instead, Margoshes offers examples that illustrate the manifold ways to fail—and, happily, to succeed—at connecting to other people.

The first story in the collection, the titular "Bix's Trumpet," is about the volatile friendship between the narrator and the narrator's friend, Bix. Bix, we learn, temporarily owns a cornet (a kind of trumpet) that once belonged to the jazz musician Bix Beiderbecke, after whom he is also named. The stories of the fictional Bix and the real Bix Beiderbecke are intertwined—both are charismatic musicians with unstable and troubled personal lives. Beiderbecke died at the age of 28, and the Bix in the story burns out at a young age, a symbolic death for a wild young man. The short story is itself divided into a series of vignettes that describe the passionate and strange friendship between the narrator, Leo, and the mercurial Bix. No details are given outside the vignettes, creating an imperfect picture of the characters. The reader is called to exercise her imagination in completing the picture. I felt in this story, as in many of the others, that a complete and compelling illustration of character is sacrificed in order to portray moments, sensations, and emotions that never resolve into a full character. The narrative, which jars and twists and doubles back on itself, as though curled up to avoid more pain, is the real reward in this story. In this way, "Bix's Trumpet" sets the tone for the entire collection.

The title story, and many others in this collection, draws attention to the power of inanimate objects in the lives of the characters. Bix's trumpet, as an object, is given symbolic meaning when it is both won (in a craps game, by Bix's father) and lost (when it hangs, unplayed, above a mantle). The symbol is subtly crafted: at various times it symbolizes Bix's potential as a musician, his liveliness and spontaneity, his inability to fully connect with other people, and his struggle to find an authentic self. In the second story, "Pornography," the narrator's dead stepfather's handwritten pornography comes to represent the unknowable and mysterious aspect of every person, and it haunts both the narrator and his mother as they struggle to reconcile its existence with the gentle poet they knew the stepfather to be. The specter of leftover texts also haunts the narrator of "A Man of Distinction," whose dead grandfather left behind a trunk of papers which includes two mysterious books in Hebrew. Some of the objects are larger, like the lake in "A Lake Named For Daddy," in which a teenaged daughter visits the lake named for her father, killed in the Second World War. This story includes the more homely rocking horse made by the father Gwen never knew, which surprisingly seems to reflect the distance Gwen feels from her father. In the end, it is the cold embrace of the lake, arbitrarily named after her dead father and which he never visited himself, where she finds a kind of communion with her father despite his perceived abandonment. Objects, for many of Margoshes' characters, represent a way for the living to connect with the dead, and sort out the complications of the relationship between the living person and the dead.

Relationships between the living can be as complicated, tragic, or finally fulfilling as those between the living and the dead, a fact not lost on Margoshes' characters. The odd couple in "Comfort" represent the inevitable complications that arise when two people's lives entwine.

Violet and Emily, two women in their fifties, live together and share a bed, although they do so platonically, for convenience and companionship. A story ostensibly about finding sheets soft enough for Violet's delicate skin reveals the complications in this supposedly uncomplicated relationship. Emily gazes at Violet "frankly, her eyes filled with amusement and, Violet thought, perhaps something else." Violet lies awake, wrapped in the new sheets, her skin comfortable, "yet somehow burning, burning" after a flirtatious encounter with a former student turned linens salesman. In the end, the story is about the inevitable loss of comfort, and the impossibility of stability in a world that is endlessly changing. The minor tragedy in the story "The Gift" also speaks to the difficulty people can have in connecting to one another. The main plot of this story centres around Gerry, who has decided to find a gift for Lorna, whom he has decided to unexpectedly visit. The conflict and confusion Gerry experiences in his search for the perfect gift is almost too reminiscent of James Joyce's short story "Araby" to be entirely coincidental. In the end, Gerry has an epiphany similar to that of Joyce's protagonist, realizing with a kind of profoundly resigned despair that he has misread the situation and failed to capture the heart of his intended object.

Perhaps one of the most unexpectedly engaging stories in the collection is "Promises." The story, narrated in the first person by a single mother, is about many things, including an apparently successfully relationship between the young woman named Jessie and Andre Walkingman. But the emotional impact of the story hinges on two events that the narrative skims over: the girl Jesse is sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend, and years later, Jesse's half-brother Aaron is sexually abused by another of their mother's boyfriends. Margoshes creates a surprisingly sympathetic voice in the mother. She is not in any way slick or intellectual, contrasting with many of the collection's other protagonists, and she comes off as unintelligent. But her simple love for her children, her incredibly bad luck in choosing men, and her perennial optimism come together to generate a picture of a hard-working single mother who is happy with her life and fiercely protective of her offspring. This is one of the few stories in the collection to feature a character who feels natural, and whose relationships and emotions are shown, not told, to the reader. There is a similarly engaging character in "A Young Lady from West Virginia," another unpretentious and non-intellectual female narrator, which suggests that stepping outside of a masculine and intellectual framework allows Margoshes to generate the most natural voices.

This collection is a challenging read for a number of reasons. The sheer variety of narrative styles, character types, and points of view means that the reader cannot simply pass from one story to the next. This collection is varied terrain, narratively speaking, and negotiating that terrain requires thoughtful reading. Quite aside from the form of these stories, the subject matter can be difficult. These are stories about pain, and in the most successful stories the reader is drawn into that pain along with the characters. Vicarious pain is not an easy thing, and although it can be rewarding, it can also be simply wearing on the reader. This is a collection to be read slowly, with breaks to pause and reflect both between stories and within stories.

Ultimately, Bix's Trumpet and other stories showcases the brilliant narrative that is possible in short works of prose, but it also occasionally falls into the difficulties associated with the short story genre. Margoshes has not yet mastered the art of precise and compact language that is desirable in short stories. However, his fascinating insight into some of his characters, his virtuosity in varying tones and perspectives, and his rich, dense narrative make the collection very satisfying.

Contributors

Alice Kuipers

Alice Kuipers was born in London, England. She moved to Saskatoon in 2003. She has short stories published in magazines and produced by CBC radio. Her first novel, *Life on the Refrigerator Door*, is published in 27 countries.

Contributions:

Wrapped in the Arms of the Holy Land -- Issue Number 3, May 2008

Ariel Gordon

Ariel Gordon is a Winnipeg-based writer and editor. Her poetry has recently appeared in *Prairie Fire*, *QWERTY*, and *stonestone*. Her poems have also circulated on buses in Manitoba and Alberta. A hand-made, limited-edition chapbook of pregnancy and mothering poems, *The Navel Gaze*, is forthcoming from Palimpsest Press in summer 2008.

Contributions:

Hewn -- Issue Number 3, May 2008

Claire Haist

Claire Haist was born in London Ontario. After a year at York University, she returned home to complete her BAH in English at the University of Western Ontario. She currently resides in Guelph, where she is completing her MA in drama, and will be making the move back to Toronto in September to pursue her PhD at U of T's Graduate Centre for Study of Drama. Claire researches the influence of hysteria studies on postmodern gender discourse.

Contributions:

So Sweet -- Issue Number 3, May 2008

Craig Harkema

Craig Harkema recently published a poem in a rock climbing magazine and has in his possession the luckiest of shirts.

Contributions:

'The Music That Thinking is': *Every Inadequate*

Name by Nick Thran -- Issue Number 3, May 2008

Dave Margoshes

Dave Margoshes is a fiction writer and poet who lives in Regina. His poetry and stories are widely published in Canadian literary magazines. His new book of poetry, *The Horse Knows the Way*, came out last fall. "Mona Lisa 1998" is part of another collection,

Dimensions of an Orchard, to be published in 2010. Another book of poetry, *Purity of Absence*, came out in 2001. A story collection, *Bix's Trumpet and Other Stories*, won Book of the Year at the 2007 Saskatchewan Book Awards.

Contributions:

Bat Mitzvah -- Issue Number 3, May 2008

Jesus at Ten -- Issue Number 3, May 2008

Mona Lisa 1998 -- Issue Number 4, May 2010

Brooklyn, 1952 -- Issue Number 5, July 2012

Fred Meissner

Long ago, Fred Meissner decided to "live life to the fullest" by playing at writing and working as a high school English teacher; having enjoyed some success in both areas, he will eventually retire from teaching, build a papier-mache glider from his rejection slips, and soar peacefully into Oblivion's misty realms. He has a few recent publishing credits, including *Ascent Aspirations*, *Electro-Twaddle*, *Armada Quarterly*, *Poetry Canada*, and a broadside for Rubicon Press. As well, *Cezanne's Carrot*, *Toward the Light*, *Horizon Magazine*, and *Inscribed* have each published one of his personal essays.

Contributions:

Moose Thoughts -- Issue Number 3, May 2008

Jason Young

Jason Young is an undergraduate student at the University of Saskatchewan, pursuing a degree in Civil Engineering. A Vancouver Film School trained screenwriter, his first produced film, the award-winning "How to Disappear Completely", premiered at the Cannes film festival in 2004.

Contributions:

Before the Gravity Stopped -- Issue Number 3, May 2008

Jennifer Still

Jennifer Still's first book of poetry, *Saltations*, was nominated for three Saskatchewan Book Awards in 2006. Her poetry has appeared in numerous Canadian literary journals and anthologies including *Fast Forward: Saskatchewan's New Poets*. Jennifer is the regional winner of the 2008 CBC Poetry Face-Off and is currently writing up a flurry in Eastend, SK, with her family.

Contributions:

Writing 'the gaps between what really happens:' *Phobic*, by Triny Finlay -- Issue Number 2, April 2007

Boathouse -- Issue Number 3, May 2008

Dream Room -- Issue Number 3, May 2008

John Matthew Fox

John Matthew Fox writes fiction and nonfiction from Los Angeles. His blog BookFox is a lively literary weblog with a special emphasis on short story collections. He has fiction forthcoming in *Tampa Review*, the *Los Angeles Review*, and *Connecticut Review*, and his book reviews have been published in *Rain Taxi Review of Books*, *The Short Review*, and *California Literary Review*. Website: www.thejohnfox.com

Contributions:

Exposition Park -- Issue Number 3, May 2008

Kate Cushon

Kate Cushon is careening toward a completed PhD with wild abandon. Her dissertation is about very bad men in the eighteenth century. She has degrees from the Universities of Regina (BA Hon.) and Western Ontario (Master of Arts), and currently studies at the University of Saskatchewan. She is very glad to have returned to the prairies from whence she came. She thinks that good writing is sexy.

Contributions:

Breaking Open the Heart in *Bix's Trumpet and other stories* by Dave Margoshes -- Issue Number 3, May 2008

Kim Roberts

Kim Roberts is the author of two books of poems, most recently *The Kimnama* (Vrzh Press, 2007). She edits the acclaimed online journal *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, and lives in Washington, DC.

Contributions:

IUDs -- Issue Number 3, May 2008

Laurie Graham

Laurie Graham will be a grad student in creative writing at the University of Guelph-Humber in Toronto come fall. She was the winner of the Other Voices 2004 Poetry Contest, and a finalist for the 2008 Winston Collins/Descant Prize for Best Canadian Poem. She comes from Sherwood Park, Alberta.

Contributions:

The Point of Learning Ukrainian -- Issue Number 3, May 2008

This Road -- Issue Number 3, May 2008

Lynn Cecil

Lynn Cecil is a writer and artist who was born in Montreal, has lived in other cities in Canada, the United States, and the South Pacific, and now lives with her family in Regina, Saskatchewan. She is currently working on collections of poetry and short fiction, as well as a series of YA fantasy novels. Recently, she co-edited *Outside of Ordinary: Women's Travel Stories* (Second Story Press, 2005). She also enjoys scuba diving in the Caribbean, especially with sharks.

Contributions:

Sand Messages -- Issue Number 3, May 2008

Nick Pincumbe

Nick Pincumbe, 25, is currently an MFA candidate at the University of Alabama. "Q and A" is his first creative nonfiction publication and despite its exploration of the uncomfortable state of modern male bonding, hopefully it shows he loves his parents very much.

Contributions:

QandA -- Issue Number 3, May 2008

Shauna Singh Baldwin

Shauna Singh Baldwin's first novel *What the Body Remembers*, the story of two women in a polygamous marriage in occupied India, received the Commonwealth Prize for Best Book (Canada-Caribbean). *English Lessons and Other Stories* received the Friends of American Writers prize. Her second novel, *The Tiger Claw*, was a finalist for Canada's Giller Prize. Shauna's awards include the 1995 Writer's Union of Canada Award for short prose and the 1997 Canadian Literary Award. *We Are Not in Pakistan*, her second collection of short stories, was a Quill and Quire Book of the Year 2007. She is currently working on a novel. Website: www.shaunasinghbaldwin.com

Contributions:

I Never Knew When I Arrived in this Country -- Issue Number 3, May 2008

Simon Barker

Simon Barker hails from Sydney but has lived in both Melbourne and California. Among other things he has worked as a bus conductor, a teacher, a librarian and a typist on the original Star Wars project. He has studied philosophy and has published scholarly articles about the internet. Some of his fiction has previously appeared in the journal *Overland*.

Contributions:

Ali the Truck Driver -- Issue Number 3, May 2008

T. Berto

T. Berto's first play, *BASH*, won the Toronto Best New Play Prize in 2000. Since then he has had plays performed in Summerworks (three times), Toronto Fringe (four times), Birds and Stones Theatre (Calgary), Theatre and Company (Kitchener), Theatre 8-0-8 (Calgary) the University of Lethbridge and York University. His work has been published in *She Speaks*, *He Speaks*, *Gay and Lesbian Monologues* (Playwrights Canada Press), *Cormorant*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Canadian Literature*, *New Quarterly*, *Carousel* and *Prairie Fire*. He is currently doing a PhD in Theatre Studies, where he received the Lambda prize in 2005 for his work in Queer studies.

Contributions:

Chrysalis -- Issue Number 3, May 2008
