

The Fieldstone Review

SUGAR



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The Fieldstone Review is an annual literary journal published digitally by graduate students in the English department at the University of Saskatchewan.

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Please find us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to keep up to date with calls for submissions and new issues!

About The Fieldstone



Letter From The Editors-in-Chief

In this issue, the Fieldstone has sugar to spare! Whether you've got a sweet tooth for delicious poetry—like our award winner, “Ingredients” by Becky Nicole James—or like to take two sugars with your cup of fiction, this issue will satisfy all sugar cravings.

Food is such a strong force of recollection. As we “chew over” familiar tastes, so too do we recall familiar times. These strong themes of recollection and family are present in many of the works in this issue, such as “Lessons From My Grandmother” by Alison Colwell, and the poems “Sweet Memories” by Bailey Schaan and “Drive-by Daycare” by Hope Houston. On the other hand, dining and food making can create family friction, as in “A Mother’s Love” by Kristine Scarrow. These pieces each bring delectable human insight to the table. But the best part of these desserts is that you can enjoy them again and again!

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Fiction

A Mother's Love

Kristine Scarrow

After several months of coaxing, our son Matthew is bringing his girlfriend to Sunday dinner. So, considering this long-awaited introduction, I've put out the Royal Doulton, the individual salt and pepper shakers for each place setting, the silk runners. I've cooked lamb, which no one in this family really cares for, but I think it makes a good first impression.

I expect that this girl has put forth the same kind of effort but, when Matthew comes through the front door, she's wearing black leggings and a shapeless tunic. They stride into the entry in their running shoes (it's Sunday dinner, remember?), and they are laughing over the game of football they've just had in the neighbourhood park. Don't even get me started on girls playing football.

"It's okay. It'll be fine," I hear Matthew say. The girl holds Matthew's hand and stands just behind him as if he needs to provide cover. In his own childhood home!

"Mom," Matthew says politely. He leans into me and kisses my cheek. His stubble needles at my cheeks. He's typically clean-shaven. I prefer him that way. I wonder if this girl has influenced him to grow facial hair.

"Bill, they are here! Hello, dear." I note that he does not let go of Beatrice.

"This is Bea." Matthew's mouth stretches wide. (It's pronounced Be-ah. What kind of name is that anyhow? Beatrice sounds so much more put together, don't you think?) He's smitten, there's no denying it. The girl comes into better view. Her hair is snaking out of her ponytail—brown wisps that create a mane around her oval face. Her cheeks are tinged pink, likely from running, and she smiles as she stretches out her hand to me.

My eyes narrow as I take her in. Her hazel eyes regard me under thick lashes. A scared doe. Bill comes up from behind me and shakes Beatrice's hand before I do, so she isn't left with her arm suspended in the air.

"Let's go sit," Matthew says, pulling Bea toward the living room. Bill and I follow them. Matthew sits on one end of the loveseat and Bea sits right next to him, so that there is almost a full seat beside her. They continue to hold hands so tight I wonder if Matthew's scared that she'll blow away.

"So..." I say. "Nice to see you both."

"You as well, Mom." Matthew nods.

"It's been a while." I try to sound warm, but it comes out clipped. "You must be busy."

Matthew squeezes Bea's hand and blurts out, "This girl is the best thing to have happened to me."

They gaze at each other, their eyes bright. My gut drops. I might as well fling myself off a high-rise and careen to my end because I imagine this moment would feel the same, but no one notices the danger I'm in. Matthew leans into Bea and kisses her cheek. I find myself touching my own cheek in response—the whisper of my son on my skin.

I think of how many times I've kissed his baby soft cheeks. How when he was a toddler, I'd blow raspberries in the crook of his neck and shoulder and his tummy. How his belly laugh would make me clutch my own stomach, happy tears pricking my eyelids. His pudgy hands, warm with sweat, would cup my cheeks. The time when I was his everything.

“Dinner is almost ready,” I inform them.

I hope Bea likes my cooking. I've been up since five preparing for the meal and scrubbing the house. If I'm supposed to be past caring what people think of me, I've been squarely brought back to those days and, even worse, I'm reminded of my early years on the pageant stage when my mother paraded me around every chance she could—every inch of me up for judgement and score.

“Why don't I get us some drinks?” Bill is jovial. He sees no problem with Matthew dating Bea or anyone for that matter. I find myself wanting a drink rather badly.

“I'll have a beer, Dad,” Matthew answers. “Bea will have one too.”

I check to see if Bea reacts to Matthew's choice for her, but she is studying my son's features with pure adoration. Did I mention they met at a bar? That they would never have met without my attempts at matchmaking? To be clear, I did not choose that venue. A bar is not the place to meet the love of your life.

It started off innocently enough—my friend Donna, from church, had suggested we have our single children meet. They both came from respectable families, and we were sure that our children would hit it off. Her daughter, Elizabeth, was a nice girl from the choir. She wasn't the most striking thing, mind you, but she was from good stock. She dressed modestly which, have you seen the styles today? Ripped jeans, midriff-baring tops? Good grief. Anyhow, we convinced our children to meet on a blind date, which was no small feat. They agreed to our plan on the condition that they would also set up two of their friends and go on a double date.

Donna and I were sure that our children would hit it off. I was bringing amazing genetics to the table. Matthew is as handsome as they come. He's tall and trim. He has remarkable grey eyes and a ready smile. His dark brown hair is thick and full; there will be no premature balding. His children will be beautiful, even if marred by the subpar looks of their future mother.

We guessed at what would be the spark to capture each other's interest: Elizabeth's singing voice that hit like a direct soundtrack from heaven itself?

Or Matthew's multiple years as a camp counsellor at bible camp? A young man-

that devoted to the word of God at such an impressionable age would surely be a good father someday, no?

It would have done me some good to consider the past of the person I'd married. One was more likely to find Bill riding in the back of a pick-up truck down a grid road with an open beer in his hand at sixteen than at any bible camp. But that's another story. Matthew is different.

Anyhow, imagine my surprise when I heard that Matthew ended up leaving the date with Beatrice (Bea, I mean, really?) and Elizabeth ended up leaving with the other guy. For all our pre-planning, Matthew decided to date Beatrice instead. I was instantly curious by this stand-in who captured my son's eye. Who wouldn't be?

Bill hands the kids their drinks.

"Would you like a glass? Bill, get them glasses. They don't want to drink out of the bottle."

"Mom, we're good," Matthew says, waving his hand at me to stop. I watch as Bea takes a swig as large as Matthew's and swallows it effortlessly. What kind of partner was she looking for? Someone to drink with? A never-ending party? That's what this generation seems to want—a life full of wants and long stretches of idleness to "find themselves." One can get just as meditative putting their hands in a sink full of hot, soapy water with a dish rag, but what do I know?

We sit in an uncomfortable silence. I want Bill to initiate the conversation, but he's content to sit quietly nursing his beer. Matthew reaches for the remote and flicks on the TV. I clear my throat and raise my eyebrow at him. He catches my displeasure but doesn't shut it off.

"So, Beatrice," I say. "Are you going to school? Do you work? We really don't know anything about you."

Bea rubs the top of her beer bottle with the pad of her thumb. Her fingers start tugging at the label, leaving tiny bits of foil on her lap. The girl is nervous.

"I'm interested in holistic medicine. I'm currently working toward being a naturopath." She speaks so softly that I find myself craning forward. When I hear the words, I choke on my drink and pass it off as accidental. Bea looks down and sees the mess she's created on her lap. She works quickly to scoop up the torn pieces, but they are damp from the condensation on the bottle, and they stick in wet clumps.

The oven timer sounds, signalling dinner. "Could everyone please take a seat? I'll bring the dishes in."

Matthew stands and places his hand gently on Bea's back to guide her to the dinner table. He pulls out a chair for her and helps get her seated. I flush, pleased that my son is being a gentleman. I've set Matthew's place setting directly across from her, so that the four of us are seated in a symmetrical way.

When I bring out the steaming dishes—a watercress soup, garlic mashed potatoes, roasted asparagus, and the braised lamb—Matthew has moved his place setting beside Bea’s so he can sit right beside her. Matthew laughs at the dishes and my face flames.

“This is beautiful, Mrs. Johnson.” Bea glances at the dishes.

“Thank you, Bea.” I am pleased that at least one person appreciates my efforts.

I scoop potatoes on my plate and wait to pass the bowl to Matthew. He and Bea are leaning toward each other, whispering. I wait for them to notice me, but Matthew pats Bea’s knee as if to reassure her.

“Mom, what’s in the potatoes? Is there milk in them?”

My eyebrows knit together.

“Cream. Why? I always put cream.”

“Well, the thing is... Bea is vegan. And gluten-free.” Oh, for goodness’ sake, of course she is. She probably drinks turmeric shakes and eats charcoal ice cream too.

I mentally dissect each dish and realize that nothing at the table is suitable for this girl. Besides the obvious lamb, every side dish is slathered in butter or cream. Bea places her fork back on her plate and folds her hands in her lap.

I look over the entire meal. The steam pulses from the tops of the dishes, all carefully seasoned and placed in my holiday dishware. My jaw tightens. The potatoes in my mouth feel like a dry lump that will not be easy to swallow.

“This might have been something to share with me beforehand, Matthew,” I say evenly.

He nods. “Yeah, I wasn’t thinking. Sorry about that. We can stop at that café you like and get dinner there.”

So, my son has no intention of staying and visiting with his family. Instead, he will leave the meal I’ve prepared for him and take her for food she can eat. Was he trying to sabotage this dinner?

“Dessert then! It’s crème brûlée, and it should be fine. I used almond milk and cornstarch to thicken it.”

Bea’s shoulders relax and she nods. “That I can have!”

Bill continues chewing his supper. He watches me rise from the table to grab the ramekins. I hand them out, push my dinner aside, and spoon the warm dessert into my mouth. If dessert is all I’ll get with Matthew, I will take it.

Bea takes a generous spoonful of the creamy custard and groans at the taste. I smile. Something at this dinner has finally gone right.

* * *

One week later, after not receiving one call or text from Matthew, I leave a message on his voicemail.

“Hi, Matthew. It’s your mother. I thought that maybe you and Beatrice could come for dinner again next weekend. We’d love to see you. This time, I’ll know exactly what to serve.”

To my surprise, Matthew calls back.

You were sure there wasn’t any gluten in the dessert you served?”

“Why?”

“It’s just that Beatrice was really sick that night. She wasn’t feeling right for days afterward.”

“It is flu season,” I remind him.

“Hmm. Okay. Well, we’ll see you Sunday.”

The following Sunday, I greet them at the door. This time, I reach for Beatrice and envelop her into a tight hug. If I’m friendly and warm to the terrified girl, they may come around more. She stands wooden, arms at her sides while I hug her. This irritates me. How can she act so standoffish when I’m clearly welcoming her with open arms?

This time, when Bill brings the drinks, I open the conversation with an article I saw in the newspaper about a shortage of family physicians taking new patients and how many citizens are without a regular family doctor, relying only on emergency clinics for their medical needs.

“Have you ever thought of being a real doctor?” I ask Beatrice. “It sounds like there is a lot of opportunity here.”

Matthew sets down his beer and folds his arms.

“Mom...” he starts.

“No, I mean it. Why be a naturopath when you can be a real doctor and solve some of the problems in your community?”

Bea’s eyes are wide. “Mrs. Johnson, naturopaths do just as much healing as medical doctors do. It’s a patient-centred approach, but the focus is on finding the root causes of illness instead of just treating symptoms. It goes beyond what a medical doctor does. In fact, many things can be self-healed with the right approaches. And it is done alongside modern medicine.”

I sip my wine, throw back my head, and laugh.

“Well, I’m not sure I’d go that far. If you think your little herbs and tinctures will help people, then you just go right ahead. I’m just saying I’ll place my faith in a real doctor.” I look Matthew in the eye. “I’m surprised you believe in all of this, since you’re going to real medical school.” I look at Beatrice again. “Matthew has wanted to be a surgeon since he was just a young boy.” To have a son this talented is a blessing I still can’t quite believe. I don’t want to think that Beatrice is dating Matthew for his career-

path and the solid future it will afford them, but one must wonder when two people are unevenly matched like they are.

“Nobody said I was going to medical school,” Matthew interjects.

“Well, of course you are.” I shake my head.

“Dad, will you tell her?” Matthew puts his hands up.

“Tell me what, Bill?” I turn to my husband who has shrunk into his seat. He glances down at his beer like it’s a life preserver in a mighty typhoon.

“I think I’m going to go to art school.”

My laugh turns brittle and high-pitched. Matthew Johnson will not be attending art school.

“Me and Bea, we’re thinking of opening a healing centre. With holistic services. And I can teach art there.” My son’s eyes are pleading with me to understand. I think of his cherubic face holding the Fisher-Price stethoscope to my chest, pretending to play doctor from the time he could walk. How he’d carry the plastic black medical bag filled with the make-believe medical supplies. I’d clutch at some part of my body and pretend to squeal in pain until he’d “fix” me. And when I’d announce that I was all better and that he’d saved me, he’d beam.

Now, he sits with this strange girl, the two of them practically intertwined on the sofa, telling me he’s not going to go to medical school? How could the past twenty years of knowing exactly what my son needs suddenly go up in smoke with the presence of another female?

Once again, the oven timer sounds. This time I’ve made polenta with beans and greens. I’m certain it will meet with Bea and Matthew’s approval. I’ve even crafted another dessert. I direct everyone to the table again while I bring out the dishes. Bill opens a bottle of champagne and pours us all flutes of it for a toast to the newly engaged couple. Matthew and Bea fawn over the meal. Bea is more open and animated over dinner, as though she’s finally found a way into the family that feels comfortable.

“Thank you so much, Mrs. Johnson,” she gushes. “I’m so touched by all the trouble you went through to make this meal for me.”

I nod and sip my wine. Even Matthew and I catch eyes. He winks at me. I’m not sure I’ve ever seen him so happy.

“Shall we have dessert?” I ask. “It’ll just be a minute.”

I step into the kitchen. The warm apple cobbler is resting on the stovetop. It is one of Matthew’s favourites. The edges are crisp, and the sauce has caramelized. I reach for the can of whipped cream in the refrigerator but then think better of it. I want Bea to know that I’m thinking of her food intolerances. I grab spoons and the pretty crystal dessert bowls that Bill and I received as a wedding present twenty-five years ago. I want to look back on this moment and remember how it meant something.

I set them on the table and return for the cobbler. I raise it to my nose and breathe in the smell of brown sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves. I realize there is one thing I forgot to do—one ingredient I've almost let slip. I take the yellow bin marked "Flour" and tuck it behind the cupboard before anyone sees it and asks. The cobbler won't be the same if I make it with something else. Besides, if it's just an intolerance, it won't kill the girl.

Bea spoons just a bit of the cobbler into her mouth. I can see she is hesitant. She chews, swallows, and gives Matthew a wobbly smile. My shoulders relax. Whatever plans they had for later tonight will be dashed. Bea is not the girl for him and the sooner he knows it, the better.

I sit with my chin on my hands, my face aglow watching my son laugh as he wolfs down his cobbler. I think of him in his highchair, sticky face and hands after dessert, reaching for me. There's nothing purer than a mother's love. One day, Matthew will know how much I love him and the lengths I'd go to for him.

Aunt Elizabeth's Time

Peter Alterman

God often walked with Aunt Elizabeth in the morning, rain or shine, hot or cold. On those days, He waited patiently for her outside her cottage until she'd washed up and taken her morning tea. But that Tuesday, two days before the summer solstice, He was insistent, and Elizabeth hurried out to join Him as soon as she'd washed her face and brushed her teeth.

He manifested Himself as a pair of sparrows roughhousing in the air above her. She smiled and curtsied, one hand holding the gold cross that hung around her neck. Elizabeth always waited for Him to speak first. She knew her place.

The sparrows alit on a low branch of the oak that grew beside her front door. He said, "I made this lovely morning just for you, Sissy. I hope you like it."

Elizabeth looked around. She took a deep breath and smelled hyacinth and wild rose and honeysuckle. The sun in the eastern sky was as radiant as the Son on His heavenly throne. Everything she saw glowed with inner light: shimmers of green, slabs of brown, daubs and splashes of yellows and whites and pinks and reds. The edges of bark and bush and leaf and petal were sharp-drawn, unworn by the day. The air itself glinted with fresh life. The James River chuckled and hissed nearby. It was a glorious morning.

"Oh yes, Lord. Thank you so much for this day," she said.

"Then let Us walk together," He said.

The sparrows rose into the air and Elizabeth followed them along the footpath that paralleled the river. Despite her eighty-two years, the blood in her legs pumped smoothly and her muscles softened and stretched to the sparrows' pace. Her lungs expanded and shrank smoothly, her arms swung easily, her bare feet thrilled to the pressure of packed dirt and pebbles.

God didn't have much to say that morning. She understood He was giving her the gift of her body. "Lord, what have I done to deserve this?"

The sparrows twittered to each other, and God chuckled. "Oh, child. This day is a gift for you to enjoy simply because you please Us."

Elizabeth bowed her head. "I am unworthy, Lord." The times she'd been critical, cruel even.

"Beloved woman," God said. Air from His beating wings kissed her on her forehead, light as a feather, stunning as a lightning bolt. Her body glowed with bliss.

The sparrows parted and flew away in opposite directions. He was gone.

Elizabeth stood rooted, unable to move as the rapture slowly drained from her.

Exhausted by His grace, she sat on a nearby bench to recover her strength. The glory of the morning ebbed. Her head drooped towards her chest, and she dreamed.

She was nine. In bed. A June dawn rosy and gold. Her father's voice was close to her ear. "Wake up, Sissy. Time to go." His warm breath tickled her ear. She brushed at it with a sleepy hand. He helped her up. He gave her a brief hug and then stepped to her door. "I'll be in the kitchen. Hurry before the others are up." He left and she rushed to wash and dress. Early mornings with Father, just the two of them walking a golf course. It was the best time of all.

She padded along the main staircase, white patent leather golf shoes held in one hand. Portraits of colonial Branfords, plantation Branfords, Confederate Branfords, male and female, lined the panelled walls. During Reconstruction, the Branfords became the Fabers, but there were no portraits of Fabers until the one of grinning great-grandfather Branford Faber in his World War I aviator's uniform.

Then, somehow, when she got to the bottom of the stairs it was a different morning, cooler, greyer, and she was racing after the sound of the kitchen door closing. Through mullioned windows, she could see Father loading his golf bag into the trunk of the Cadillac. Junior stood by the front passenger door leaning casually against the side of the car, legs crossed at the ankles, smoking a cigarette. His sandy hair ruffled in the breeze. Elizabeth stood by the window holding her golf shoes and watched Father drive away with Junior sitting next to him.

Anger and hurt exploded in her chest. She ran out the back door and across the lawn towards the riverbank. Once there, she heaved her golf shoes out as far as she could. They plopped in and disappeared. "Golf is a stupid game!" she screamed.

A deep voice echoed through her world, in the air around her, on the ground below her, on the water before her, in the trees above her, on the grass beneath her, in the hidden life all around her. "Be at peace, Sissy."

"Who?" She twisted round, looking for the speaker. A great wave of peace washed over her, and she knew, knew, it was the Voice of God speaking to her. She fell to her knees and clasped her hands in front of her and bowed her head. "Thank you, Lord," she whispered. Gratitude filled her. Except for a fleeting thought: 'God spoke to me, Junior; not you!' and she was immediately ashamed.

God laughed.

The thunder of His laughter woke her. She was embarrassed, thinking someone might have passed by and perhaps felt pity for an old lady asleep in the morning's warmth. But she was an old lady, and she was asleep in the morning's warmth. Elizabeth sighed and retraced her path home. By the time she arrived back at her cottage, the soles of her feet hurt and a fine film of sweat covered her face.

"Tea," she said to nobody. "I shall have my tea now." She wondered why God-

had hurried her so that morning. The answer came as she walked through the doorway. Her niece Lily sat at the kitchen table holding a manila folder. “Where have you been? We were supposed to meet...” she consulted her watch, “twenty minutes ago.”

The middle one of her brother’s three children, Lily was near sixty, small and elegant like her mother, like all the Gardiner girls. Lily’s face was scrunched in a scowl. As a child, she’d been imperious and neither age nor a career on the bench had softened her. She’d grown into a handsome woman. A strong woman. It was a shame she’d never made time for a family, left that for her younger sister.

“Tea, dear?” Elizabeth said. She ignored the folder in Lily’s hand and filled the kettle from the tap.

Lily shook her head. “No thank you.” She pushed a manila folder towards Elizabeth. “You know what this is.”

When the water was heating, she sat across from her niece, folding her hands in her lap. “The results of the MRI scan.” Ordered by the neurosurgeon Lily insisted on consulting.

“I’ve made an appointment for you with Dr. Stevenson tomorrow at ten to go over the results.”

Elizabeth didn’t know the Stevensons but that didn’t matter. She couldn’t make the appointment. “Sorry. Tomorrow is my morning to teach Bible class to the children.”

“No, it isn’t. You stopped that last year. Remember?”

Right, right. How could that have slipped her mind? Lately, she was getting mixed up in time. “Still, you should have asked first.”

“He’s a very busy man and he did me—us—a favor fitting you in. His next opening wasn’t for another month. And I had to reschedule a hearing.”

Lily did look after her, though they didn’t often agree. “So, will you go?” Lily tapped the folder with the MRI scans with a finger.

Elizabeth went to the counter and dropped a teabag into a cup, then poured boiling water over it. What had they been talking about? To see the surgeon? “Well, yes,” she said, “Since you had to reschedule a hearing to make time for it.”

Lily looked at her watch. “Okay then. I’ll come by for you at 9:20.” She rose, scraping the chair legs against the floor tiles, and left.

Elizabeth spread out the scans on the table and studied them as she drank her tea. All she could see was pictures of the inside of her head. She wondered if the pictures captured a tiny spark of her soul, but she knew better. There was the body and there was Spirit, and no camera could capture Spirit. She wondered if the pictures spread out on the table before her could tell the doctors why the headaches were becoming more frequent and much, much worse. She was ready to die, happy even, yearning to be with her mother again.

She turned her mind from questions she couldn't answer and took up her Bible. As it often did, the pages fell open and it spoke directly to her: "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church."

She smiled. The Lord's words were always there to guide her. Laying her Bible down atop the pile of MRI pictures, she walked over to the kitchen window and looked out at the line of trees bordering the river. She could almost see the dust and pollen and water in the warming air, and she sighed contentedly. How much of her life had been spent along this riverbank? So many memories, one for each tree leaf, each blade of grass.

She remembered one memory above all the rest. It was a chilly September morning. She made her way down the lawn from the big house to the riverbank awkwardly, holding her swaddled infant nephew to her breast with both arms. Branches bent and sprang back; brown and red and green leaves blew through the air. In bare feet, she felt her way carefully down to the water's edge and stepped in. The river's current pushed at her ankles and shins and knees, soaked her long dress up to mid-thigh as she stopped and handed the infant to Pastor Weems.

He knelt slightly and scooped water into his palm and sprinkled it over the baby's head. Shocked by the cold water, the infant began crying. Pastor Weems raised his voice over the baby's cries, reciting, "As John did in Christ's time, so I baptize you in the name of the—"

He was interrupted by a woman's cry as the baby's mother waded into the river, arms outreached, her face filled with terror and rage. "What are you doing? What are you doing?" she screamed and yanked the baby from Pastor Weems' arms.

"—Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, Amen," he finished.

"It is done," Elizabeth said to her sister-in-law. She offered the swaddling towel to her. Rose ignored her and clasped the infant tightly to her wet blouse.

"He is a child of Christ now," the pastor said.

Over the squalling baby Rose screamed, "You bitch. You insane bitch." She turned on the pastor. "If I ever see you near my children again, I'll kill you with my bare hands." Then she turned and splashed to shore holding her screaming, naked son to her wet breast and hurried up the long lawn to the big house.

Elizabeth stood in the chilly waters of the James River holding the swaddling blanket. "He is a child of Christ now," she said.

A comforting memory. She and the pastor had been close for almost seventy years, more than the entirety of her nephew's lifetime.

Obedying the words her Bible had spoken to her, Elizabeth called him. His secretary put her through to him at once.

"Sister Elizabeth," he said. "It is so good to hear your voice again."

This confused her. Surely, they'd talked just the day before?

"How did the operation go?" he said. "And your recovery? When can we look forward to seeing you again at Church?"

Now she was really confused. "Operation? What operation? I haven't seen the doctor yet. My niece is taking me to him tomorrow morning. I wanted to discuss that with you."

He was silent for a moment. Then, carefully, he said, "Elizabeth, we did talk about it. Weeks ago. And according to your family you had the operation. Are you sure you're all right?"

His words frightened her. They made no sense. What was going on? She pressed a hand to her chest. Breath came hard, as though something big was choking her airway.

She gasped. "William, I promise you. I have not been to the doctor. I have not had an operation." Even she could hear the panic in her voice, hysteria held at bay. Afraid of what else he might say, she hung up.

Her mind rejected his words. Had she been dreaming, imagining things? Had she really had the operation? She ran her hand over her head and felt soft stubble on her scalp and a thick scab that formed where the surgeons bored into her skull.

It was true.

She cried out, "Lord, please help me!" and fell to her knees on the cool tiles of her kitchen floor, hands clasped beneath her chin, eyes closed. She waited for a message. There was no answer. So, she began to whisper the Lord's Prayer. But after "Our Father, Who," she couldn't remember the words she knew so well. She tried again. "Our Father, Who—Our Father—" Tears welled up in her eyes and fell to the tiles silently. What had they done to her?

Her mind worked feverishly to make sense of what was happening to her. She searched her memory but found no doctor's visit, no operation on her head. And yet there was the evidence of her scalp and the Pastor's words. Unless she was imagining it all—but how could she—and it really was Tuesday morning with her future unmade. She cowered on the floor like a beaten dog.

It was a posture she knew well, when Daddy came home from the club drunk, stumbling, red-faced, roaring rage like a wall of water from a breached dam. Only Mother stood between her and the flood as she cowered, curled into a ball, arms protecting her head. And Junior, her brother, was drawn uncontrollably to the thundering noises of voices and crashing furniture, lurking almost out of sight, smirking.

God forgive her, but she was glad Junior was dead. A drunk like Daddy. The only good things he'd done in his life were his three children, her nephew and nieces.

Tears came to her eyes and she blinked.

She was in the solarium at the rear of the family's home. Junior's body was lying on the hospital bed they'd installed there, stick-like under an unwrinkled white sheet. He looked terrible in death. Cancer had sucked the life out of him, leaving little behind. His face was folds of grey skin on bones beneath, his open eyes yellow around watery blue irises.

Nobody else in the room seemed to notice he was dead. An aide, a woman Elizabeth knew from her church, sat knitting on the davenport nearby. Lily sat behind her desk in one corner, fingers flying on the keyboard, face hidden behind the monitor. Fern sat next to her father, holding his hand. Empty bottles of Jim Beam, his best friend, filled the trash can beside her.

Junior's corpse said, "Now I'm dead, you come to visit."

The ghosts of four-hundred years of Virginia Branfords lay like lead on him. Elizabeth, too, felt their weight and it was unbearable. Compassion for him flooded her heart too late.

"I'm sorry you're dead. I'm praying to save your poor soul."

His dead eyes stared into hers. "But who will pray for you, Sissy?"

She blinked.

She lay on her back on her kitchen floor. Lily was kneeling over her, fingers on her wrist, cell phone to her ear. "What?" Elizabeth said.

"Thank God, thank God," Lily said, putting down the phone. "You're alive."

She struggled to sit up, but her lazy heart was slow to react and she had no strength to rise.

Lily helped her. "There," she said. "Much better."

Elizabeth pushed her away. "Leave me be, child. Leave me be."

Lily leaned back. "I'm glad I came down for you early. What happened to you?"

She remembered everything. "I don't know. What day is it?"

Lily frowned. "It's Wednesday morning, of course. I'm here to take you to your appointment."

"What appointment? I've already been to the doctor, already had the operation." Her hand went to her scalp to find the scar. She ran her fingers through her thin white hair. Hair. She searched her scalp for the scab and found nothing. Was it all a dream?

"What are you talking about? Your appointment with Dr. Stevenson is in half an hour."

Elizabeth was shocked. "I don't understand," she whispered. If she was back before the appointment, before the operation, maybe it was all a dream. That was the only way it made sense. After all, how could she prove she'd had the operation if her hair wasn't shaved, no scab covered the healing site of the operation? All she could-

think of to do was to get on with the day in which she was living.

Lily looked at her aunt with real concern. "Let me help you up."

She reached for Elizabeth's hand, but her aunt brushed it aside and struggled to her feet by herself. She stole a glance out the window. Dusty shafts of golden morning light poured through. She knew God waited outside for her. That was a comfort at least. No matter what was happening to her, God had not forsaken her. "Make me a cup of tea while I get ready," she said, heading for her bedroom. She didn't really care about being late. She didn't really care about time anymore.

Despite Lily's prodding, the best her limo service could do was drop them off at the medical center ten minutes late. By the time they'd navigated the preliminaries of the surgeon's practice, they were almost thirty minutes late for the appointment. They sat in a small grey treatment room that had one padded stool in front of a small computer desk, one metal chair, and one paper-covered examining table. When the doctor came in, Lily had to stand.

Dr. Stevenson was tall and square and had a fleshy nose and thin lips. He wore a blue blazer and paisley tie over which he'd thrown a white lab coat. Elizabeth thought his fingers were perfectly manicured, nails polished pink, thin white curving tips. They were the most perfect fingernails she'd ever seen on a man.

"Do you understand what I'm saying?" the doctor said. He was pointing at a dense white blotch in a scan of her brain displayed on the computer screen.

What had he said? She shook her head.

"This is a picture looking down on your brain." He pointed at the screen. "This white spot is a tumor. Unfortunately, because of the position, it's life-threatening. We can remove it. But I want you to be aware there could be permanent side effects."

"What side effects?" Lily said.

Dr. Stevenson started to list possible side effects, but Elizabeth already knew them. She interrupted him. "So, my decision is clear, then. Have the operation and prolong my life but at the cost of permanent side effects."

"Possible permanent side effects."

"Possible side effects." She didn't say that one of them was becoming untethered in time. "How long do I have without it?"

"A month. Maybe less. It's urgent. In fact, I'd like to admit you right away, get you into the hospital now."

Elizabeth closed her eyes and said a silent prayer. "Okay, let's go ahead."

She opened her eyes. She was in her hospital bed, Dr. Stevenson looming over her. His smile was impersonal as he explored her shaved scalp, shone a flashlight in her eyes, and checked the drips in her tubes. He said she was doing fine, but she was beyond reassurance. The waiting nurse lowered her bed. The surgeon's visit exhausted-

her or maybe it was not knowing where she'd be when she opened her eyes.

She strained to keep her eyes open, not blink or look away from the clock on the opposite wall. But it was impossible.

She blinked.

“No surgery, then,” she said, sitting on the bench outside her front door facing east as the sun rose over the trees that lined the river. Golden light burst through the leaves, bringing bright dancing dust motes, fat oak and maple and sycamore leaves glowing green. She watched, delighted, as dust motes danced in the yellow-white light and then there was the Son, a shimmering in the glowing dust. She gasped with delight and laughed like a baby playing peekaboo with her mother.

Leaves fluttered in the morning breeze; the shafts of light danced along with them. He invited her to follow along as He played within the beams. He flicked a sycamore leaf towards her. She reached for it, arm extended, looking straight up into the bright blue sky and rose, her body turning into dazzling light as she left her home.

New War—Old Technology

Mitchell Toews

Lena Boychuk guides the truck down an empty road on the open steppe. It's morning, a clear spring day. A German Shepherd sits on the passenger side and the air in the cab is humid from the dog's panting. A sizzling hum comes from a radio beneath the truck dashboard and Lena leans over to adjust the squelch. The decrepit lorry—Lena would say vintage—is overloaded. The springs squall like they are about to blow apart. She picks her way over the frost-heaved pavement, jerking the wheel to avoid craters and rubble. Five heavy drums lashed down in the truck bed sway in unison.

“Signal okay?” she says in Ukrainian.

A crisp female voice comes from the speaker on the dash, “Loud and clear, Commander.”

All around, farmland rolls to the horizon. The fields, as if embossed, are combed in perfect rows. The low-angled sun lights the first downy wheat shoots, pale green against the black soil. On Lena's left is an oxbow. The water is still except for faint surface frissons that coincide with distant rumbling.

The ridiculous bulk of a T-90 tank, dappled in matte shades as if it could hide, is slumped on the road ahead like a sleeping bear. A delicate morning mist frosts the armour plate. A soldier sits with feet dangling astride the cannon barrel. He studies the truck as it approaches. Eyes glitter keen and dark.

The shepherd tenses, a growl deep in its throat. Lena pulls to a halt beside the tank, the truck's noisy brakes announce her arrival, and the tires cut sharp ruts in the wet beside the road.

“Chto sluchilos? What are you doing here?” Lena says.

“We're out of fuel...”

“Unfortunate,” she remarks to the dog, then looks back to the soldier. “Where are you from?”

“East,” he says and taps the colourful crest on his shoulder.

“In that case, neighbour, may I give you a ride home?”

The soldier laughs quietly without smiling. “Not to change the subject, but I see your dog has three legs...”

“All dogs have three legs, neighbour sir.”

His laugh is a sniff. “True, Babusya. But seriously, you can give us a hand with our fuel problem, yes?” His eyes narrow, and he tugs his leather gloves on more tightly.

“It's possible. What do you need?”

“TS-1 kerosene. But we can also run regular diesel.” He leans back, watching-

her, and speaks quietly into the microphone bail that curves from his helmet to his mouth.

A hatch on the tank clanks open and a slack faced young man pokes his head out. A warm puff of air escapes the hatch. Licorice vape, gasoline, laundry detergent: an incongruent mix of indulgence blended with the distinctive reek of napalm.

The smell of victory, Lena muses.

She clears her throat. "Well, neighbour friends. I have a sweet deal for you!" She hooks a thumb at the drums strapped together in the truck bed. "All the diesel you want, if you have the grivna." The dog whines. "But it's gotta be cash money—no scrip."

"Your dog sounds worried."

"That may be, sir. But this is not my dog."

"You are a comical one, Babusya." He waves the back of his hand at the young soldier who salutes and clambers out.

"We can make a deal, I'm sure," the tank commander says, sliding down from his perch.

* * *

As she drives away, Lena sees a plume of black tank exhaust in her mirror. She gentles the shepherd's head and speaks out loudly, "You were right about the fuel, Justina!"

The radio crackles with static and the woman's voice responds in thick Ukrainian, something about, "Women and dogs set men together by their ears..."

Lena laughs. "How true!"

Lighter now, the truck climbs the rise as if eager, and Lena watches the tank behind them. It lurches forward and then stutters, hisses, and shakes before issuing an enormous backfire. The explosion flattens the grass near the tailpipe with a whoosh! and sends ripples across the water of the oxbow. Smoke pouring from the hatches, the tank stops moving, and Lena sees the turret start to rotate towards them before she crests the hill.

She shifts gears smoothly and revs the engine. Clattering, the cargo of hollow drums bounce in the box behind her as the truck speeds away. The dog leans against the door to brace itself while it licks spilled sugar from the seat and sniffs at the stack of empty paper sacks beneath an old wool blanket on the cab floor.

"New war, old technology..." Lena murmurs then raises her voice for the radio microphone, "Justina! I'll come back to base for more fuel... there's another T-90 stranded nearby at Fischau village in Molotschna, yes?"

"Yes. Another customer for you. See you soon, Commander."

Rob

Gunnar Ohberg

He nearly fell off his stool at the bar as he explained to us the conditions of his sabbatical.

“Sometimes it’s only for a semester,” he said. “But you can apply for up to a year. That’s what I got. Can you imagine? A whole year of getting paid to relish life and add to one’s adventures.”

“Where you gonna go?” asked Arlo.

“Well, I have colleagues in Kilkenny,” said Rob. “Such beautiful architecture. Oh, and I would just love, love, love to see the Nore. Maybe storm a castle or two while I’m there.” He looked at me and winked.

I raised my empty whiskey glass. “Storming castles,” I said. “Sure.”

I’d hoped he might notice I needed a refresher, but unfortunately he’d already turned back to Arlo and Lynda to recite for them some funny jingle about two cats fighting. LaRhonda saw me with my glass raised in the air and so she poured me a fresh one, and I thought, damn, I’ll have to pay for that one. Rob waved for her attention, knocking over Arlo’s pitcher in the process. The two men jumped off their stools as beer cascaded between them.

“Ah, blast,” Rob said, dancing back from the spill zone. “I am so sorry. Did it get you? Damn. It didn’t, did it?”

“I cleared it,” Arlo said. He wiped at a pantleg. “Mostly.”

“LaRhonda,” Rob said. “Love, could we?” He gestured at the spilled beer.

“Quit putting napkins on it,” said LaRhonda. “You’re just making it worse.” She threw Rob a hand towel. Rob placed it delicately over a section of the spilled beer and went back to reciting everything I believe one could ever know of Irish history. Lots of kings killing kings, it sounded like to me.

Later, the lights came on and the music cut out.

“Okay children,” said LaRhonda.

“I’ll give you twenty dollars for one more round,” Rob said.

“Register’s closed, babe.”

“I’ll add it to the tip, then. Come on, love, I’m celebrating. I’m going on sabbatical. LaRhonda. LaRhonda. One more, love. LaRhonda.”

She opened her register and began to count the bills.

Rob looked at me and rolled his eyes. I shrugged: what can you do? He laughed and rose from his stool with his arm pressed against the side of the bar for support. His feet barely left the ground as he made his way to the front door.

I was the last one outside. The night was warm and open. Lynda was cackling at some joke Rob had just told while Arlo stood beside them and nodded his head, eyes closed as he tried to light a cigarette. Rob grabbed the stem of a handicap sign to help him balance as he stepped off the curb onto the asphalt of the parking lot. Next to the parking lot, the highway stretched gray and flat into dark hills. I watched the hills and listened to the jokes and the laughter and the click of the door as it locked behind us.

* * *

Arlo looked like hell. His body drooped like an old scarecrow as he sat at the bar next to me. There was a small circle of shadow on the bar top between us where one of the lamps over the bar had gone out. LaRhonda came over and handed me my drink. I asked Arlo who died.

“Rob called the bar,” he said. “Seems he’s lost a leg. Sends us his best.”

“Lost his leg,” I said. “My god. How?”

“Not sure. Says he didn’t feel pain or nothing. Just woke up this morning and it was gone.”

“I heard someone in Cartersville lost their leg the other week in just that same way.”

“I heard that too.”

“And now Rob.”

“That’s right.”

The sadness in Arlo’s voice made me uncomfortable. “Maybe he’ll find it somewhere,” I said. “I hear people can grow them back sometimes.”

Lynda showed up. We told her what had happened to Rob. She looked at the floor and shook her head from side to side. “A damn shame,” she said.

We all nodded. Arlo decided to buy us a round in Rob’s honour. It was what he would’ve done if one of us woke up without a leg. A few other regulars joined us. Someone mentioned how Rob would’ve kept buying shots. Lynda ordered another round.

I stared at the shadow on the bar and then turned to say something to Arlo, but someone else was now sitting where he’d been. The man was nursing a tall boy. He was lanky and his face sagged in ways that made it look like it was melting.

“Your friend needs to drink more water,” the man said. “That’s what the doctors say anyhow.”

“You’re talking about Rob?” I asked.

“Sure.”

“You knew him?”

“Course I knew him.”

“Have we met?”

The man took a slow swig of his beer. “Trust me,” he said. “I knew a guy. Same thing happened to him. He started drinking water. Had like, five glasses a day or something, and then one day his leg came back. ‘cept it wasn’t his leg he’d lost, it was his arm.”

“The water did it?”

“Sure.”

I looked around for Lynda to ask her what she thought of this water cure and caught her locking lips with Arlo near the jukebox. That got me mad. She and I were almost an item once. I walked over and told Arlo the first thing that came to my mind. That got their attention. I don’t remember what it was I said exactly. But the next morning I woke up with one side of my jaw rusty.

* * *

A week passed and Rob came hobbling in on crutches, smiling like a loon. His left leg was absent from the knee down. He scooted next to me at the bar, and I clapped him on the back and then had to grab his arm to keep him from falling off his stool.

“Sorry,” he said. “Balance issues.”

“We’re all real sore to hear what happened,” I said. “Maybe you just need a drink?”

Rob laughed. “Of course.” He called for LaRhonda. Lynda and Arlo came over to join us. Drinks were ordered and divvied.

We all cheered to Rob’s health. I got up to use the bathroom. A floor mat near the restrooms had a corner that was curled up and it nearly tripped me.

Rob must’ve caught me stumbling out of the corner of his eye. “Careful there,” he called after me. “I only brought one pair of crutches.”

He didn’t seem so cheerful after I got back from the bathroom. In fact, he looked downright miserable. I searched for Lynda and Arlo and saw they’d moved to the pool tables at the other end of the room. To hell with them, I thought, and sat next to Rob. One of the lights over the bar had gone out. A lake of shadow spread between us.

Rob stared into his glass as he spoke. “He left me, you know. We were together for almost three years.”

I didn’t want to talk about that. “It’ll come back, you know,” I said. “The leg. I’ve heard it’s happened before. Someone told me water helps.”

“Wonder where it went.”

“I don’t know. Don’t suppose it’s getting too far without the rest of you.”

“I hope it’s up his fucking ass.” Rob raised his hand in the air. “LaRhonda. Two-

more, would you?" He eyed the empty glass in his hands and then set it inside the shadow. "I hope it's jammed up there, wiggling its toes against his sternum. He'd probably enjoy it."

LaRhonda placed two shots of whiskey between us.

"My ex is a shithead," Rob informed her.

"Poor boy," said LaRhonda.

"Well," I said. "Anyways." We clinked our glasses and drank.

Rob took to the crutches pretty quick. After a couple weeks, it was almost like he'd never lost the leg at all.

* * *

I was about to grab my stool at the bar when I saw Arlo headed full steam my way. I thought maybe I'd said something else wrong that I didn't remember and was about to turn and leave, but he stopped a few feet from me and said, "It's Rob again," and so I took a seat.

"What is it now?" I asked.

"The other leg," he said.

"Damn." I tried to get LaRhonda's attention. Seated down the bar from me was the man with the melted face.

Lynda came in and slumped in her seat at the bar and then wiped at her eyes. Guess she'd already heard the news. Arlo came over, and they hugged for what felt like a few years. I wanted to say something but thought better of it. Arlo got us each a shot of whiskey and we toasted to Rob.

"They'll have to build a ramp here," Lynda said.

"There's one in the back," LaRhonda said.

"I thought that was a fire door."

"Hey, Lynda," I said.

"That alarm hasn't worked in years," LaRhonda said.

"How come you never mentioned it?" Lynda asked.

"Lynda," I said louder.

"Y'all use the front doors just fine," LaRhonda said.

Arlo whispered something into Lynda's neck, and she laughed.

"Lynda," I called again, and she said, "Hey," and then grabbed Arlo's arm and led him away to the pool tables without sticking around to hear what I had to say. I thought, hell, they can play pool if they want. Free country.

For a second, I couldn't find my drink at the bar.

"What'd you do with my beer?" I asked LaRhonda. Sometimes she hides them-

when she thinks I'm acting up.

"It's right there, dummy," she said and pointed to my left. There it was, under the broken bulb.

"Thanks," I said.

* * *

Arlo moved from the bar and looked Rob over. "Learn any tricks yet?" he asked.

Rob smiled and rubbed his palms over the armrests of the wheelchair. His legs were entirely gone now.

"I'm afraid I'm still but a simple novice," he said.

"Well. Least now you'll get to park wherever you'd like."

"It's not all bad."

"Know what'd make you feel better?" I said. "A drink."

Rob laughed. "LaRhonda."

* * *

LaRhonda came over.

"You should know," she said, "I don't think he's coming back."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "More?"

"More."

"Jesus. What now?"

"Heard it was his hands this time."

Across the bar from me was the man with the melted face. "Should've drank more water," he said.

"Excuse me," I called to him. "Do we know each other?"

The man just shook his hound dog face and went back to his beer.

I walked over to him. "Hey. No hard feelings. Want to get a pitcher? Rob would've wanted us to keep having fun."

"Sure," he said. "But I already closed out my tab."

LaRhonda came over and I waited to see if the man might order the pitcher for us, but he didn't. Arlo and Lynda were near the jukebox, his arms around her waist and hers around his neck as they danced under the red glow of a Budweiser sign. It made my insides sour a little.

"Give me a minute," I said. I headed to the jukebox and tapped on its screen and flipped through a few of its 'Greatest Hits'S selection.

"Nice song," I said. "Mighty nice."

They stopped dancing and stared at me for a moment.

"I need to use the restroom," Lynda said.

"Sure," I said.

"What do you want?" Arlo asked.

"Nothing. Just I have an idea. About Rob."

"Spill it, then."

"Well, he ain't here on account of his missing parts, right? He's probably all cooped up in his house right now wishing he were here with us. I bet he misses us a lot."

"Hm," Arlo said.

"Smart man like that needs people around him. To keep his mind stimulated and such."

Arlo and Lynda glanced at each other and then stared back at me.

"So, let's pay him a visit," I said. "Try to cheer him up a little. I've given him a ride a few times. He's right off 41. We could stop by for just a bit."

"Because he misses us," Lynda said.

"That's right," I said. "Well?"

"I guess that'd be fine," Arlo said. "Lynda?"

"Fine," she said.

"I'll drive," I said. "We should bring something to drink with us. Think we could pick up something on the way?"

"Sure," they said in unison.

* * *

A woman answered the door. I thought maybe I had the wrong place. The houses in Rob's neighborhood all looked the same, white boxes in crowded rows like teeth. Every time I'd been to Rob's house before it'd been dark and we'd both been in a state.

"I'm sorry," said Arlo. "Does a man named Rob live here?"

"He does," said the woman. "I'm his sister."

"Is he here now?" I asked the woman.

She looked at us and then at the bottle of whiskey Arlo was holding.

"Are you friends of his?" she asked.

"Yeah."

She looked skeptical. "From the college?"

"No, ma'am."

Rob shouted from inside the house. "Callie, is it for me?"

She sighed and opened the door for us to come in.

Rob was set up in a bed in a room near the back of the house. He was missing a lot. His arms were gone all the way up to his shoulders. Under the sheets of the bed, his body was now a small island rising with the waves of his breathing.

“Hey, Rob,” Lynda whispered.

“Hey, bud,” Arlo said. “Something for your sweet tooth.” He pulled the bottle of Bulleit out of its bag and held it out for Rob to admire.

“Ah, you came bearing gifts,” Rob said. “I hope Callie wasn’t too cross.”

“We don’t have glasses, though,” I said.

“Well, you can’t borrow mine, they’re prescription,” Rob said and chuckled. “We can just drink from the bottle if that’s okay with everyone. Not much I can do with a rocks glass these days.”

“Of course,” said Lynda. She took the bottle and opened it and gently lowered it to Rob’s mouth. He drank and then we followed suit.

* * *

Lynda and Arlo were holding each other when I got to the bar. Before I could say anything, LaRhonda pulled me aside.

“I wasn’t going to say anything,” I said.

“He’s gone,” she said.

“Who?”

“Who do you think, dummy?”

“Ah, dammit.”

She looked down at the bar top. “Left a note in his will for his sister to call us. Can you believe it?”

I suggested the bar should buy a round in Rob’s honour. LaRhonda squinted at me and then walked over to where the rinse station was and reached under the station and returned with a bottle of Old Crow. She poured me a long one on the rocks.

“Not gonna do a round,” she said. “But you can have this one on the house.”

I drank the Old Crow and ordered another. LaRhonda asked if I didn’t mind paying for it first. I asked her if I couldn’t start a tab and she said I couldn’t. There’s really no faith in some people.

It was hot that day and the rocks glass felt sweaty in my hand. I set it on the bar and watched the ice melt. The light in the cubes dwindled and then it was gone. I turned the glass to try to find more light, but there was none. I kept turning and searching, I don’t know for how long.

I looked around and didn’t recognize anyone. Arlo and Lynda were gone. Even LaRhonda wasn’t there. Someone else was behind the bar. I found my drink near where the lamp went out and reached for it. My hand disappeared in the shadow under the empty bulb.

The Copycat

Maggie Iribarne

I did not choose black for my husband's funeral but instead wore a vibrant striped dress. Seth exuded life and colour. He loved me in bright tones.

Afterwards, I sat in a wooden chair listening to the drone of mourners. A shadow fell and a woman wearing a black dress and pillbox hat with a veil stood in front of me. Before I could force a smile and engage in yet another awkward conversation, a familiar voice, sticky-sweet, emerged.

Linda.

I stood in defense.

"Allie, I just wanted to tell you how sorry I am. I lost my mother this week, too. I get it. I totally get it. I'm here for you, Allie. I'm here." Her fake soothing voice brought acid to my mouth.

I put my hands on Linda's shoulders, forcing her backwards, watching her stumble and regain her balance as I kept shoving, releasing the rage of a lifetime until she fell through the door.

* * *

I didn't even like her in second grade. She sat behind me in class, craned her neck over my shoulder to see what I wrote on my paper. I turned to see she'd copied my name into the top line. My name. Astonished, I jerked my paper to the right. Her eyes followed the paper. She smiled with her innocent, wide-eyed go-to expression.

Like a bigger version of Tinker Bell, her face carried no blemish, her lips were pillowy and pink, all her other features accentuated by two brilliant green eyes, eyes that looked into my irritated brown ones with hope or need or something.

"Copycat!" I said.

She smiled again, this time displaying her white chicklet teeth.

"Meow!" She put up pretend paws and stuck out a little pink tongue.

We both cracked up laughing.

* * *

Eventually, no one could tell us apart. In middle school, we shared tubes of Maybelline #52 cherry pie-flavoured lipstick and swapped our skinny jeans and form-fitting t-shirts. We joined the soccer team and spent afternoons kicking the ball back-

and forth, often discussing our different school subjects. Academics were my main passion, and Linda seemed to have similar priorities. She copied my notes and study habits, something I considered a compliment. Since everyone loved sweet, beautiful Linda, our friendship increased my social status, a win-win.

Linda eventually ditched me. One day, without warning, she turned her copycat attention to Deandra Evans, the pigtailed head of the cheerleading squad. She even swept her hair into the same tight side ponies, tilted her head and snapped her Bubble Yum gum exactly like her new friend. I spied her across the hallway leaning on Deandra's locker, chatting and laughing away.

* * *

I didn't intend to go to the same university as Linda. I just hoped it was a big enough place so I could easily avoid her.

One breezy fall day, walking across the quadrangle, I felt the green eyes coming at me like headlights. I froze in my tracks.

"Allie!" Linda said, "I love your hair!"

"Thanks." I touched my recently shorn locks, feeling an eerie, familiar combination of pride and dread.

The next time I crossed the quad I found her, sitting in a ray of sunshine, her hair cut the same as mine. The pixie cut perfectly framed her defined cheekbones and big eyes.

"You should go to my salon," she said. "Give me your number and I'll text you the info."

Her hair *did* look really good, and I had not made any friends yet, so I gave her my number. Our friendship began again.

After winter break, Linda met a guy. Patrick.

I ended my freshman year without Linda.

* * *

Later in my college years, just after I met Seth and things were going well, Linda texted me.

Hey, Allie-kins, Do you want to go out? Ladies' night at the Driftwood!

Of course I said no, but she pressed me.

Oh, c'mon! It'll be fun! Like the old days. Just you and me!

I wasn't sure what old days she meant, but I could not resist the pull of being in Linda's orbit.

All I remember about the rest of that night was the boom-boom-boom of techno music, the bodies bumping into me, the sweat dripping off my brow as I maneuvered-

the bar looking for her. With no answers to my texts, I worried she was in trouble, but I also knew that she'd probably found someone else. Under a cold clear moon, I walked alone up the hill to my dorm.

* * *

The summer of my engagement, Linda reappeared after another hiatus.

"She wants to bake our wedding cake," I told Seth.

"Sometimes people change," he said, painting an old chair blue, matching his clear, kind eyes.

On the day of my wedding, I could barely see the cake because all I could see was Linda standing in front of it, contrasting with the chocolate layers, wearing an off-white, form-fitting gown. She looked like a stunning meringue, her hair and makeup expertly done. I could feel my own dress and hair grow sloppy, ridiculous as I shrunk beside her. The whispers of my guests crowded my ears and mind.

I swore that day would be the last time I allowed Linda into my life.

* * *

After Seth's funeral, as she lay in the doorway, I fought the urge to kick, to spit.

I looked down on her, "How dare you? You are not getting to copy this—*my grief!* No way."

Linda slinked back, scurried away.

I pictured her licking her wounds, circling the neighborhood, green eyes darting around, looking to rub softly against a new leg, purring ever so sweetly.



Nonfiction

Bridge of Dreams

Lev Raphael



Every night when I was growing up, the George Washington Bridge gave me a gift. From my eighth-floor bedroom windows in a slightly shabby Gilded Age apartment house high on a Washington Heights hill, I would watch the golden lights strung along its length come on as if a magician had uttered a loving spell.

For me, as a shy, bookish kid who sensed he was different from his peers but wasn't sure how, that necklace of lights spoke of dreams, connection, and mystery.

I knew that they lit the way to the lush green Palisades across the Hudson in New Jersey, but that was reality. Then there were the schoolbooks which mentioned that a battle had been fought somewhere nearby during the War of Independence. And one elementary school teacher had explained to us that the bridge was nearly 5,000 feet long. Those facts were like something I'd have to memorize for an anxiety-causing quiz. But they didn't matter to my heart.

For me, the lights coming on at dusk signaled a change in the state of quotidian reality. I could dream of traveling almost anywhere deeper into the continent because I lived on the country's edge, the son of immigrants haunted by their horrific past in the Holocaust and struggling to adjust to a new, demanding city that didn't want to know what they had survived. That was the past and New York was surging into the-

future, constantly tearing itself apart to build, build, build.

Gazing at those hypnotic lights that were brighter than stars, I could fantasize about escape. School was behind me, and so was being mocked or bullied by other kids and profoundly harassed by one snooty teacher who seemed to think my living on the border of Washington Heights and Harlem was a sign of inferiority.

From her point of view, she was right. We weren't remotely like the middle-class families whose kids peopled her classes, families who had been in the U.S. for several generations. Mrs. Zimmermann in fifth grade—tall, dour, in perpetual sneakers—was of German-Jewish descent like most of my classmates, but my parents were Eastern European Jews. The European enmity between these two groups which now seems like a rusty, worthless antique, was still toxic and divisive in the 1950s and 1960s. German Jews by their own estimation were more cultured, while they saw their "opposites" as vulgar and crude.

This was ironic, given that between them, my parents spoke nearly ten languages. My classmates with their American names of Michael and Scott and Laura and Richard and Lizzie and Dennis and Ronnie inhabited a different world than mine: they were privileged, going to Disneyland and summer camps, bragging about their expensive models and toys.

But I had my view of the bridge, a glowing promise that the world was all before me if only I left my eyrie and crossed over. Discovered America, and myself.

Image Credit: ricardocostaphotography

Lessons from my Grandmother

Alison Colwell

Step 1: Gather pails of fresh blackberries. Early season berries contain the highest pectin levels and are the best suited for making jam.

Summer was sliding into fall. Plump purple berries hung from the blackberry bushes that crowded the empty spaces between fences and roads, so different from the ordered hedgerows I'd grown up with in England. Grandma handed my sister and me small plastic pails, and we followed her along the driveway, picking berries as we went. My sister grew bored and returned to the house. But I stayed, trying to make a good impression. Though, I ate as many of the fat berries as I put into my pail. Soon sticky juice stained my fingers, and my forearms bore thorn scratches. An hour passed before Grandma decided we had enough.

Step 2: Measure 6lbs of blackberries into a thick-bottomed pot. Gradually heat the berries over a low heat, crushing them slightly with a wooden spoon to release the juices. Bring to a boil and simmer gently for 15 minutes, stirring the whole time.

Grandma tumbled the berries into the pot biggest pot my mom owned. She passed me a wooden spoon as she turned the heat on low. When the berries warmed, their skins burst and deep purple juices filled the pan. I stirred constantly, afraid they might stick, afraid to disappoint her.

I have an old sepia photo of my grandmother. She's sitting in the dirt with five of her eight siblings. She looks about six years old. Their clothing is threadbare, and none of them are smiling. Her mother, my great grandmother, had been wealthy, but her family had disowned her when she fell in love and then married an itinerant labourer. They moved often as he worked as a navvy digging reservoirs. My grandmother understood poverty. She went into service when she was fourteen, first as a nanny, then at eighteen, they sent her briefly to cooking school. The jam she made in the kitchen of the big house had to last until the next crop of berries.

Step 3: Add a splash of lemon juice and stir in 5lbs of sugar. Once the sugar dissolves, increase the heat to high, bringing the jam to a rolling boil. Stop stirring.

When I was thirteen, my mom remarried, and we moved to Canada. Grandma came to visit the next summer. She slept in my bed, and I shared with my sister for the three weeks of her vacation. Till we moved here, she'd been a constant presence in my life. We'd spent every Sunday afternoon at her house, drinking endless cups of tea or tending my grandfather's grave at the local church.

My grandmother was only a couple of years older than my new Canadian stepdad. But she belonged to a different generation. She never wore pants. She tied her scarf tightly under her chin to protect her hair. I'd missed her, but now she was here, she seemed smaller somehow. England is a place of narrow streets, houses with small rooms, and staircases with doors at the bottom; she belonged there, in the place we'd left behind.

Canada was bigger, figuratively as well as literally. The western edge was filled with wide-open beaches and old forests that stayed dark even in the midsummer sun. My stepdad taught us how to dig for clams and roast oysters over a driftwood fire. We ate them straight from the shells. Canada was wild, but I adored the freedom.

Step 4: Bring the jam to the setting point (220 degrees). Perform a wrinkle test on a cold saucer or use a candy thermometer to check it's ready.

Poverty and the hardships of rationing after the Second World War taught her thrift, the importance of not wasting food and how to preserve the harvest for the lean winter months. I grew to be an adult in Canada, but those lessons still rubbed off on me. In my late twenties, I moved off the grid to a small island off the west coast. I spent the summers putting up food, jams and chutneys, tomatoes and salmon. In winter, the shelves of the root cellar bowed under the weight of the jars. Too many jars. Except I still couldn't stop preserving the food, unable to watch it go to waste. I started taking my extra jars to the local farmers' market.

Step 5: Remove the jam from the heat and pour into clean jars. Leave a ¼ inch headspace at the top of each jar.

I only went back to England once, in my early twenties, to visit my grandma. She was physically fit, but dementia had taken hold of her mind. We sat in her small living room, amidst the commemorative glassware and crystal figurines, watching Coronation Street on her small TV while she spun circular stories about her childhood and her family and the perils of marrying for love. She resented the family she never knew, the ones that had consigned her mother to a life of poverty. Even my grandfather, a gentle man loved by everyone, died early, leaving her bitter and alone for twenty years.

Step 6: Process the jars in a boiling water bath for ten minutes. Remove from heat and let rest, undisturbed, till cool.

My own kids are teenagers, older now than when my grandmother first taught me to make jam. This last year has been a hard one. I found myself unexpectedly single, raising two kids on my own. This winter, we had to use the food bank to get by. But there are still rows of jars in my pantry. There's always blackberry jam for breakfast in the morning. She taught me well how to put things by for the times when we wouldn't have enough.



Poetry

The Dugout

Chelsea Coupal

Quick shiver into
summer and our
bodies quiver
beside water,
stone-stillness.

Folded-up new
fawns.

And grass, her one
billion thin tongues, licks us
like a mother.

Quivering breath, maple-
sweet heat, sharp-beat of
crickets. Flutter next to me,
subtle one, and I can't tell:
shudder of pulse or moth
wing?

Under sun plump as a
chokecherry and evening's
gold-thick quilt.

Our bodies braided
as wheat.

Quick, shiver into summer.

One more quiver, it's gone.

Cabbage moths or
his pulse flutters
next to me.

THE SUMMER I LISTENED TO “SUGAR, SUGAR” BY THE ARCHIES A WHOLE LOT

Ken Pobo

At almost fifteen, I felt that I was floating in an air balloon over Villa Park—the fire went out and I began to sink. Clouds that seemed friendly now looked like paid assassins.

One way to relight the fire and prevent a crash was to listen to music, the bubblegummier the better. The Archies took over the radio with a song so sweet it could give you cavities. I wasn't in love then, just waking up to it, scared, preferring a longer air

balloon ride.

The Archies brought me down safely. Love wouldn't be as gentle.

MAPLE

John Grey

Don't worry. The past will be here.
Just as soon as maple seeps to sugar.
The old ways won't stand for these new roads.
And they'll bring laughing children with them.

The kettle knows. It warms at the pace of time reversing.
Ambrosia of a Massachusetts kind does nostalgia one better.
It's not just the mind feels jaunty. The body flexes away
months and years. Veins sweeten the heart like tubes that
drip rich amber from trunk to vat, from hillside to lower
glade. Thoughts do not spill a drop.

No strip malls. No pigeons on the green.
No fast-food hangouts on the truck route out of town.
Eye knows it's done. Hand grips it steady.
1955 is it. Such a burnished gold decanting.
Gaunt February woods. Scattered March budding.
What the calendar doesn't say, the tongue will see to.

The Roots

Zachery Cooper

My grandpa clears
the dry rasp
from his throat,
hacks dust from his lungs.
He pulls his dirt-stained
suspenders tight
& says he'll pay me
a nickel
for every thistle
I kill.

*Get the roots, he says.
Otherwise they come back
strong and angry.*

My father & I sit
on the steps
of his boyhood home.
He giggles.
My grandpa's words
soar over my head
into Missouri's
amber sky.

I am five, or six,
maybe seven,
nothing more
than a blond swirl
of hair and pebble-sized
callouses to my name.

My grandpa's 90,
cornstalk-thin,
bears a farmer's
sun-scorched
skin.

He cradles
a silver coin
in his palm,
stares solemnly
at his founding father's
worn face,
who told him
*if you plant me,
I will bloom.*

We watch him
tower over
a thistle.
It wears a crown
of spikes around
its magenta flowers.

He looks back
to us, his seeds,
and kneels.
His finger
pinballs
past the thorns,
down its spine.
The roots pop
when he twists
& rips it free
from the earth.

Like that, grandpa says,
having pulled
my father's roots
free from the hell
he grew in the depression
of his mind.

Grandpa knows
to trace a weed
to its origins.
He knows it'll poke
& sting as he searches
for its heart,
it'll try to sway
him with elegant purple
flowers & sweet milk.
But if he doesn't
get the heart,
the roots,
it'll come back
stronger and angrier
than before.

Grandpa scares me.
His voice as rough
as the gravel
his spade turned
over.

His voice doesn't scare
my father. Buried
behind throaty words
is a man
who knows
to harvest
what he loves.

He knows
he's responsible
for the seeds he plants,
watering them, tilling
their soil, making
sure their leaves
find light
on the darkest
days.

I watch my father
& his father
wander the yard,
pulling thistles
until a dim dusk
invites fireflies
out for the night.

Grandpa says
he never gets lost
walking the fields
in the dark. Fireflies
always light
the way
home.

Years later,
my father hoists
his father
by tractor bucket
to branches fat
with plums.
I am ten,
crossed-legged,
twirling grass blades
between my fingers.

I am a mute
witness to trust.

My grandpa
stands calm
with his son
at the helm.

His earth-smooth hands reach
a pregnant branch
ready to burst purple,
& he gets to work
& picks,
as he's done all his life.

When grandpa topples over
the bucket's
crooked steel edge,
he hits the ground
with a dull thump,
like plums might.

My father
looks to me first,
then to his father's
limp body
buried under
a fruit mound.

In that moment,
time stops,
and we are there
to harvest grandpa
from the ground.

Ingredients

Becky Nicole James

Chamomile. Mother says I should drink tea
before bed to soothe my cough.
Spearmint. With a long stream of honey, she says.
Lemongrass. Joe boils the water for me
in the screaming kettle he'd thought was a stove decoration.
Tilia flowers. I am inhaling, then drinking, the ability to breathe.
Blackberry leaves. Joe drinks a cup too, peering at me
over the rim of the blue pottery mug. Three weeks, no job.
Orange blossoms. I make lists as I drink—Target,
Office Depot, Home Depot, Wachovia, Wal-Mart.
Hawthorne berries. The honey sinks to the base
of the mug, the way our kisses fall to the end of the day.
Rosebuds. The last sip is the sweetest.

Sugar Bush

Kristen Baum DeBeasi

We scabble the mound, light
ritual fires. Tall figures, naked

stand helpless against us, bare
limbs stretched skyward. We

move among them; press, pierce
their flesh—take slippery, sweet

slickness for ourselves; pierce
again when old wounds heal, open

flesh to renew the flow, the leaching.
Syphoning off life force, we gather

in the lengthening days. Stoke
the fire. Observe this rite of spring.

Figs at the Tomb

Carol Hamilton

They left them, a ritual
of ancient life and death
In Oaxaca the lost one's
favorite foods are placed
on the grave all the long night
of El Día de Los Muertos
We feed our living
or "fast food" to them
take fake flowers
to the cemetery
Things here are swift
and sanitary and practical
We look for no communion
with mysteries Yet sweet figs
will soon ripen in the sun
on my gloss-leafed bush
and I will taste

I Want Sugar Again; Stupor

Susan Vespoli

~ after Diane Seuss's "I Want Drugs Again; Whimsy"

I want sugar again; naivety. Mommy-me in my purple flip-flops
sending Adam, Jake, and Josh to Dunkin' Donuts for my fix.
They were sixteen, steered my hatchback into a drive-thru for sinkers:
Jelly, Maple-frosted, Boston Kreme, luminosity for my
tongue. No thought of calories or tooth-rot; role model
for craving. I jones for pure cane, fat grams, them laughing.
Smashing Pumpkins and Sublime blared from the radio.
His friends called me Mom, pressed faces against the living
room glass window. Ate pounds of deli-sliced Boar's Head on
whole-grain while their favorite bands overdosed on heroin,
my son and his pals singing along in black t-shirts, mohawks,
to "Badfish" and "The World is a Vampire," smoking Newports
on the back porch, me blind, numbed out on sweetness, stupor
in a shiny pink cardboard box, (Sour Cream, Cruller, Glazed).

MILK AND SAFETY

Susan Alexander

*...there is one desire
touching the many things, and it is continuous.*

– Robert Hass

It must be Sunday because Dad's gas station has to be closed.
We're playing statue tag with neighbours on the lawn beside the monoliths—
mounded rhododendrons blooming magenta clusters bigger than our heads—
when he whistles us over, his three little girls.

He looms beside the green Plymouth wagon with its fins.
We pile in, get to sit up front, right beside him on the bench.
The doors slam like shots.
He guns it down the driveway over the ditch.

*Ditch too small a word for that hidden country of frogspawn
and mud skunk. Its steep sides hold pockets of clay we mine
then pinch into sacred vessels—
our pious offerings of seedhead and water*

We're wearing our festal dresses
because it can only be Sunday. Matched lilac acetate,
buttoned and sashed, sewed at night by our zealous mother
waiting up late for Dad to come home.
Our luminous mother who somehow that Sunday is staying home.

Do you know where we're going? Father booms at us in an unknown voice.
No, answers Wendy, eldest and bravest. He whistles again then roars
we're going CRAZY, wanna come? Julie screams. He wild-eyed weaves
to the wrong side of the road—head nodding, eyes close,
his hands slip from the wheel. Faster and faster, the incantation

I scream you scream we all scream for ice cream
we chant and rampage beyond ditches and fields stretched flat for miles
over diked delta land *ice cream ice cream ice cream*

*There is a many-breasted goddess in the Ephesus Museum.
The guidebook claims she is Artemis the Mother.
Artemis, who we know is the everlasting virgin
in whose honour her Amazons cut off one breast to better hold a bow.
Her marble statue is studded with round mammaries like*

soft ice cream cones from the Dairy Queen
where we each lick white nipples of sweet frozen cream
that drip down our flushed arms onto lilac stitching and seams
while pleasure and shame creep over sticky, motherless skin
and we all touch the one desire.

On the way home, Dad sits up front, alone, smoking.
We three climb all the way back to our special seat
facing the rear window. Telephone poles flash past,
the sunlit transformers a sea-glass green.
Together we look into endless blueberry fields,
the stunned arrow of road we are leaving behind.

.

The Sugary Sweet Song

Katherine Shehadeh

In the morning, I call him
a cartoon mosquito. His racquet head
serves up two laminated, candy almond eyes.
I remember quickly gobbling down
from the amber-coloured crystal dish
that doubled as an ashtray
when my grandmother wasn't home
to stop us. His saltwater taffy limbs
slingshot around to meet the dimpled sides
of another dawn's tired skin. *Mommy!*
hops off his pink cotton fluff tongue.
The sugary sweet song, I hear
is short-lived & so I savor
this chance to sing along.

The Children

Cori Howard

carry the Burmese sweetness
like chai served at street stands
in tiny glasses
their skin the colour of the Mekong
their tiny hands grasping mine
never letting go

at the monastery my son
asks questions the monk can't answer
both of us unsure how to hold the mystery
my daughter deflates when she sees
the broken puppies limping over
begging for love

my son gets stomachaches when
he hears us fight
the pain lasts for weeks
my daughter tries to make us laugh
dancing around making farting sounds
desperate for laughter

my heart whisperers
for years
I stayed so I wouldn't break them
but they kept smiling
they were always
unbreakable

Miss Lydia Rawlinson takes her coffee with sugar.

Cath Nichols

Have you read Mary Wollstonecraft? Her Vindication of the Rights of Man, and now The Rights of Women.

These 'rights' she talks of—I cannot see why we need them. We're all owned by someone, it's God's order. I belonged to my father. He died. Now I belong to my brother. This is the way things are; I have no objection... Milk?

I'm glad, perhaps, to be free of a husband! My shares in the business are one-sixth, and though wealth ties me to family, I prefer this bondage to the one made through marriage.

Do you take sugar? Good, I am so pleased! There are some fools who think that by refusing sugar the market will collapse and the slaves will be freed. Such nonsense! If the market fails, the slaves

will be made homeless. My brother, Abraham, made notes on the subject. He says, 'Many have left off the use of sugar for the purpose of putting a stop to the slave trade. If the custom becomes prevalent of eating and using

nothing that has been touched by slaves, we may soon expect to see people in the state of their first nature, naked in the field, feeding like Nebuchadnezzar upon the grass.'

He is right! How can we avoid cotton, mahogany and rum? They are

the clothes we wear, the chairs we sit on, the glass we raise.

Those people who take their coffee sour—

what kind of world are they trying to make? What next?

Will they drink their coffee black, to show sympathy for the cow?!

Who do they want to grow their coffee? Who do they want
to harvest sugar cane? White men?
How much will a cup of coffee cost then?
We must trust our merchant brothers to do what is best

for the economy and for slaves. What we Rawlinsons do
is essential for Lancaster and for Liverpool.
We cannot stop now; too many people rely on us.
Trade has served me well; kept me comfortable.

Besides, whatever Mrs. Wollstonecraft might say,
this business is for the men to decide.

[Part of a radio script commission from Lancaster Litfest, BBC Radio Lancashire and the
Lancaster Museums Services. Unpublished]

Sweets

Dion O'Reilly

She started young, my mother,
beating dogs before
she turned five, and soon after,
landing boards on other
kinder heads, so I was another,
but hidden from friend
or distant family, the only
eyes on me were penned—
rabbits, or choke-chained
mastiffs, horses, oblivious
in their endless fields.

This is background,
so you understand how
I learned to eat, that timeless
evening, bored, when I opened
a cabinet, and everything within,
like sentinels or toy soldiers, lined up
to protect me—jars of Empress jam,
bonbons in boxes, cookie squares
in crackly paper.

Imagine a baby rat, left
alone, no spinning wheel, no soft
fleece covering a wire surrogate.
Just untimed shocks and piles
of confectioner's sugar. Pearly. Cloud-like.
Dropped from above. A love
that kept my secrets.

Sweet Memories

Bailey Schaan

I bake dried buds into cookies,
lay wilting petals on cakes and
fill teabags with clustered blooms.

A diabetic's dream. Sugar is too
sweet so I use flowers to give the
illusion of something candied but not
concrete. Floating lilies on a pond,
dancing granules in the sky.

They remind me of the greenhouse,
my grandmother, and God—
of reaching out to graze what is forbidden,
chastening myself not to sink my teeth into
anything too pleasurable.

Drive-by Daycare

Hope Houston

Three children chortle on an urban street corner
as saliva sunshine escapes from their open mouths.
One's hair blazes backward like a phoenix in flight,
red like the wheels of another's silver scooter.
Their teeth, like floodlights, beam something insatiable.
One's mouth, a volcano, ruptures into song.
Boarded-up buildings form the dollar store's backdrop,
where the trio breaks into a tap on the cracks of the walk.
Arms flap and flail like the plastic bags in their hands,
candy and pop and gum cradled like gold within them.
In my car, sitting at this red light, I, too, return to childhood.
I, too, beam something insatiable, then rupture into song.



Contributors

FICTION

Kristine Scarrow: Kristine (she/her) is the author of four young adult novels and spent the last five years as a hospital writer-in-residence. She is in her final year of the MFA in Writing program at the University of Saskatchewan. She is currently working on a short story collection and lives in Saskatoon.

Peter Alterman: Peter Alterman (*Aunt Elizabeth's Time*) is a member of the Writer's Center in Bethesda, MD and publishes literary fiction, sci-fi, literary criticism, and more. He has been published in *Hidden Peak Press*, *Penumbra Speculative Fiction Magazine*, *The Bombay Review*, *Smoky Blue Literary and Arts Magazine #12*, *Antietam Review*, and more.

Mitchell Toews: Mitchell has placed work in 100 literary journals and anthologies since 2016. A three-time Pushcart Prize nominee, he was a finalist in The Writers' Union of Canada's 2021 Short Prose Competition for Emerging Writers, the 2022 J.F. Powers Prize for Short Fiction, and the 2022 *Humber Literary Review/CNFC* Canada-wide Creative Nonfiction contest. A collection of Mitch's short stories will be published by At Bay Press in Winnipeg in 2023.

Gunnar Ohberg: Gunnar is a student in the MFA program at the University of Saskatchewan. His short stories and poems have appeared in *The Racket*, *in media res*, *The Mark Literary Journal*, and *The Old Red Kimono*. He is currently working on his first fantasy novel.

Maggie Nerz Iribarne: Maggie is 52, living her writing dream in a yellow house in Syracuse, New York. She writes about teenagers, witches, the very old, bats, cats, priests/nuns, cleaning ladies, runaways, struggling teachers, and neighborhood ghosts, among many other things. She keeps a portfolio of her published work at <https://www.maggienerziribarne.com>.

NONFICTION

Lev Raphael: Lev is the author of 27 books in genres from memoir to mystery and has seen his work translated into 15 languages. A former *Detroit Free Press* book reviewer and guest assistant professor of Creative Writing at Michigan State University, he now coaches, mentors, and edits writers at writewithoutborders.com.

Alison Colwell: Alison graduated from the BFA program at UVIC and is now the Executive Director of the Galiano Community Food Program, a charity focused on increasing food security on Galiano Island. Alison is presently writing *Hold On*, a memoir about parenting a child with anorexia, during a global pandemic. Her fiction can be found in *Daily Science Fiction* and the *Drabble*, and is forthcoming in *Flash Fiction Magazine* and her creative non-fiction work in the climate-fiction anthology *Rising Tides* and *Folklife Magazine*.

POETRY

Chelsea Coupal: Chelsea's first poetry collection, *Sedley* (Coteau 2018), was selected by Chapters Indigo for an Indigo Exclusive edition and shortlisted for three Saskatchewan Book Awards; her work has appeared in more than a dozen Canadian literary journals and anthologies, including *Arc*, *Event*, *Grain* and *Best Canadian Poetry*.

Kenneth Pobo: Kenneth is the author of twenty-one chapbooks and nine full-length collections. Recent books include *Bend of Quiet* (Blue Light Press), *Loplop in a Red City* (Circling Rivers), and *Lilac And Sawdust* (Meadowlark Press). His work has appeared in *The Fiddlehead*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Asheville Literary Review*, *Nimrod*, *Grain*, *Hawaii Review*, and elsewhere.

John Grey: John is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Sheepshead Review*, *Stand*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, and *Hollins Critic*. Latest books, *Leaves On Pages*, *Memory Outside The Head*, and *Guest Of Myself* are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in *Ellipsis*, *Blueline*, and *International Poetry Review*.

Zachery Cooper: Zachery holds a BA in Creative Writing from Vancouver Island University (VIU). His work appears or is forthcoming in *Prism International*, *The Malahat Review*, *Queen's Quarterly*, *The New Quarterly*, *Event*, *Freefall*, *White Wall Review*, *Filling Station*, *Broken Pencil*, and *The Quilliad*. He lives in Nanaimo, BC.

Becky Nicole James: Becky earned her MFA in Creative Writing from Queens University. Her poetry, fiction, and nonfiction have appeared in many publications including *Margie*, *Echo Ink Review*, *Birmingham Arts Journal*, and *Moon City Review*, and she writes for the *International Bipolar Foundation*. A former English professor, Becky is a reader for the magazine *Metaphorosis*.

Kristen Baum DeBeasi: Kristen is a poet, writer, and composer whose poetry has appeared in *Enchanted Conversation*, *Blue Heron Review*, *Contrary Magazine*, *Menacing Hedge*, and elsewhere. She is a Best of the Net nominee and was *Moon Tide Press's* Poet of the Month for July 2021. A native Oregonian, she was raised in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and now resides in Los Angeles. When she isn't composing or writing, she loves testing new recipes, watching hummingbirds hatch, and collecting twigs for her fairy garden.

Carol Hamilton: Carol has retired from teaching 2nd grade through graduate school in Connecticut, Indiana, and Oklahoma, from storytelling and volunteer medical translating. She is a former Poet Laureate of Oklahoma and has published 19 books and chapbooks: children's novels, legends, and poetry. She has been nominated ten times for a Pushcart Prize. She has won a Southwest Book Award, Oklahoma Book Award, David Ray Poetry Prize, *Byline Magazine* literary awards in both short story and poetry, Warren Keith Poetry Award, Pegasus Award, and a *Chiron Review* Chapbook Award.

Susan Vespoli: Susan lives in Phoenix, Arizona, where she relies on the power of writing to stay sane. Her poems have been published in *Rattle*, *Mom Egg Review*, *Nasty Women Poets*, and other cool spots. She is the author of two books, *Blame It on the Serpent* (Finishing Line Press, 2022) and the soon-to-be-published, *Cactus as Bad Boy* (Kelsay Books, late 2022 or early 2023).

Susan Alexander: Susan is a poet and writer living in British Columbia on Nexwlélexm/Bowen Island, the traditional and unceded territory of the Squamish people. Susan's work has appeared in anthologies and literary magazines throughout Canada, the U.S., and the U.K. She is the author of two collections of poems, *Nothing You Can Carry*, 2020, and *The Dance Floor Tilts*, 2017, from Thistle-down Press. Her suite of poems called *Vigil* won the 2019 Mitchell Prize for Faith and Poetry while some of her other work has received the Vancouver Writers Fest and Short Grain awards.

Katherine Shehadeh: Katherine is a writer, attorney, and mom of 2, who resides with her family in Miami, Florida. Her recent poetry appears in *Blue River Review*, *Prometheus Dreaming*, and others. Find her on Instagram @katherinesarts or on Twitter @your_mominlaw.

Cori Howard: Cori is a writer and poet living on the traditional unceded territory of the Coast Salish peoples. An award-winning journalist of 30 years, her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Real Simple Magazine*, and *The Independent*, among others. Cori is the editor of the best-selling anthology, *Between Interruptions: Thirty Women Tell the Truth about Motherhood*, and her poetry has been published in *Sustenance and The Sound*.

Cath Nichols: Cath's latest collection is *This is Not A Stunt* (Valley Press, UK). She's chronically ill, uses a wheelchair, and rests a lot. She also writes fiction for children.

Dion O'Reilly: Dion's debut book, *Ghost Dogs*, (Terrapin 2020) was shortlisted for several prizes including The Catamaran Prize and The Eric Hoffer Award. Her second book *Sadness of the Apex Predator* was chosen for the Portage Poetry Series out of the University of Wisconsin's Cornerstone Press. Her work appears in *The Sun*, *Rattle*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Narrative*, and *The Slowdown*, among others. She facilitates workshops with poets from all over the US and hosts a poetry podcast at The Hive Poetry Collective.

Bailey Schaan: Bailey is currently in the second year of her B.A. (Honours) in English at the University of Saskatchewan. Her work has also been published in *Antilang* and *In Media Res*.

Hope Houston: Hope is a 2020 MFA in Writing graduate from the University of Saskatchewan. There, she worked as managing editor for the program's newsletter, social media manager for the *River Volta Reading Series*, and editor of the online journal, the *River Volta Review of Books* (RVRB). For her thesis, she wrote a middle-grade, fantasy novel exploring grief as a spatial process. Houston has poetry forthcoming in Issue 47 of NYU's *Washington Square Review*, and her prose has appeared in *Mystery Tribune* and the RVRB. Her literary influences include Kazuo Ishiguro, Diana Wynn Jones, Flannery O'Connor, and Audre Lorde.

ART

Keitha McClocklin: Keitha recently graduated from the University of Saskatchewan Bachelor of Fine Arts program. Keitha works in a range of disciplines including painting, printmaking, drawing and photography—often weaving techniques from one discipline to another. Her work is characterized by its focus on composition, colour, and pattern. Keitha's techniques and subject matter—fluidly moving between representational and abstract, give her work its unique contemporary feel. You can find more of Keitha's art on her Instagram account @keitha.art.



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