



THE  
FIELDSTONE  
REVIEW

ISSUE 9, 2016



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### Editor's Note

Jade McDougall

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It has been another year of great submissions here at *The Fieldstone Review*, and we have truly enjoyed assembling issue 9 for your reading pleasure. This year was a general issue, and we received a great mix of entries touching on a wide range of themes. Interestingly, this year there were more submissions than usual relating to politics, as well as to dead birds. Coincidence? We hope so. I'd like to thank the authors whose work appears in this issue (Jeffrey Alfier, Stephen Bett, Dallas Hunt, Shannon Jose-Riz, Shannon Kernaghan, Jonas Kiedrowski, Leah MacLean-Evans, Shannon McConnell, Sonnet Mondal, Melanie Oberg, Jared Pearce, April Vázquez, Linda White, Daniel Yetman, Nicole A. Yurcaba), and everyone who submitted pieces this year. It has been a privilege to read and publish your words.

Special thanks go out to our portfolio editors: Tara Chambers (Poetry), Adar Charlton and Martin Winquist (Fiction), and Jessica Ratcliffe (Non-Fiction). They, along with our team of intrepid readers (Jillian Baker, Shakti Brazier-Tompkins, Tara Chambers, Adar Charlton, Sara-Jane Gloutnez, Claire Peacock, Jessica Ratcliffe, Sheheryar Sheikh, Tristan Taylor, Adam Vázquez) had to make some tough choices this year, and I want to acknowledge all the time and care they put into the review process. Were I vested with the power of trophy-giving, this season's MVP would undoubtedly be the ever-composed Shakti Brazier-Tompkins, who not only took on the tasks of copy-editing this issue and reading for two portfolios, but also lent her wisdom and organizational prowess to guiding a rookie Editor-in-Chief through the process of getting this journal online. Finally, you would not be reading these words without the heroic efforts of our web editors, Adam Vázquez and Jon Bath. Thank you, everyone!

We hope that you enjoy *The Fieldstone Review* 9, and if you feel inspired by these talented literary artists, consider lending your voice to next year's issue.

Sincerely,

Jade McDougall  
Editor-in-Chief

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POETRY



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## The Collective, 1950

Jeffrey Alfier

*after Marina Razbezhkina's Harvest Time*

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She jumps from the combine  
as if it were burning, leaps  
over windrows to a crying child,  
sucks a thorn from his foot,  
washes him in ravine runoff.

Her husband, legless from the war,  
watercolors her in a bright green  
scarf – a gift for the rescue.

Harvests are white as homespun,  
wheat on the threshing floor,  
light cut by dust motes,

as butterflies that sift the fields,  
get stranded in bedrooms at night  
like pieces of torn sleeves.

Like the white horse  
she must have dreamed.

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## The Guadalquivir in August

Jeffrey Alfier

Daybreak, and I amble down Almansa  
through haze that screens the thoroughfares.  
This is my timeless habit, as are sleepless  
eyes, heart meds, fried eggs,  
letters I forever fail to send home.

For now, this river grows only silence:  
embankment walls beveled  
with first light, stone stairs that dip  
to its smoke-green glissando.

The sun begins its hard lock on the streets.  
By noon, every doorway will be threshed  
by heat.

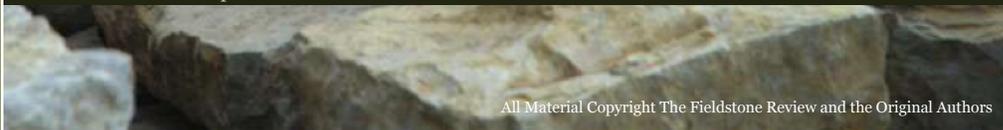
On Isabell's bridge, someone still sings  
last night's ballads. I want to join  
in, but a raw tongue and dry throat  
have stolen the words I need.

The river conducts its first traffic.  
Crows appear unsummoned  
like blown cinders, lumbering in the soft  
surprise of blue, troweling with beak  
and claw the scraps of castoff fish.

I watch the bridge, the errant singer  
now gone. A kestrel's shadow  
wheels in from nowhere,  
hangs flightless over the river.

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## **GOP Candidates (2016) Fight ISIS... On Stage!**

Stephen Bett

All these blubber-boy  
candidates ramping up  
tough talk, raunchy-  
paunchy boys  
blowing out  
noise

They're gonna carpet bomb  
terrorists, fling  
burgers & fries,  
drown caliphates  
in soda

No boot camp for these  
tele-tubbies, they're  
just going to roll  
over Raqqa

Take their sleeper cell  
breath away, breath  
away

breath away

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## Dancing Yellow Thunder

Dallas Hunt

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A shove-off!

Creaking clumsily on one foot,  
followed haphazardly by the other, hang-  
ing in time, your hips swinging,  
staggering to a silence  
that reverberated through  
the hall.

Your forehead gleaming with  
sweat, mouth dry, parched, dancing  
differently than what  
fell from  
elders'  
mouths.

Your soft, worn hands grasp-  
ing for the receiving hands of  
a(n) (inviting) partner, the  
lush manes of mares absent so  
the wind obliges, whirling  
you around, until  
you lie splayed  
on the legion  
floor.

This is no Sun dance, but  
you tap your toes in time with  
the "tsk-tsks," thrust into a  
dance from oblivion, a void with  
no history; another Indian emerging  
from the earth, steeped in mutilated  
self-worth, motivated, they'll say,  
by endless,  
endless thirst.

Next time, I will dance with  
you, Raymond, and we  
will stomp our boots so  
hard we'll create sparks that  
rise to the heavens, that  
call forth clouds and yellow  
thunder, and we will watch as  
they do the electric boogaloo,  
the smell of singed hair  
filling  
the hall.

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### Cracking Open Snow Peas on the Promenade by the Drava

Shannon Jose-Riz

*"Peas are not amused.  
They have spent all their lives  
keeping their knees together."*

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– "Peas," by Lorna Crozier

Dear Lorna,

I think I have been raised a pea.  
I think peas are meant to be punctured,  
manhandled–

see, they don't thrive so well  
in Osijek air.

You're here to adventure,  
explore, he says.

The promenade sprawls naked,  
waiting to be touched,  
to see boys kissing – all these  
bare forearms.

You won't sleep tonight, he whispers;  
the words cling to my collarbone –  
and I say yes, because  
we sleep all too much,  
we readily coma inside  
the tight, green lips  
of peas.

I did not come to the promenade  
to sleep.

So I challenge the life of peas,  
burst them open  
underneath sweaty sheets  
licked by marijuana and Ožujsko.\*

Cast away the shells  
into the Drava river  
like an old skin  
that I convince him, them,  
myself –  
I had never worn before.

---

\* A traditional Croatian beer.

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## Gum Wall

Shannon McConnell

### *Seattle*

The sound of applause trickles down from the market  
signaling another fish has unnaturally sailed into waiting hands.  
Instead of piss, a ritual saturates the alley below,  
a polyphonic chorus of mashing jaws.  
A peculiar fusion of fruit and mint  
scatters helplessly in the air.

Previously a wall of deep scarlet brick and mortar,  
now a fifty-foot stretch of rainbow spectacle,  
constructed one pressed thumb at a time  
by post-masticated rubber.

Tourists congregate in droves  
to pull globs from their mouths,  
and stick a warm addition  
to scarce vacant spots  
on the discoloured bricks.

To unfocused eyes the alley becomes  
a canvas for a modern world map,  
each piece a hardened pin, a statement of existence,  
connecting continents over an ocean of saliva,  
forever bonding lives in impressions of thumbs.

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## April and My Plastic Sunflowers

Sonnet Mondal

The four plastic sunflowers in my bedroom –  
The way they swayed in the ceiling fan's air –  
Were the functional-year-long-April for me.

Fallen twigs of meditating winter  
And the deadwood sanity of their roughness;  
The begging deserts of the patient summer  
And the coarseness of their ravaged mirages;  
The thin tune of the nostalgic autumn  
And the restlessness of their alcoholic breezes  
Were never like fresh seasonal fruits to me  
For I had the functional-year-long-April in my bedroom:  
Those four plastic sunflowers.

Not long, my wedding and divorce –  
Both in their infancy –  
Ended the perpetual April in my room  
By demanding those yellow sunflowers  
In the package of reparation.

It was four seasons ago and the spring of April  
Now seems to be a creepy plastic serpent  
Irresistibly insidious in its illusory cruelty  
as my new girl friend from the same city  
Talked of bringing new plastic flowers in my room.

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## Michelangelo

Melanie Oberg

I know how Michelangelo felt painting the Sistine.  
I too started peeling off my skin in infinite boredom  
To reveal pages –  
Sheaves of dermis, translucent tissue wafting to the floor,  
Little membranes of fascia for binding –  
Paint stains between the cracks on my fingertips,  
And nails torn in the plaster.  
My body, my scaffold, full of lead  
Pigments.

Held patience in my hands –  
Above my brush head  
And wished to  
Cut and bind the vellum  
Of my skin so that I can just paint it  
Sitting down.

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## Is Just a Dream, Dream, Dream

Jared Pearce

Though the novel was not about adultery,  
she fantasized about her teenaged lovers  
all night and confessed to her husband:  
she had cuckolded him in her mind's den.

He said, Why not stop reading the book, then?  
But how could she stop? For the dreamland  
the novel wove was a mystery to discover  
God: how He was in love and our sultry  
Affairs against his passion, and his overwhelming  
adoration – who can win against that?  
A husband or a teen romance can only hope  
to fill a momentary emptiness, scratch an itch.

She read the novel, she passed the glitch  
of jealousy to a scarier ground: to grope  
for how to love and be loved by both God and man,  
battering words for a bridge to that realm.

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### The Forest, 24 October 2015

Nicole A. Yurcaba

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Today we feed the woods our souls.  
We hand-bind ourselves to the soil  
from which we came, to which we will return:

black to brown, brown to black; black to black  
to back against Mother's misty call.

We disintegrate, absolve, into column inches,  
decaying status, sweet decadence,  
stacked *stein auf stein, stein auf stein\**

upon our chests until  
ribs cracking into organs declare mortality.

Somewhere, somewhere  
the wind cries not "Mary!" but  
"Tell me, child, did you remember to pray?"

Did you remember to brace yourself against the oak  
and allow ancestors to course through you?"

Psychosis lies in separation.  
Psychosis lies in separation.  
Commodity employs.

Turn skyward.  
Kiss the sun.

---

\* German for "stone on stone, stone on stone."

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FICTION



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### Snap

Shannon McConnell

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There is a weathered crow carcass crushed on a rusty storm drain. Its belly is ripped open, exposing its skeleton. Its wings bend in different directions like broken crayons, held together by their paper wrappers.

Samantha, thirteen years old, kneels down beside the bird, staring at its thin, withered legs, running parallel to its disheveled tail.

“Do you remember when we had to put Joey down last year?” she asks her younger sister, Erica.

“Yeah, I couldn’t go in the room. It was too sad,” Erica remembers.

“It wasn’t that bad. It was like Joey was there, sick, and then they gave him the needle and he wasn’t Joey anymore.”

Erica winces as Samantha calmly reaches out and pets a clump of feathers on the bird’s awkwardly angled head.

“You know what we should do?” Samantha points towards the belly of the bird. Erica tilts her head to look, but hesitates to get any closer.

“You should probably leave that alone.” Erica checks the quiet suburban street for traffic.

“We should break the wishbone,” Samantha suggests as she touches the defenseless bird.

“No, we shouldn’t. Don’t touch it.” Goosebumps sprout on Erica’s arms as she watches. “If anything, we should bury it.”

“Shouldn’t we get to have the luck that it’s left behind?” Samantha asks, carefully stroking the mangled feathers.

Erica knows that her sister will do whatever she wants.

“Erica, it doesn’t feel anything. It’s empty.”

No matter where Erica looks she can feel the crow’s little eyes pleading with her. Samantha carefully pulls the remaining feathers away from the skeleton, its innards previously expunged by an eager scavenger. She shuts one eye and squints with the other, digging through the mess. Erica pretends to watch for traffic, sweat forming on the back of her neck.

“There it is,” Samantha declares, gripping the “V” of the bone and pulling. A crude “crack” ascends from the bird’s disfigured frame. Samantha swiftly stands up; fingers stained a dirty grey, a small bone in her hand. Erica turns back, her stomach twisting in her torso at the sight of the bone.

Samantha motions for Erica to grip the other side of the bone. Erica reaches out with a wavering hand and pinches it between her finger and thumb. The bone was smaller and rougher than she thought it would be.

Samantha eagerly jerks on the bone, while Erica, eyes closed, stays static. A sharp snap rings out around them.

“Dammit,” Samantha scoffs, holding up the smaller bone. She kicks at the carcass, slamming it against the street curb, scattering mucky feathers and splintered bones, staining her shoe charcoal.

Erica slowly opens her eyes and looks at her piece. The broken bone feels even smaller now, delicate.

“Hey, we should get Slurpees,” Samantha suggests, already crossing the street to the sidewalk, wiping her shoe on a patch of grass.

Erica kneels down beside the bird. Its small black eyes somehow sadder than before. Carefully, she places the bigger bone on top of its chest.

“I’m sorry,” she whispers.

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Old Juan

April Vázquez

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Carefully, Old Juan laid the hand-embroidered napkin across the scratched countertop and began to fill it with tortillas from the frying pan, each as warm and supple as the belly of a newborn puppy. He'd brought the napkin with him from Mexico in a duffel bag full of Matilde's belongings; it was one of a set she'd bought years ago in a market stall near Chapultepec. He'd brought it because the set was one of her favourites and because it reminded him of home, little imagining that in his son's house there would be none. In Santo Tomás, everyone wrapped their tortillas in napkins like these. Doña Eugenia sold them in steaming bundles – thick, hearty, with flecks of cornmeal visible in their fleshy surface, like spots on the skin of the aged – for eight pesos a kilo at the corner of Calle Angel. Everyone there ate them daily, for how else would the children get their minerals? But here, in Carville, Virginia, there were no tortillas worth eating, only thin, prepackaged ones with no flavor – and, Old Juan suspected, no nutrition – in the refrigerator section at Food Lion. Still, one does not give up tortillas at the age of eighty-two.

When he'd pulled the last tortilla from the pan, Old Juan turned off the stove and tucked the corners of the napkin up around them, then with his good hand he took a firm grasp of the little package. He set it on the table between a sticky paste of refried beans and a green tomatillo salsa mixed up in a bright yellow melamine bowl the night before – not pounded out in a proper *molecajete*, for there was no such thing in the house. His son's wife, as she'd remarked pointedly on several occasions, was American. What would she want with a mortar and pestle? No matter that she'd been born in Arizona to Mexican parents; it was a point of pride with her that she didn't eat *chile*. From what Old Juan had seen, she didn't eat *food* at all – just McDonald's, KFC, canned soups, and microwave dinners – but these observations he shared only with Matilde. Why cause trouble with his son?

It had been bad enough that night at the airport, when he'd met his grandsons for the first time and discovered that they spoke no Spanish. Old Juan had been unable to hide his dismay, and he'd seen that Juanito was offended. "We live in the U.S.A., Dad," his son said huffily, and Old Juan had turned his face to the glass of the back seat window and vowed to himself never to mention it again.

He'd made many such vows to himself over the past weeks, things that he wouldn't anger or embarrass his son by bringing up in conversation. The soap that gave him a rash (he'd used *Lirio* for decades, but there was no *Lirio* here, with the closest Mexican grocery hours away); the fabric softener – not *Suavitel* but some American brand in a garish pink bottle whose name he couldn't pronounce – that made his clothes smell like a chemical flowerbed; the barber who shaved off all his hair because Old Juan hadn't been able to explain and Juanito had stepped out for a cigarette; the tasteless white flour tortillas that made a lump in his throat. About these things the old man unburdened himself only when he and Matilde were alone.

And now here she was before him, his precious, beloved Matilde! She'd entered the kitchen as soundlessly as a kitten and sat in the opposite chair watching Old Juan as he lowered himself to a sitting position at the table. With her thin forefinger she toyed with a small hole in the flowery plastic tablecloth where the cotton of the underside stuck through. It was a habit of hers, every mealtime, to worry the hole absent-mindedly, as though she could repair it by the sheer force of will. Matilde had never been able to hear anything out of his place, torn, broken, unusable. Their home in Santo Tomás had been spotless and uncluttered, everything in its place and in good working order. This was what his little Matilde did: fixed things, made things right.

"Did you have a good rest, my darling?" Old Juan asked her tenderly now, noting that her great black eyes were still drawn at the edges from sleep. Matilde made no answer but nodded gently and smiled.

"You made it just in time for the classics hour," said the old man with contentment as he slowly stood again, reaching up to switch on the radio that sat atop the refrigerator behind him. It picked up just the one Spanish-language station, and that inconsistently, with static and interference. But every afternoon he and Matilde listened to the *boleros* and *sones* of the classics hour, reminiscing about when the music was new. It was their ritual.

"Shall I fix you a plate?" Old Juan asked, but Matilde wrinkled up her nose and shook her head decidedly.

"Eat, my lovely, you'll blow away. . ." he urged by rote, but the truth was that Old Juan was proud of his wife's discipline, her lithe figure, like that of a young girl. Even in old age she'd never let herself go the way so many other old women did.

"Pues," he concluded, as he often had during the past sixty years, "you'll have something later, when you're ready." Then a *danzón* came on the radio, and suddenly Old Juan chuckled delightedly. "Do you remember this one?" he asked her.

Matilde grinned, her eyes crinkling at the corners. Of course she remembered.

"It was 1945, wasn't it, my love? How we danced to this song! It was all the rage that summer. Remember how they used to clear the tables from the market square every Friday evening, and the young men would turn out in their zoot suits, the women with their hair done up in those *petateos* that took hours to get right. You'd wear your curlers all morning on Fridays, like Doña Florida on the *tele!*"

Old Juan gave a deep belly laugh, and Matilde beamed demurely, her head inclined forward to reveal the long gray braid wound behind. Then she looked up at him musingly, her eyes shining, and all at once Old Juan had a vision of her – not as she was now, in her old age, but as she'd been that summer of 1945, the summer before they married. She'd been as delicate and graceful as an *alcastráz* flower, her skin the color of almond milk, her eyes like obsidian. How he'd burned for his Matilde those Friday nights, holding her little body in his arms, the promise of love yet to be fulfilled unspoken between them. Then in the fall they'd married and she became his, truly and completely his. Within a year she'd borne him a son, another Juan, but the delivery almost killed her and they hadn't had more children. Looking back now, he saw her long recovery then as a precursor of lifelong frailty, culminating in her final long illness last year. . .

Then another song began, a story of love and loss half a century old.

*"Ya no estás a mi lado, corazón,  
En el alma sólo tengo soledad. . ."*

Old Juan stood slowly, leaving his unfinished meal on the table, and reached up to the radio, turning its dial to full volume so that the sound of the song filled the kitchen. He held out his palsied hand to Matilde. She put her hand softly in his and took a step toward him, wrapping her other arm around the old man's stooped back, nestling her head against his thin chest. They danced, attuned to the same rhythm, and it was as though the years fell away from them. Like youths of twenty again, their hearts beat together, their steps, steady and firm, forming a pattern on the cheap linoleum floor as they swayed from side to side. Old Juan felt a lucidity, a unity of thought, rare these days, and in the light of that clarity, he saw that all his life had been lived to bring him to this moment, to prepare him for this certainty: the realization of how utterly, how wholly and uncompromisingly, he loved his wife. For this he had lived, nothing more – to love Matilde.

Then a voice broke in upon Old Juan's thoughts.

"Dad! Dad!" Juanito crossed the kitchen in great strides toward the radio, which he switched off in one deft motion. "Sit down, before you fall again!"

Old Juan stared at his son as though he were a stranger. Surely this couldn't be his little Juanito, whose thin face and great soulful eyes as a child had so resembled Matilde's – not this hulking, red-faced creature with wrinkled shirttails hanging loose over his size 40 pants, scarcely covering the fat rolls underneath. And behind him, the bleach-blonde that reminded Old Juan of Miss Piggy from *The Muppet Show*, who could she be?

"Juanito –" the old man began in a choked voice, reaching out toward him with his good hand.

"It's John, Dad."

Old Juan stopped abruptly, staring again at his son. Then the old man heaved a deep sigh and turned away. He shuffled through the open doorway toward his bedroom down the hall. When he reached it, he sat down heavily on the twin-sized bed in which he slept, night after night, alone. He didn't look at the photograph on the bedside table. He didn't reach up to wipe the hot tears that seeped from his eyes, making trails down his leathery face. He seemed unaware of everything around him. A single word – *Matilde* – escaped his lips, a word, whispered under his breath, so soft that it was hardly a word at all. It was a plea. A prayer.



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## As Good a Day as Any

Linda White

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Calvin Harrison turned down the dirt road and braked. He listened to the throb of the big diesel and sighed. He was going to miss his new truck. It made him feel like someone else – not the friendly neighbourhood pharmacist, not the hen-pecked husband, and definitely not the doting father. Someone you saw in commercials – a little taller and straighter. Someone with flinty blue eyes, whose tight Wranglers bulged in all the right places.

He didn't mind the doting father image. He and his daughter, Natalie, had one of those perfect relationships where they laughed at each other's jokes and each knew what the other was thinking. He'd spoiled her and if he had it to do again, he'd spoil her more. No regrets.

That's why it felt worse than betrayal; it was devastation. Natalie wasn't his. In his mind's eye he could see himself standing stunned.

"What do you mean she's not mine?" he'd asked when the silence had stretched so tautly he knew something would break. His wife had looked at him with determined eyes.

"She isn't yours, Calvin. I wasn't ever going to tell you, but I want out. I can't do this anymore." Mim, his wife of twenty years, was leaving. She went on explaining, but he wasn't really listening. All that mattered was the shattering revelation. His beloved Natalie, his Tallie, wasn't his. A few weeks and their marriage was over. Twenty years dissolved with a few strokes of a pen.

Calvin shook his head to clear it. Pale light fingered the horizon and touched the clouds that had gathered to greet the sun with pink gold. Mim would have a name for the colour, something from the new palette of paints at Home Depot. Pink Desire, Reef Rose, Peach Parfait. Pink Abalone. Mim – so tied into things that didn't matter. She'd be happy choosing the new colour for the walls and happy while she squabbled with the painters. Almost before the paint dried, she'd start getting restless again. It was the same with her hair. When he met her, it had been a shiny blonde mane. She could have modeled for l'Oreal or Clairol. God knows she used enough of their products over the years. Always experimenting beyond blonde. Never happy with the previous tint. He never knew what to expect. Wild Irish Red, Mahogany Fire, Ebony Ice. Then there was the chunking and streaking. Mim said no one had a natural hair colour any more. When Cal tried to summon up the shade her hair had been when they met, he couldn't. He was living with a stranger. Sometimes he watched her when she wasn't looking and by narrowing his eyes and squinting tried to conjure the image of the girl he had married. Occasionally, he thought he caught a fleeting resemblance.

The horizon burned gold fire now where the sun began its shallow ascent into the fall sky. The clouds radiated gilt light. The air was still.

It was as good a day as any, Calvin thought.

He would have liked to take Mollie for a last walk but it wouldn't have been fair to the little mongrel. He couldn't leave her in the truck even though someone would find her... just like they were going to find him.

Light raced across the hilltops, casting the hollows into shadow and outlining the dark limbs of aspen trees with tinsel trim. Time was getting short. His father used to say, no time like the present. Already the siren of lethargy threatened to mire him in inaction.

He lifted the shotgun from the truck seat. Its double barrel glinted in the early light and the handle felt cold. The acrid scent of gun oil hung in the air and there was a sharp snap as Cal broke the gun to load it. He slid two magnum shells into place and there was a second snap as he closed the breech. Magnums... he would only need the first one but he didn't want any mistakes.

He tried not to think about Jim Craddock, who botched the job and actually needed the second shell. He must have lost his nerve at the last minute and only his jaw had been blown away. He'd staggered around his game room, splattering blood and howling in outrage. Then he'd finished what he started.

Cal killed the truck's engine. He wasn't about to destroy the interior. Maybe Mim could get a decent price for it after... even with its unfortunate history. He climbed out and closed the door quietly. No need to slam it; the truck wasn't a year old yet. A breeze sprang up and carried the spicy fall air up the hill to Cal. When he looked out across the valley, he saw a doe standing next to a stand of willows. She had seen him and was testing the air cautiously but it was another month until hunting season opened and she was more curious than scared. He watched her for a minute. A fawn stepped into the clearing and Cal could see it was sleek and healthy, phantom grey in its new winter coat.

When he started down the slope, the whitetails turned to step delicately into the bushes. Cal headed west. There was a small lake... the locals called it Schubert's after an early settler – and at this time of the morning, the bright yellow leaves of the poplars would reflect perfectly from its cobalt depths. Those same poplars protected it from errant puffs of air and made it a picture perfect enough for a calendar.

Cal stood for a couple of minutes. Maybe if things were different between him and his wife... but they weren't. Maybe if Tallie... but he couldn't think of her; he just couldn't.

Minutes later the shotgun blast sent the doe and youngster deeper into the bush, their white flags flashing once as they disappeared. On the hilltop, Cal's Dodge waited in splendour, silhouetted against a cerulean sky that promised early snow.

The silence was absolute. Then the breeze brushed dried grass blades against each other. Aspen leaves like gold foil coins rattled together. A crow flew up and landed at the top of a tree, cawing raucously.

Cal emerged from the western woods. He was a dark shadow against their colour and it was him the crow was scolding. He held the shotgun gingerly and broke it to remove the remaining shell.

"Damn it, shut up," he muttered. The crow cocked its head as though listening. "It's just not a good day to die."

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the fieldstone review

A Cross Seasoned Ceres  
David Verman  
Navigating through the labyrinth of rain filled potholes, James pulled the Chevrolet Blazer to the edge of the farmstone, careful not to jostle his wife, Adrienne. Mud speckled the windshield as they chugged up and down.

She leaned back with her eyes closed to combat her nausea, and with a flick of his wrist, James cut the engine. The whole world went silent aside from the metallic plop of raindrops freefalling from the eaves onto the roof of the truck.

"You still doing okay?" he asked.  
She nodded, but didn't open her eyes.  
Sighing, James swung his mud-splattered door open and stepped into a puddle.

Even though the rain had stopped, all the cross still baddled together as one barbe with twelve tails flicking away from. A sharp cone cut drew James's eyes to a cross balanced on a barbed wire fence starting at him with its head cocked. It was missing a toe on its right foot and had trouble staying upright. James made a sucking noise with his lips and the cross ruffled its feathers, flew into the surrounding trees, and then made another obnoxious call.

Slaking into mud to the top of his ankles, and feeling the stones underneath through his boots, James nudged across the driveway to open Adrienne's door. She stepped down with his help, and he handed her a navy umbrella. Opening it, she held it above the two of them as they staggered into the house. As if not to break her, he laid her with care on the sofa.

"The sound of the rain reminds me of when I was a kid," she said.  
"Why's that?" asked James as he stepped into the kitchen to hold the kettle.  
"Going camping, sitting in the tent, waiting for it to stop while dad brought the car around. Good memories."

After bringing Adrienne tea and painkillers, James sat with her until her medication caused her to fall asleep under a pile of blankets. James sat comfortably in a t-shirt and jeans, but she shivered even under the covers. How it pained him to watch her suffer.

James carried an English muffin onto the rain-covered veranda. He used a rug to dry a wicker chair that overlooked the fields. The rain on his arm stood on end when the breeze blew, and he sank into his seat - after several minutes of sitting in the humming fog, his clothes became damp.

The cross with the missing toe perched again on the barbed wire fence and eyed him with the same curious expression as before. Its wings glided in the rain and water dripped from its feathers as it flittered onto the wooden railing five feet in front of James. He rewarded the bird's brazenness with a quarter of the muffin. It gobbled it up as soon as James offered it, and the animal stared at him, as if wondering if he would share the rest.

"Wait a moment," said James to the bird.  
He opened the delivery screen door and sauntered into the kitchen with the intention of making more coffee, but Adrienne coughed, and by the time he made it outside again, the cross had flown away.

Adrienne's lungs rattled with the agonous sound of death. Gritting his teeth, James turned away and waited for it to either pass or for her to hark up a lung.

"Are you alright?"  
She dipped her chin in what might have been a nod and smiled. If only she would speak her mind and tell him how she really felt - she didn't want to burden him, but pretending to be okay was more heart-wrenching than being honest. The most he had seen her do was to look at him with the same life that would be expected of a woman in the prime years of her life, but the rest of her was frail enough to break at the faintest touch.

"I'm sorry," she said.  
"You're sorry?"  
"For making you stay here with me. I know you'd rather be at the clinic."

"Cherise is at the clinic. It will be okay."  
She closed her eyes and fiddled herself against her pillow.

\*\*\*

The next day, the cross landed on the same spot on the fence, staring at James with its inquisitive expression. James held out half a muffin and the bird glided to the setting wooden planks of the veranda and ate from his hand.

He named the cross Ceres after the Roman Goddess of the harvest. He didn't have any crops, only a few empty fields, a dozen cows, and a barn of hens too stubborn to lay eggs, but the name still seemed appropriate.

For two months, Adrienne's condition stagnated, not improving as her doctors had promised, but not worsening either. Three mornings a week they would drive into the city to visit the hospital and participate in the experimental treatments on which the last of their hope hung. Afterward, she would fall asleep on the couch, knocked out from the effect of being anything other than sleeping. James would sit on the veranda with a bag of bread for Ceres until he heard her stir or cough.

"What are you going to do if...?" she asked when James brought her tea.  
He rested the cup on the table and sat across from her. "I think I'll go back to the city."

"I know you never wanted to live here at all."  
"But the fresh air is good for your lungs, and this is where you wanted to be."

She turned to the window. The rain had slowed to a drizzle. "Did you know there's a weed for that after-rain aroma?"  
"What is it?"

"Petrichor. Isn't that something? It comes from the soil. It releases a chemical in the air that we breathe in. I think that's my favorite smell."  
"I don't want to live here without you."  
"But the farm's been in my family so long, it's a shame to sell it."  
"Maybe your cousins will take it."

She didn't say anything, but instead rested her head on his chest until she drifted asleep. He had known with certainty that they were in the final hours, he would have had time to prepare for her passing.

\*\*\*

After a brief period of activity, where Adrienne managed to pick the blueberries from the pile behind the property and make jamules with those blueberries the next morning, she died within a week, silently, as if unbeknownst to the world except for James and her closest family members.

Ceres was present at the wake, solemn in all black like the other mourners, and loomed in the trees while the guests gathered. Six people came in total.

"I'm so sorry for your loss" said Gabriela, Adrienne's youngest cousin, when she was leaving with her husband.  
James glanced away until he was sure he could speak. "Thank you, but it's all our loss."

She rested a sympathetic hand on his shoulder. "Will you stay here?"  
"I don't think so. You know, with the clinic and everything... Actually, Adrienne said you might have an interest in buying the property."

She shared a subtle look of uncertainty with her husband. "We'll see, but with the timing and..."  
James smiled and nodded.

\*\*\*

When the guests left, James was left with one companion, at least for as long as the weather allowed. Ceres drifted down from the treeline onto the veranda, and James threw crumbs as he ate. Ceres had a look in her eye as if she could sense his vortices but couldn't formulate the words to console him.

Loneliness overcame James within a matter of weeks without the frequent trips into the city. Life on a farm that he had no desire to live on was a life of boredom. After feeding the cows in the morning, there wasn't much else to be done, but because so desperate for attention that he even took to conversing with Ceres.

"Are you going to come with me when I move back to the city? I know you'll like the parks, all the garbage you can rummage through. How about it, eh?"  
The bird's face filled with an unnamable level of human expression: empathy, curiosity, compassion.

The last place he wanted to be stuck was the farm, and, as expected, Adrienne's cousin and her husband looked on as potential buyers. Even if he could find a patron, he'd promised Adrienne not to let it out of the family - he had two hundred acres of fields, three university degrees, and didn't even know how to turn on the tractor.

Every time Ceres approached James, she grew braver until the climactic moment of landing on his shoulder. James had his hand to Ceres, reading a newspaper and enjoying the dying hours of sunlight on an August evening when Ceres plopped down with the stealth of a covert military aircraft. James sprang to his feet and Ceres flapped her wings to keep her balance. When James realized what was happening, he sat back down and waited for the bird to regain its footing. He cringed, waiting for Ceres to bite off his ear.

\*\*\*

In September, James found a buyer for the property - an American with thick Russian accents, who had even less farm experience than himself, if possible.  
"What's the scrage?" the man asked.  
"About two-fifty."

The man nodded and stroked his goatee. "This is embarrassing but... how much is an acre?"  
James opened his mouth, but then realized he hadn't the faintest idea. The two men laughed, and two days later, they drew up the preliminary paperwork.

When Ceres visited that day she landed on the barbed wire fence enclosing the cattle but wouldn't land on the veranda, and when James approached, she flew away. Not one to believe in the supernatural or find meaning in what could just as easily be coincidental, to James, it seemed obvious that the bird's odd behavior must have had a logical cause even if the couldn't think of what it might be. Maybe she sensed a change in his body language - he read that some birds could do that.

The last time James saw Ceres was on an afternoon during the final warm days of September.  
He sat on his usual spot on the veranda and heard a cross cawing from the treeline, nothing unusual, but soon an entire chorus of crows encircled, and even the cattle joined in, nesting - phoning - for relief from the awful noise.

James sprang from his seat to witness the commotion. Two other crows, thirty percent bigger than Ceres, chased her through the trees with malice gleaming in their red eyes. They knocked her out of the sky, and she collapsed into a heap. James ran toward the scene and tossed rocks at the birds. He hit one of the creatures square in the sternum, causing it to tumble from the sky.

"Bastards," he said to himself.  
The cross he hit regained its wits and flew away unharmed.

An animal had never looked as human as the moment Ceres looked at James's in the final moments of life. It opened its beak, and then lay still. Fear. The creature felt fear.

\*\*\*

James buried Ceres in the blueberry patch behind the house, and while he was paying his respects the wind knocked his hat off, tossing it toward the empty fields. He bent over to pick it up and stared out at the flat land. Maybe in another life he would have made a great farmer. He could have spent his days tilling in the field and might have found meaning in the stars that were always cloudy in the city. But he wasn't a farmer, he was a doctor, and it was time for him to go back to the life he left behind - away from the memory of Adrienne, away from Ceres - where he could pretend nothing had changed.



NON-FICTION



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## Last Chance for Icons

Shannon Kernaghan

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I shed my everyday skin, an epidermis of to-do lists and brain-numbing minutia, to travel with my friend Karis. Destination: Greece, for an experience awash in mythology and olive groves.

Although I brought a list of Greek phrases, I rarely remembered them in time. In my defense, the word for "yes" sounded like "no" and a simple "thanks" involved four syllables.

I didn't feel hampered because many of the Greeks communicated seamlessly in English. And while the people made themselves clear, some of the printed material was lost in translation. Take the belly dance CD I bought, not for the music but for the song titles: "My Bouzouki's in High Spirits," "You'll Get Used to Me Little by Little," "A Secret Gnawing," "Off with Grievances and Sorrows," and my favourite, "I Do Not Own Mansions or Have a Pot."

I don't own mansions either, but I do own a pot or two. All are from the Gordon Ramsay collection. As for the shape of my bouzouki, that's something I'll discuss with a partner. When I have a partner.

*Guidebook: Sightseeing features the Acropolis and Parthenon, plus views of the Agora, Royal Palace, Temple of Zeus and Hadrian's Arch.*

My travel motivation wasn't solely to experience the Grecian marvels I studied in Mr. Edmond's twelfth grade history class. No, it was to forget about Petey, a man whose name always reminded me of a parrot's. Petey was a heart-breaking partner, one who pulled disappearing acts on paydays. After gambling away his moneys on winking VLT's and come-hither blackjack tables, he'd fly back through my open window. When I finally heeded the sensible warnings from friends and family, I closed the shades on home and heart. Next, I tossed the millet treats (purple fleecelined hand cuffs, bedroom side table) and threw away every belled mirror (framed pictures of Petey flashing his disarmingly crooked smile, disarming enough that I ignored my three-dates-before-sex rule that night after Earls . . . hell, I took that rule and lined the bottom of my bird cage).

*Guidebook: In Mycenae, see the Treasury of Atreus, the Beehive Tombs, Lion Gate and Agamemnon's Palace. Don't miss the amphitheatre of Epidauros before touring the Olympic Stadium.*

The translation delights didn't end with music. While ordering lunch at an outdoor tavern near Syntagma Square in Athens, Karis read aloud a typo-riddled blurb from the back of her menu: "This store is obliged to dispose of printed sheets, at a special place by the exit for the expression of any complaint whatsoever, with content for the market police, the hygiene department or the fiscal department."

*Who am I to complain, lazy me,* I thought in a mellow mid-afternoon wine buzz, my stomach stuffed drum-tight with succulent tomatoes, grape leaves, and olive oil. After ten days I couldn't decide which greeting to use, *kalimera* or *kalispera*, depending on the time of day. When I paid the bill I took no chances and simply smiled in the direction of our server.

I wasn't always lazy, and arrived on schedule for every tour and event. I climbed a thousand stone steps and rambled through so many temples – Athena, Zeus, Apollo – that I forgot the details, retaining only images of revered ruins where Karis and I held hands to our hearts.

For me, Greece was a land of discovery, past and present. Greece was also a land of icons, available at every street stand and corner store. With Petey off the radar, I focused on collecting the Holy Virgin Mary, weeping, black, or pensive, from tiny key chains to bulky triptychs.

And if a suitcase full of the Virgin Mary wasn't enough, I added an assortment of Byzantine saints. Something about the word Byzantine sent an unexplainable frisson of pleasure up my vertebrae. (Weeks after I arrived home, my mental abacus added two plus two to equal a long-forgotten crush on that same grade twelve history teacher. Damn his woody cologne and boot-cut Levis as he soared the classroom aisles.)

*Guidebook: We invite you to an evening excursion at a taverna in Plaka. Excellent food served in a lively atmosphere, and entertainment through dances and music.*

I started to laugh again, feel lighthearted. In a restaurant and seated close to a troupe of Greek folk dancers, one of the dancers suddenly stopped in front of me and stuck his shoe under my nose. His toe sported a gigantic yellow pom pom. The man yelled something in Greek and pointed to that fuzzy pom pom. Was I supposed to stroke it? Kiss it? I did both and now could be married to a Greek man. I only hope he owns a pot.

I have no memory of what caused the sparrow-brown bruises on my shins that I saw when pulling up my socks the next morning. I blamed the anise-flavoured ouzo. I also blamed the Metaxa brandy that smelled like Old Spice and tasted like gasoline. Worse, it made me snore like a lawn mower in my hard twin bed.

"I dreamed a bunch of bikers were chasing us," Karis said into the bathroom mirror, smearing concealer under her eyes, "but I woke up and the motorcycle noise was your snoring!"

"Sorry, but when in Greece . . ." I wasn't completely sorry; my friend's pillow-muffled sobs awakened me every second night. Karis had come to Greece to honour her recently deceased mother who'd planned to return to her homeland before the cancer whispered, then roared. I recall half a dozen blue-framed posters of Crete and Santorini in Karis' family home.

*Guidebook: Bask in a four-day Aegean cruise where you can spend time in the playground of the rich and famous on the island of Mykonos.*

The usual destinations for travellers – Rhodes, Mykonos and Patmos – were picturesque, although it was the inconsequential moments that pushed deep roots into my psyche, especially the tan-furred dogs and one-eyed cats that coiled around my legs. These strays recognized the hopeful rustle of a plastic bag, one that promised leftovers. I gathered chunks of meat and cheese after each meal, enough to fill a few flea-scratched bellies. Each dog's grinning pleasure from a gentle pat lingered in my memory, longer than any piece of antiquity I studied through nose-smudged glass at the National Archaeological Museum. All fascinating, these antiquities I read about since high school, and all forgettable. Excluding the conjured scent of Mr. Edmonds. That scent glided alongside as I circled the Grecian terrain in a bus filled with eager-eyed tourists in wrinkled washable cotton. All with their own agenda, their own baggage.

It was the cat and dog stories that I continued to mention, not the meandering map of my itinerary. It was those memories that occupied my dreams as I hugged my colossal pillow and for months murmured Petey's name – *fly home . . . fly away* – into the dark night.

*Guidebook: After breakfast, bid farewell to new friends as we transfer you to the airport for your return flight home.*

When Karis and I rushed through the airport to find our homeward terminal, we passed a kiosk that brimmed with souvenirs. In addition to packages of freeze-dried olives in shades from green to black, the faces of a dozen Madonnas and her requisite halo broadcast from every shelf.

"Last chance for icons," Karis called out. "You must have an empty corner inside that carry-on."

"No, I'm good," and I patted a bulging bag that slapped my thigh with each fast step.

My friend was teasing about my frenzied packing the previous evening and how I had to choose between scuffed Adidas and a carved wooden panel depicting the Holy Virgin. The sneakers landed noisily in the hotel trash can and I carefully swaddled the Virgin in my hoodie.

I could hardly wait to land; I flung apart my seatbelt before the plane came to a complete stop. Then I could hardly stand still as luggage tumbled from the carousel's grunting man. All I wanted was to hug my friend goodbye and hurry home, to lay out my treasures across the bedspread. Now that Petey no longer occupied one half of my nest, there was plenty of room to display my icons. And spread my wings.

"Opa!" Karis shouted for the tenth time when climbing into her cab.

"Opa to you, girlfriend!" I shouted back, my grin wide and idiotic, not caring who heard or watched.

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## RE: Improving Saskatoon by purging undesirables from downtown

Jonas Kiedrowski

July 29th, 2013

His Worship Don Atchison

City of Saskatoon

222 3rd Avenue North

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7K 0J5

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Dear Your Worship:

re: Improving Saskatoon by purging undesirables from downtown

I write today regarding the undesirables loitering about downtown. Surely you too have seen them, perhaps while you wait at a bus stop. They chortle maniacally, pull off shady deals, and act as though the law does not apply to them. Often in clusters and difficult to walk around, these people are completely oblivious to the citizenry. That is, until they want something from us. Then they're in our face looking for attention.

As far as I'm concerned, these businessmen are ruining downtown!

Now I admit that I've never engaged in a substantive conversation with these lazy bums. But they're different from me. Therefore they must be lesser people than me. And you know what I find most reprehensible? When they do speak up, they're usually looking for handouts! Just this spring they were begging – begging – to get out of paying property taxes. We both know that if these lollygaggers simply worked harder, they wouldn't need handouts. It really burns my assessment.

Enough is enough! It's time for Saskatoon to take action. We need to purge these undesirables from our downtown! Obviously, the most expedient solution is to starve them out by removing a key need for their survival. With this in mind, I have taken it upon myself to observe their one commonality: They are all clad in suits and other business attire. It thus stands to reason that if these undesirables cannot get their hands on suits downtown, they will not hang out downtown.

The solution is clear: Let us tear down the suit stores downtown! It is only by taking the wrecking ball to the peddlers of business attire that we can purge this dangerous filth from our city centre.

It is doubtful that my solution will stop these leeches from continuing to ask for special breaks. However, it will move the problem away from my personal and immediate sphere. Therefore, in my mind the problem will be solved. I am sure it will be in yours too.

Helpfully yours,

Jonas Kiedrowski

PS – Could you please mail me a new Route 12 and Route 14 bus schedule? I want to double-check that peak-hours service through City Park has been cut in half.

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## Cheeky Monkey, Or the Strangest Sentence on My Hard Drive

Leah MacLean-Evans

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Have you ever written topless? At your desk, the door to your room open behind you because you are alone in the apartment. Everyone goes to their real jobs and you sit and the bra band is gone and your ribcage can finally open. Did you know that's supposed to happen when you breathe? Your lungs are bigger than you know. Notebook pages brush the underbelly of your breast.

I only ask because this story is about tits. It ends weird shit and it starts with some smartass hipster poets but mostly it's all tits in between. Maybe you think you know what that means and I suppose you could be right, who knows.

I used to write normal stuff, with fairies and satyrs and gods and shit. I wrote more than one story about goats. Anyway I'm saying I don't start stories about tits on purpose. But it was almost midnight and Aiden showed up at Emma's apartment where everyone but me was already drunk and he'd bought a typewriter from some high school kid online. It came with ribbons and everything for only fifty bucks.

Emma's apartment should have been an omen, a tiny one-bedroom downtown that she shared with her animator/skate-board-shop-owner boyfriend. It was crammed with vinyl records whose faded covers I didn't recognize, not that I would anyway. I wouldn't recognize Justin Bieber standing in front of me. When Aiden arrived later he oohed and aahed over the collection, picking out his favourites for Emma's record player. In attendance were also Luke and Dionne; they were all poets I'd met in a writing course. When the semester ended we decided to keep in touch, and this was the group's first attempt at socializing outside class.

"Here's your prompt," Aiden said. Aiden the bearded wonder who had pointed ears. Our messiah who had brought us the holiest of all outdated writing hardware. Aiden who read Michael Ondaatje, which pleased Luke, who also read Michael Ondaatje, although neither of them liked *The English Patient*. I still have never read *The English Patient*, partly because of them. Aiden was a Campbell. Still is. Matt the MacDonald, also from the class, was absent that night. Perhaps if we'd had the MacDonald in the same room as the Campbell some clannish force of fate would have been thrown off balance, changed the course of history, spared me from what was to come.

Aiden said, "Here's your prompt," and pulled a stool up to the coffee table where he plunked the typewriter's elephant case: "cheeky monkey ice cream."

It should be said, if only for Aiden's sake when he reads this, that I hate these games. I hate continuing stories that aren't mine and I hate improvising and I hate performing on command. But Aiden snapped open the case and unfolded the typewriter over the table and wound a white sheet deep into its belly.

Emma wrote first and then Aiden and then Luke, but Dionne was refusing her turn because her boyfriend had just dumped her. And that's when I got worried because I realized I would have to follow Luke. A significant proportion of Luke's poetry is allegorical for sex and the prospect of writing a collaborative sex poem with a group of intoxicated poets I had no desire to see naked horrified me.

As per the rules, when I sat at my typing post, I read only Luke's text, the rest of the sheet folded back.

were less than helpful. like modern octogenarians sans teeth and gnawing the air without control. this was only a small bit of what was to come and she had to get home soon. her ice cream was melting.

He had written, and I was relieved. I began to write,

its

with no capital, because the shift key didn't work. And then, aiming for the beginning of an article, hit

t

and the typewriter stalled. And the paper shifted of its own agency, sliding to the right with apparent intention, such that the 't' landed on the left of the beginning of the line and in effect I had written

tits

Well fuck, I thought. And Aiden was over my shoulder laughing and Luke was saying, "You can't take it back, you have to keep going," and I thought, screw you guys, you want cheeky monkey ice cream tits, that's what you're getting.

Aiden discovered in Emma's collection a retro whale sounds vinyl of which he was particularly fond and Emma rejoiced because it was supposedly amazing and no one else knew about it. They turned it on and the high-pitched tremble of whale vocalizations crackled on the player as I wrote.

There was no hope for me in that den of hipsterism, only the inevitability of my inept uncoolness. I never meant to write about tits. And definitely, oh definitely, not in relation to cheeky monkey ice cream. In fact, I erased it from the dropbox of my mind, until days later Aiden typed up the hardcopy and sent it to us. It's infamous, now, a bizarre inside joke relived at every new party, in retrospect stranger than it is funny.

tits, he thought looking at the ice cream bowl. it looks like tits, cleanly scooped and cherry-topped. she'd let it melt again, and it dribbled down the side of the bowl. the monkey watched her eat the ice cream and licked his lips.

Later we voted unanimously that Emma, chill, sweet Emma, was the coolest person in the universe, and later Aiden left to travel the world then learn museum restoration in a tiny college town, and later Luke lived in the basement of his Jewish mother for years while learning to cook and tearing it up on Growlr, and Dionne moved West all the way West to the coast. And some of us stayed in touch and some of us didn't. And Cheeky Monkey sits still in my hard drive, an awkward couch-surfing undergrad friend.





CONTRIBUTORS



1. **Introduction**  
The purpose of this document is to provide a comprehensive overview of the project's objectives, scope, and deliverables. It serves as a guide for all stakeholders involved in the project, ensuring that everyone is aligned and working towards the same goals.

2. **Project Objectives**  
The primary objectives of this project are to develop a robust software solution that meets the needs of our users, while also ensuring that the development process is efficient and cost-effective. Key objectives include:

- Develop a user-friendly interface that enhances the user experience.
- Implement a secure and scalable backend system.
- Ensure the project is completed within the specified budget and timeline.

3. **Scope of Work**  
The scope of this project includes the design, development, testing, and deployment of the software solution. It also encompasses the documentation of the system and the provision of training for the end-users. The project will be managed using agile methodologies to allow for flexibility and frequent communication.

4. **Deliverables**  
The project will produce several key deliverables, including:

- A detailed project plan and schedule.
- Functional software applications for both the user interface and the backend.
- Comprehensive test reports and quality assurance documentation.
- Final deployment and user training materials.

5. **Conclusion**  
This project represents a significant opportunity for our organization to improve its operational efficiency and user satisfaction. By following the outlined objectives and scope, we are confident that we will achieve a successful outcome that meets all the project's requirements.

