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# Cover Art

LANDON MACKENZIE



*Houbart's Hope (Blue) Tracing One Warm Line*, by Landon Mackenzie

2001–04; Synthetic polymer and appliqués on linen

228.6x312.4 cm

Collection: Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal

Photo: Steve Farmer, Halifax

## EXHIBITIONS OF THIS WORK:

Studio Preview, West 3rd Ave, Vancouver, 2005

"New Worlds" (with Alison Norlen), Gallery of the Confederation Centre for the Arts, Charlottetown, 2006

Anna Leonowens Gallery, Halifax, 2005

Fofa Gallery, Concordia University, Montreal, 2008

Surrey Art Gallery, 2008

Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal, 2011

EDITOR'S LETTER

# Journey

CLÉLIE RICH

Welcome to *Room's* Journey issue. This is a very special issue for us—indeed the first of four very special issues, all celebrating *Room's* thirty-fifth volume of quality writing and art by women.

When we turned thirty, we gave ourselves a facelift, rebranding ourselves from *Room of One's Own* to *Room*. In the intervening five years, we've moved firmly into the digital era to streamline several of our processes, including moving 99% of our manuscript submissions and our contest entries to an electronic process, expanding the number of collective members who live outside of Greater Vancouver, and dabbling our toes into the digital stream with Twitter, Facebook, and our increasingly successful electronic newsletter. In short, we're thriving, and proud of ourselves. All of these achievements are the result of some spectacularly talented Roomies—what else would you expect us to call our collective members—and I've chosen to focus on our Roomies in place of our regular RoomMate and BackRoom sections. Just this once, Dear Reader, instead of looking at you, we'll be looking at us.

Other changes to this issue include the absence of our 2011 contest winners. Look for them in issue 35.2, together with new writing by Genni Gunn and an interview with Madeleine Thien. In 35.3, look for more twists on our anniversary celebrations, and we're closing the volume with an interview with one of the very early members of the collective, in an issue with a very fitting theme—Labour of Love.

In this issue—from our beautiful blue cover by Landon Mackenzie to our closing pages—we explore Journey. Evelyn Lau, Vancouver's current Poet Laureate, has three poems on personal change, and three poems on travel. The rest of the issue follows Evelyn's lead, weaving back and forth between these two themes, between the public journeys of travelling the outer world and the private journeys of negotiating our own inner worlds, if you will. And our interview, "Ramblecrunch!," combines the two in a look at worldschooling a ten-year-old in an RV around Europe for a year.

Young girls at various stages of their lives also figure in Taryn Thomson's

“The Game” and in Michele Annable’s story “Livia.” Sara Lier’s hobo-girls, and the women travelling through the images of poets Diane Buchanan, Portia Carryer, and Christine McNair—these women are familiar to all of us.

The poems of both Margaret Malloch Zielinski and Chuqiao Yang carry us to distant places, with Zielinski transporting us to faraway places with evocative names, while Yang’s travels lead us on more internal journeys. In the fiction of Michelle Kholos Brooks, her protagonist recalls an earlier version of herself, while in “Open Loop” Ann Cavlovic’s protagonist slowly walks herself into a new version of herself.

For interior art for this issue, photographs felt more appropriate than paintings or illustrations. C. Caroline Schmeing’s photos capture the carefree, unselfconscious moments of youth, and the images of photographer Joanne Gallant-Chilton capture deliberate movement, feet carefully or joyously placed upon a path.

The interplay between aging, failing fathers and daughters is the subject of both JoAnne Potter’s piece, and of Barbara Parker’s opening piece, “Losing the Word for World.” Parker’s piece is also about a man who studies the language of hunter-gatherers, who knows that “once a family is settled, ten thousand years of history is lost. A thousand words will disappear.” Poet Carol Shillibeer examines the interpretation of language, as does Marilyn Moriarty in her creative non-fiction piece “Naked Italian.” Even when writers are writing about everything else, we are still writing about language.

Our closing pieces, both creative non-fiction, are about the end of the journey, and finding the place that is home. For Dawn Service, it is about rebuilding a cabin, to the accompaniment of bird song. And in our final piece, “Homecoming,” Jen Brubacher says, “The world unravelled huge at my feet and I walked it without fear.” Whether on a journey of travel or a journey of growth, I wish the world may unravel huge for all of us.

# Losing the Word for World

BARBARA PARKER

She thinks of it as a story of two men, a daughter, and words that disappear into the thin air between now and then. She is the daughter, and one of the men is her father. The other is a man she's never met. He is featured in a documentary about one of the last nomadic tribes in Borneo. In the film she sees a man in all his nakedness, admitting to the world that his life's work is coming to an end. As good a place to begin as any, she thinks.

\* \* \*

The one in the movie is a traveller, a hunter of language and culture. Sometimes he lives as a guest in another place, halfway around the globe. She sees that he is lucky, because he has found a second home where two outstretched hands clasped after years away bring the world together. Lucky because his work has become his life, not separate from his own breathing. And unlucky because that work tears his heart apart.

The man is an anthropologist. A linguist. He has been studying the language of the Penan people, nomadic hunter-gatherers who live in the rain forest of Malaysia. He explains: The Penan have forty words for sago palm. That is because for them, the sago is food, shelter, and medicine. Deep in the jungle, the Penan live and hunt by the river, by its clear and tumbling tributaries. In the film, the Anthropologist stands by one of those streams. He squints in the bright light, which makes the worry lines deepen on his forehead. He sips from a water bottle slung at his side. He flips through a typewritten book, its pages damp and curling in the equatorial heat. *Ba*, he reads. River. He is speaking from his own work, a dictionary of the Penan language. Sunlight glints off the water, but he shakes his head in warning. Logging is threatening the traditional home of the nomadic Penan. And though he has spent twenty years recording their words and their stories, the Anthropologist knows many more need to be remembered.

\* \* \*

Her father has been diagnosed with a disease, which she researches on the Internet. It is named after a British doctor who wrote a paper about it in 1817. It has been discussed and treated since medieval times, but no one knows how to cure it, or why you get it. A roll of the dice. There are many symptoms associated with this disease. The word *degenerative* is often paired with the word *disorder*. There have been changes in her father since his diagnosis. But he lives in another city, which feels half a world away, and she has her own life. His wife has tried to warn her that things are getting worse, but it is difficult to imagine from such a distance.

Now her father's helpmate, partner, stability, and—increasingly—his memory, needs to travel to another province for a few days. The one who has become the de facto interpreter, the one who keeps the conversation going so she and her father don't have to, asks her to come and help, because he is not up to travelling, and can no longer be left alone. *Of course*, she answers, without asking questions.

And then she wonders, what exactly does *can no longer be left alone* mean? Back to the Internet, searching for the word she thought she understood. *Parkinson's*. The list of symptoms is long, and the words hang with Latin endings and frightening futures. She closes her laptop.

She schedules a visit; plans to stay for four days. After she confirms the dates, out of her own pre-history comes a memory—a childhood dream to have her father all to herself. Lucky girl.

\* \* \*

The Anthropologist flies across the globe and lands in a noisy, busy city. He makes arrangements to travel by bus and boat, as he has done before. Back to find the families who travel through the jungle, to listen once more to their stories, write down their words. News has reached him that the logging companies have already reached the edge of the primary forest, and he wonders if the change since his last visit may be greater than he had predicted. He finds himself in an area that is running red with mud, churned and dishevelled by heavy equipment. The machines make angry swaths through the jungle, tearing at the biggest and most valuable trees, dragging them out, toward the city. He wonders for a moment if he is too late.

\* \* \*



She drives 400 kilometres north. Stops for coffee, and then decides she needs a new shirt, and a pair of sunglasses. She is in no hurry to arrive. It has been a long time since she's been alone with her father. By the time she rings the doorbell, it is six p.m.

Her father answers the door, and she takes a step backward. His neck is bowed, his chin touches his chest. He is thin, unsteady. She is relieved when he smiles and grabs her wrist to welcome her in. They stand in the hallway. He looks at her suitcase. *Put that ...* he is not quite sure where. He turns away, shuffles toward the kitchen. The neighbour who has been sitting with him hands her a few sheets of paper that are stapled together, and suggests she order pizza, *right away*. Gives her a look that says, what took you so long?

\* \* \*

The Anthropologist is surprised and not surprised. For years he has watched the logging edge closer to the primary forest. He has witnessed the canopy collapse, has seen the strong sun reach down to the forest floor. He knows many of the families have given up their hunting lives, have started to grow rice at the edge of the forest, or moved to shacks outside logging camps. But this time, rivers swollen with mud make it difficult to get to where he needs to travel. It dawns on him; there may be only a handful of people still hunting. Still gathering. He understands, with each query at familiar stopping points, he is searching for the last nomads. The lines on his forehead crease again. Once a family is settled, ten thousand years of history is lost. A thousand words will disappear.

\* \* \*

On rare occasions when she was young, she and her father would sit under the light at the vinyl-covered kitchen table. His head close to hers as they bent over a copy of *A Tale of Two Cities*. He knocked his finger against the page, reading aloud. *It was the best of times, it was the worst of times*. Listen to the sound, he said. *We had everything before us, we had nothing before us*. Listen to the language. She drew near to him, then, entranced by his tapping, shivering with the chill of a hundred-year-old story, leaning into his words, into the thrill and mystery of the world that was her dad.

\* \* \*

*Running out of time* are not words that have meaning in the Penan language. A family can make one journey through the forest last twenty years, following the life cycle of the sago palm. Travel is measured not by days but by what is found along the way: ripe fruit, the track of a wild boar. They are outstanding hunters. They stalk and kill their prey with a *keleput*, a blowpipe, carved out with a bone drill. The Anthropologist admires the drill, precise to the millimetre. The darts, tipped with poison, can kill a pig, a *babui*, in a matter of minutes.

The Anthropologist has crept through the jungle with them; he has camped near a mature stand of sago, as they cut, washed, sieved, pounded. He has taken off his shoes and stamped the sago himself.

\* \* \*

After a few moments, her father returns to the living room, sits, then stands again. He is looking around, like he has forgotten something. He shakes his head, worrying that he won't remember to tell her things, which pills he needs, at what time. She laughs and says don't worry, we're in this together. After she phones for the pizza, she finds him wandering in the hallway. He is searching for the TV remote, is concerned he won't be able to show her how to use it. I can figure it out, she says. Besides, it's all written down. Here. There are four pages of notes. But he is not satisfied. He stands at the kitchen counter and refuses to move until she agrees to watch him mix his fibre drink. She watches while he unscrews the lid on the plastic container, and measures two scoops of powder into a glass of water. Then he picks up a spoon and puts it back into the container, instead of into the glass. He freezes; he knows he has missed a step, has done something wrong. She takes the spoon out of the jar, and uses it to stir the powder in the glass until it dissolves. Everything is fine, Dad. Drink up now.

\* \* \*

The Anthropologist travels further into the forest, tracking a trail that is weak, incomplete. He has to use his training, he tries to remember what the Penan have taught him. In the deep forest, in the true forest, there is

no getting lost. When a Penan enters an unknown area, he must follow his feelings. *Mal can uk.*

\* \* \*

The pizza is delicious, they both eat their fill. They decide the thin crust is the way to go, and he helps her find Saran Wrap for the leftovers. Things are going okay. Her father the power boat has disappeared. No need to worry, anymore ... Will she keep up? Will she please him enough? This new dad is slow, and careful. He explains that he needs coaching with his physiotherapy exercises. She eyes the instructions sceptically. *Tuck in the chin, press the neck flat, and count to five.* Her father ran a half-marathon. He straightens his curved spine against the wall, waiting for her to begin. For a moment he is his old self, ready to challenge yesterday's best score. But soon he is shaking with the effort of concentration, with the exertion of straining against his frozen vertebrae, and she hurries to relieve him. One second, two second, three second, rest.

\* \* \*

The Anthropologist is worried. Everywhere he goes, he finds settled Penan. Have you heard of any families who are still following the *babui*, the sago? They lower their heads. No. Try over there.

\* \* \*

At bedtime, the daughter does something she has never done before. Instead of settling into the guest room in the basement, she sets up a mattress on the living-room floor, and—according to the written instructions—pulls a large board across the top of the stairs, like she used to do for her toddler. The anxiety returns; her father is as confused as she is about the mattress. She does not read the words that are written on the page. He's been wandering in his sleep, it says. Instead, she listens to him plan the route from his bed down the hallway to the bathroom. It is as if he has never done this before. Which lights will we leave on? he asks again, and again. She repeats the same answer six times. I know I'm beating this to death, he says. Lucid, and sorry. I could scream, he says.

The second day they venture into new territory. Sitting side by side, for hours. She learns a new word. *Tiger Moth*. Not the insect. The airplane. A black and white photograph, marked with a sticky note, is in a book on the coffee table that traces the history of the province's rural roots. More sticky notes, on pages where her father's name is mentioned. A book written by a stranger, who took the time to research and record things she had not known, had never heard before. Her father points to the photo of the double-winged plane, and chuckles, says, sure, I flew that.

Her father, flying solo. It is the first she has heard of it. For two hours her father speaks clearly, his voice strong and unwavering. He tells a story of flying with a gas can in his lap. Of crash landing in the bush, and fixing the broken tail wheel using a moose antler.

At night she scribbles notes. Struggles to remember everything he has said.

\* \* \*

The Anthropologist meets a young Penan boy, who is wearing a cotton T-shirt that says *Falcons*. The boy sleeps in a cabin. His father works with the crew, clearing trees for money, to secure a future for his son. The Anthropologist wonders how the boy will remember, over the roar of the earthmovers, the places where the ancestors died, the path where the wild boar must be followed. Who will show him the rocks, the trees that tell their history?

\* \* \*

The next day, her father calls her his granddaughter. And then Patricia, which is the name of the secretary at the church. They are at the church so he can proof the Sunday bulletin. She is embarrassed, watching her father totter up to the chair beside Patricia's desk, but grateful to her, for letting him feel he is needed. He lets his cane clatter to the floor, and runs his finger down the printed page. They wait in silence, watching him stare at the paper. She wants to rip the paper out of his hands, and leave. Then her father stabs at the headline above the lead photo. The words should be more active, he says. Gotta get them excited about going to church. He suggests a phrase, and tells Patricia to put it in *all caps*. Patricia looks over his head at

her, eyebrows arching. You have to admit, it's a good idea, she smiles. Later, when she mentions the secretary, he corrects her. We shouldn't use that word, he says. We are supposed to say *office manager*.

\* \* \*

The Anthropologist rests near a tree, his head in his hands. He pulls out his scribbler to read the words. *Tong tana*. The Penan have told him it means forest. But it is also the word for land, and the word for world. *Tong tana* is the forest; the forest is the world. He stands again, still searching at the edge of the world for a family that calls the forest home. Home, where the animals and plants all have names, and are known. Where the spirits roam, where the river is. *Ba*.

\* \* \*

*Tremor* is one of the symptoms of her father's disease. It does not indicate chill, or nervousness, or anxiety. It is listed next to the scale they use to assess motor function, mental functioning, behaviour, mood, and activities of daily living. Her father's tremor is restricted to one hand, his left. She decides there is no way to measure the impact of that hand, lightly shaking, resting now in the crook of her elbow, as they move slowly through the supermarket. Or how it feels to stand at the meat counter, discussing dinner, one trembling arm around her shoulder.

\* \* \*

Finally the Anthropologist finds what he has been looking for. A nomadic group he has known for twenty years, a family he has hunted with. Friends. They are reunited in an area that is familiar to the Anthropologist, and he tries to hide his surprise. The oldest boy tells him they have been here for a year, living in a long house. They have not moved at all. He leads the Anthropologist to a house that is built high off the ground, with sticks. The orange tarpaulin roof signals like a flare, as the edges of the plastic flap in the wind.

The chief comes out. He grabs the Anthropologist by the wrists with both hands. There are tears in their eyes. My heart is content, says the

chief, in his own language. I didn't think I would see this day, he says, his outstretched arms refusing to let go of this old friend.

The Anthropologist nods to the roof, and asks in the Penan language, why are you not using sago branches? The chief pulls his hand away. The sago is hard to find now.

\* \* \*

On the last evening, she finds her father sitting on the edge of the bed, bare-chested. One trembling hand holds a pair of plaid pyjamas, which he has taken out of the drawer. He looks up at her and sighs. I don't know what to do, he says. She pulls the shirt over his head. Tell me about the old days.

\* \* \*

The Anthropologist sits with the chief and listens to his story. He talks in the chief's own language, asks questions, and writes more words in his ragged scribbler. He is tired, but he has so many questions. He pauses to clarify the meaning of another word, listens carefully, and writes again. One more word against the inevitable, the language itself destined to disappear with this old man. Words will no longer be passed down through generations, because they will no longer be needed.

\* \* \*

The daughter makes another trip to her father's soon after the last. Not because she has to. He refers to her as the woman who is visiting. He gets up to go to the bathroom, walks into the laundry room, and freezes, not knowing what he has done wrong. But later father and daughter take turns reading poetry. His voice is strong again, steady with long term memory. He skips the first poem that begins *Gather ye rosebuds while ye may*. He turns the page and uses his finger, the one that doesn't shake as much, to hunt for the lines that swim away. After some effort, he finds what he is looking for. He raises his head for a split second. Listen to this, he says, closing his eyes, reciting from memory words from a man long dead. *Then, then me thinks, how sweetly flows / that liquefaction of her clothes*. Then he laughs, an old delight welling in his throat. Now there's a word, he says.

\*\*\*

In the film, the Anthropologist admits in front of the camera that all the luck in the world won't change the fate of the Penan people. He drops his head, it is hard to hear him. He mumbles something about writing a tombstone, an epitaph. Then he lifts his eyes, which are watering, and she sees he is no longer a professional, he is just a man who is not yet dead, who is saying, *If I have to write an epitaph, I want it to be a thousand words long.*

\*\*\*

It is time for her to go home. She brings her suitcase up to the front door. Her father is watching her gather her coat, her hat; she lays them on the bench. This morning his face is clear and unconfused, and she is surprised to see something new in his expression. He is sorry to see her go. They've had a good time together, haven't they? She agrees with a laugh that is cut short by a threat, a river of tears; she manages to promise to come back soon.

But he doesn't let her go. He pulls on her arm, and leads her to the kitchen. He plants himself at the counter, and pulls an empty glass out of the cupboard. Slides it with a wobble along the countertop toward her. She laughs again, and shakes her head and says, all right. For old time's sake. She unscrews the lid of the jar, dips a spoon in, and scoops the powder into the tumbler. He watches as her hands perform the action in one fluid motion. He waits calmly beside her, and the only sound is the metal spoon clinking against the glass. They have no words, because none are needed, now.

# Face

EVELYN LAU

A writer once said, *Face it,*  
*no one's ever going to give you a second glance.*

A judge once wrote,  
*Your face is like a lotus blossom,*  
*your lips like an exotic orchid.*

You live in every reflective surface,  
snag my gaze in a shop window,  
a polished picture frame, a teaspoon.  
I must see you twenty times a day, yet somehow  
I missed the moment you came unpinned  
from the framework of bones that stretched you  
taut like a canvas, and slid—  
settling into your current motley state  
of pouches and hollows, as if invisible fingers  
had prodded and pulled at the flesh,  
scattered sunspots across your cheeks  
and chin, pawed the skin around your eyes,  
pinched a tag or mole out of pure malice.  
White hairs zigzag from your temples,  
streak the childish fringe you've maintained  
since your first haircut, as though  
this could keep you a child.

Yet there are days you still surprise me,  
seen from an angle in flattering sunset light—  
times I would secretly agree with the judge's verdict,  
glance around for confirmation  
and realize no one's looking.



# Brain

EVELYN LAU

There might be something wrong with you.  
Or is it all in your head?

Migraines flash across your landscape  
like electrical storms, scorching trees and shrubs.  
Anxiety torches your neuron pathways,  
obliterating names, faces, human language.  
You stare at a line of poetry for hours  
before stuttering to a stop  
like a seized-up computer.  
You search so ardently for the right word  
you implode in a shower of sparks  
and scrolling numerals. Some days  
you are shrouded in fog like a coastline—  
a horror-movie fog that creeps in  
like poison gas, like lethargy.  
Other days you are on fire—  
when I touch my forehead my fingertips  
leap away singed—  
I can almost smell you burning,  
a tofu scramble left on high heat on the stove,  
swelling against the stricture of the skull.

The middle of the night is your favourite time—  
you replay reel after reel of embarrassments,  
spark lame conversations with a Round Table wit  
that evaporates in the morning light.

# Skin

EVELYN LAU

You came into this world a sheet of blank paper,  
fresh linen, a bowl of almond milk.  
My life has left its marks on you—  
the puckering of scars, railroad tracks  
of stitches, the needle pricks  
and tick-tack-toe forearms  
of a wayward adolescence.  
Your keloid tissue shines silvery  
as snail slime, meandering  
down the scratching posts of my limbs.

Now I am in preservation mode—  
moisturize after every shower,  
stay out of the sun, avoid parabens  
and parfums, leaf through magazines  
in search of the latest miracle cream,  
functional food, do everything  
to prolong youth. To give you  
that satin texture, that radiant glow.  
Line the pockets of Estée Lauder,  
the dermatologists at Clinique, even when  
there's no money for the mortgage.

These days, you don't need a punched window  
or a razor blade to register damage—  
a mosquito bite, a scratched hive  
will leave a stain that takes six months to fade.

# Naked Italian

MARILYN MORIARTY

I was taking Italian for the first time at a language institute in Otranto, Italy. On the map, Otranto lies at the tip of the heel, facing Yugoslavia on the Adriatic Sea. It is Italy's most southern port and its farthest eastern point. The institute organized a small apartment outside the city gates where my front door opened on a marble terrace skirted by a small mountain. There Byzantine monks had cut a cell out of the rock at least a thousand years before. "Climb up!" My landlord pointed to the ladder next to the banana tree. Shoes off, a good twelve feet up, and I was in the cell chiselled out of the mountain. It had a window, a niche for an oil lamp, and a pedestal-like form for a basin. My hands and bare feet read the Braille of its niches, its rough floor, and incised walls.

In my room, the tightly fitted wooden shutters blocked morning's phosphorescent light. They failed to block sound, so church bells rang me out of bed to school. The bells faded to a resonant echo on the road past a poppy-filled meadow, where bright orange petals smudged the base of trees. The bells became little less than clangour at the sea wall where the ocean swallowed sound. The Castle of Otranto turned blank ears to the dim chimes, and marked my turn into an alley, where up, around, down cobbled streets that penned my body in a Saracen script, the way ended at the narrow stairwell in the language school. Second floor up, the institute was partitioned into rooms filled with files and computers. My class: a seminar room crowned by a pink cherub in a blue sky.

In class I am attentive to learning the articles and the genders of nouns. Singular masculine nouns end in *-o* and make their plural with *-i*. The guy that stalks Jenny, my classmate, is the (proper) noun: Massimo. She thinks his name is fake and bragging. Singular feminine nouns end in *-a* and make their plural with *-e*. One purse is a *borsa* but several are *borse*, like those of Jenny's friends, who accompany her in Massimo's car. Plurality becomes more complicated when considering the articles which accompany nouns. A group of masculine nouns, starting with *z*, *s+consonant*, *gn* or *ps*, require *lo* in singular and *gli* in plural, like *gli snorkel* in Massimo's trunk, when he takes *le ragazze* (the girls) to *la spiaggia* (the beach). I can't even pronounce *gli*,

which in Italian comes across like *llye*. To the ear, many vowels give words the quality of running water as the boundaries between them dissolve.

Because those boundaries do exist, and they are meaningful, I stalk nuance even to the sense-taxed point of trying to see the line between sky and sea. Scrutiny blurs what seems discerned. Does the sky give the sea its depth by reflection? Is the reflector or the reflection the more perfect beauty? My language teacher tells the story of Suleiman the Magnificent, who tested the skill of his artisans. They were of two groups, Oriental and Byzantine. He made a studio for them and then passed a curtain through to divide the room in half. Each group worked behind their part of the curtain. At the end of the day Suleiman evaluated their work. The Byzantines had made a beautiful mosaic, elaborately detailed, showing vibrancy and depth. Then Suleiman opened the curtain. The Orientals had spent the day bronzing a mirror, which reflected the mosaic in every nuance.

Who could say which of the artisans practised the more perfect art?

In the afternoon, when my classmates sought out newly found companions, I took swims across the harbour of Otranto. Though gift shops in town sold postcards of a hooked shark the size of a Volkswagen, I did not fear shark attack because I could see the bottom, even to the wave tracks that pointed toward shore. Besides, the water felt bathtub warm, and the waves were not overpowering, even when the wind rose. Twenty minutes carried me from one side to the other, and twenty back. A few days into classes, I decided that I wanted to swim across the harbour naked. I waded through the breakers, swam beyond the sight of sunbathers on the beach, removed my string bikini top, tied it to my bikini bottom, and put my goggles over my eyes. If I swam as I did in a lap pool, I would move too fast to enjoy the water. Mixed strokes let me pace myself—now jetting through low crests of waves, now taking the ocean in between my legs and then kicking away like a frog; now windmill arms nearly waterplaning; now coasting face down, breath drawn, to watch my shadow on the bottom, sliced by lasers of light. At the other side, I drifted, head only protruding like a small seal, watching people playing in the surf. On the return swim I lay back, floated in the middle of the harbour, goggles cocked on top of my head. Clouds moved slowly across a cerulean sky, the sun glazing my chest and face. My chi inhabited my body perfectly. Sky and sea enfolded me like a glove.

Back on the beach, I created homework as I translated a booklet on

Frederick II. Translation feels like prayer, a rote process transformed by mind's dedication. My translation comes at the level of the signifiers: even though I simply substitute one word for another, meaning accrues. Something grows, is growing, as, in the exchanges of word for word, a new writing is made. Each step in translation requires strict attention: What gender is the article? Is it definite or indefinite? Are there adjectives attached? What of the verb? If in the present tense, does it form its conjugation regularly in one of three ranks of *are/ire/ere*, or irregularly like *sono* or *avere*? My mind frisks every word like this, while, in turn, this new language folds my brain into its grammar, shaping me the way the winding streets patterned my walk into the story of a place.

I change one word into another, until the line in the notebook goes to the end of the page, and then a second line is started, blots of blue ink running when sweat drops on the paper.

To translate on the beach requires an intense mental focus that blots the world. Descartes, when he arrived at the definition of a subject, exercised such focus, mentally shutting the door on sense perception to subtract the world from mind, arriving at the conclusion, *cogito ergo sum*. In his third meditation, he writes:

I shall now close my eyes, I shall stop my ears, I shall call away all my senses, I shall efface even from my thoughts all the images of corporeal things, or at least (for that is hardly possible) I shall esteem them as vain and false; and thus holding converse only with myself and considering my own nature, I shall try little by little to reach a better knowledge of and a more familiar acquaintanceship with myself.

The reverse happens to me: rather than abstracting myself from the world, the world enters my translation. The notebook paper wicks drops of sweat. Grains of sand blot the blue ink. Words emerge from the tip of a pen but their medium is sand, water, sweat, shell. The beach creeps into language recorded in my notebook.

What I translate:

Palermo, cosmopolitan city, pools (*pullula*?) the later Latin, Arabic, Greeks, and Jews with *l quali*. The sons of Constance speak, dialogue is divided. An analogous situation is in Otranto, where Latin, Greek, and Jewish people lived together peacefully, trading,

helping each other. Federico, born the 26th December 1194, at lesi of a German father (Henry VI) and a Norman woman (Constance di Altavilla, Hautville) *rimane* <sup>remained</sup> an orphan for four years. Affidavit of his mother of the court of Innocent III, live in Palermo *crocevia* (?) <sup>crossroads</sup> a diverse culture and language. Patron ... he knew (the Latin language?), he was a legislator, protector of *dotti* and the arts. Passionate about ornithology, he wrote a treatise dedicated to *caccia* (hunting). He is an able soldier and a perfect musician.

In class, we learn nouns and adjectives. Of nouns, body parts. Colours give descriptors for our selves. Green eyes, brown hair, blond hair, blue eyes, brown eyes. From the self to family: my sister has brown eyes and brown hair. *Russo, rosa, maron, nero, bianco*. Numbers: one to ten, ten to one hundred, counting by hundreds. I have *quarantotto* years. I live in *Il ventunesimo secolo*, the twenty-first century. Body parts. The face: the eyes, nose and mouth; hair, ears. Arms and legs. Hands and feet. Breasts.

I never sunbathed topless. At forty-eight, I would never do it younger. To me, a naked body meant a sexualized body—but only on land. On land, we become trapped and caught in other people’s eyes, their gazes rarely neutral, more often scans that produce data: species, sex, height, weight, status. In water, nakedness dissolves the boundaries of self. Since sight creates distinctions that water effaces, I did not want to be seen. I had gone to Catholic school, where even the appearance of a white bar across the back of a white shirt brought a scolding from the nuns, who insisted we wear camisoles. For my twenty-something classmate, a Swedish librarian named Anna, nudity meant *Playboy* magazine. “I am not a Swedish bikini girl,” was her mantra. But she was testing the waters, too, so resolve followed upon a week of discussion. Anna would try it too. After all, here, women breastfed their children in public. My modesty was American.

I had never studied Italian before now, either.

No hiding. We removed our tops. Woman next to woman we lay back on our towels. I untied two strings on my suit, let the straps drop all the way off. Feelings of insecurity initially flooded me. I shut my eyes. Nothing happened. Sister Ethelberga did not show up to throw a towel over me, saying, “Cover yourself.”

We both lay in the sun for an hour. Then we got up and went home, and said, “We did it.”

Grammar gives a way to claim my experience: Possessive pronouns are always preceded by the definite article. [The] my swim. [The] my topless sunbathing. [The] my new language in this part of Italy with its archaic soul intact.

This day white sand seems to rise up under translucent rippling waves as if hands lifted green to exalt it. I could walk across the Adriatic on light like this. Square windows in the building by the shore evoke a drab Mondrian burned to cinders in the sun of the *mezzogiorno*. A ragged geometry of antennae impales the sky.

I went to market to learn how to buy things. *Pesche* and *pesce*: was it fish or peaches I ordered?

Our teacher took us on a field trip to the remains of the first university and dormitories in Europe. The *masseria*, the walled farm house, with its special room designed to hold snow, a medieval ice box, the *naveria*—I wrote new words on a slip of paper and put them in my pocket, where other new words were deposited on gum wrappers, a napkin, a receipt from the grocery store. In the public restroom, the words fell out of my pocket. I gathered my vocabulary off the floor and in the evening copied them to note cards. The act of writing seals the word to the mind. First prompters, the note cards became emptied out, husks of growing mental material.

Swimming across the bay of Otranto, my bikini balled up and tied to my ankle, I float on my back and look at the sky, which arches above me. White clouds with grey thunderheads edge up the horizon, drift slowly across. They morph into forms, now like the sheep in the cathedral in Ravenna, now into the hindquarters of a horse, the mottled neck of a destrier. The waves speak as they rock me: *We thought you were a dead man. Or a small horse floating on top of us.* The waves reminded me of the many armies drowned here, of Queen Constance, who left Germany for southern Italy, travelling over the Alps with her white mules.

The winds change twice a day here, from west to east in the morning, from east to west in the afternoon. Were all the sailboats lateen rigged, able to shift with the wind? Southern Italy was the location of the other Norman invasion, that of the Guiscards who came to drive out the Byzantines in *Magna Graeca*. The conqueror Robert Guiscard died in Greece, but when he was carried back here to Italy for burial, a storm struck and waves washed

his coffin off the boat. The coffin was recovered, but the body became corrupt, and only Guiscard's bones were carried home. It is said he left his heart in Otranto.

These waters that hold me contain particles of war, bloated corpses, cinders, and bones. I open my mouth when I swim, and suck in particles of time. My legs appear with stripes as the sun zebra paints them silver and blue. Pink aureoled nipples stiffen as the water cools, change in the temperature like reef creatures. Only the slender cord of swimsuit connects me to the civilization sunbathing on the shore, but a cord is enough.

The story is told, as tradition or myth, that in July and August in Salento people in the wheat fields get bitten by the spider, the *Taranto*. The poison put the women (usually, only) into a frenzy of fever. They grew restless. They became possessed. "Only women?" I ask my language teacher. "Yes," she answers. "Only women. You have seen the blind balconies over the streets—there was a time women did not go outside. They stood in the balcony and looked down."

The contortions of these *tarante* sometimes resembled the spider. Skirts waving up their thighs, the poisoned arched their backs, crabbed on all fours, flailing on the pavement.

Music formed the antidote. Folk musicians would come to people's houses and play the song that made the woman dance. She danced the poison out. Finding the right song was tricky; several tunes might be tried. Violin, tambourine, and accordion were the traditional instruments. The dance, in the family of tarantellas, is called the *pizzica*, "pinches." Dionysus still lives in this ritual of possession, even though Christianity has filtered it with a link to Saint Paul, patron saint of the envenomed. Still other links to the Greek culture persist, like the fisherman's dialect called *Griko*. *Kalimera*, "good day" in Greek, names a local village. The spider-stung sickness is called *tarantismo*.

A new student joins the class, a twenty-nine-year-old African American woman. Newly divorced, she has left her son with her mother back home. Her sexual magnetism draws in men around her. "Scorpio," she says. A group of students from N.Y.U. appears on the scene; they invite her to all their parties. The fact she has no interest in them, in graduate school, or their ideas enhances her draw. A few days before I leave, an anthropologist comes to Otranto for language lessons. She comes here looking for *taran-*



*tismo* and its folk musicians.

In my last class, the teacher turns on the music, a scratchy CD. She will teach us the *pizzica*. We students, who are all women students, make a circle, and then raise single arms to hook air. One foot up and then another, we step in time to the tambourine. The accordion climbs on to the rhythm, and then the singers raft nasal lyrics over the building cataract. The tempo accelerates, hijacking pulse. Even inanimate things acquire energy. Books shake on the shelves. Dust rises from the filing cabinets. A ground phone gasps a random ring. Stacked conference chairs vibrate from the shock on the floors. The room cannot hold the swelling crescendo. Panes of glass vibrate as if they might explode. Sound waves take the shape of birds that fly from window to window, beating their wings against the pane. This music drives us before it, and we dance the *pizzica* like the bitten, as if we could not strip naked to swim across the harbour.

# The Works of Angels

SARA LIER

I thought we were dead  
when Dave spread his maps  
across the wheel and took off  
his glasses to consult them while his semi  
careened unchecked down the interstate.

Hobo-girls think they can be  
their own guardian angels,  
kissing their St. Christophers  
and sticking out their thumbs, trusting  
the knife in a pocket, but I

prayed to something  
on Rt. 80,  
when we just wanted to get across  
state lines, so we hitched  
to a truck stop and trusted our knives.

And down came Dave in his 4-ton truck, embarrassed  
by his housekeeping, how he'd spilled spaghetti  
he'd cooked on a hotplate  
the night before. Hobo-girls think  
they can be their own guardian angels,

but when that old man  
in a crossroad town 2 days later  
put his hand on my shoulder and said,  
"May God send angels to protect you,"  
I didn't think of

the girl I was travelling with,  
though she looked angelic enough,  
kissing her St. Christopher and  
sticking out her thumb.  
I thought of Dave,

who spread his maps across the wheel,  
took off his glasses,  
and picked a safe place  
to drop us for the night, as his semi  
careened down 80 unchecked.

There was a certain road-art  
that made him know every turn without looking.  
It was that same mojo we'd been after  
for days, just trying to get  
across state lines, clutching our knives

and sticking out our thumbs. "If you  
were my daughters," Dave said,  
"I couldn't stand to think of you out here, bumming rides  
from truckers. They're a nasty type.  
I don't like their society myself," said Dave,

who made spaghetti over hotplates, and kept  
a cooler full of sandwich supplies  
he shared with us, watching us spread mayonnaise  
across the bread, and going himself to search  
for a wayward tomato, while his semi careened unchecked

through the tallest mountains in Pennsylvania  
at 80 mph. "I take care of myself," said Dave, "and try  
to avoid the truck stops." We didn't wonder then  
why he'd appeared at one on the outskirts  
of Scranton soon as we'd

kissed our St. Christophers and decided  
to look for a ride. "I hear stories," Dave said.  
"If you were my daughters I'd be worried  
sick." And I won't lie now, though at the time  
we gave fake names & histories, trusting our knives:

truth is, we needed rescuing. And I won't lie  
about how we sat and watched  
after he dropped us off  
to make sure he left again. Dave was clownish  
and unswervingly kind, but hobo-girls

can't be too careful. If I ever met an angel,  
I'd do the same: stick close  
to the girl I'm travelling with,  
clutch my knife, don't tell my name.  
Sacred things aren't always trustworthy.

I would eat his food,  
I would give him a story that was close to true,  
I would thank him, I would watch him leave, and then  
I would kiss my St. Christopher.  
I would stick out my thumb.

# The Game

TARYN THOMSON

I watch Ava peel down her panties. Her ass a kicked apple: Brown. Purple. Blue. She tucks wads of newspaper inside her jeans, zips up, and smiles. “Ready.”

At lunch she sticks with me. This is good—with her I get more attention. From the opposite corner of the school, Mike and Dominic look to where we lean against the rough pebbled wall. My stomach feels funny—scared and excited mixed together. We run as soon as we see the boys make a move. Dom catches Ava first. Whack—his closed fist meets her newspapered rear. From different parts of the field, Mike and I watch Dom and Ava. Everyone always watches Ava. Dom lingers after hitting her, close to her, saying things that Ava likes but pretends not to. I scan the playing field. Mike is after me. He nears, and I know what is coming, suck my breath in as his arm draws back and then—slug—pain on pain. The New York Yankees logo on the back of his jacket bounces as he speeds off, in search of the next girl.

In the washroom, Ava, Jill, and I compare bruises. Jill doesn’t have many. She is taller than all the boys and a bit pigeon-toed. Ava straightens her hair in the mirror. “I saw Mike chasing you today.” She meets my eyes, impressed. She is proud when I get attention from boys. Her approval feels like warm buttered toast on a cold day.

“This is kind of sick, you guys.” Jill’s back is to the mirror as she nibbles on a fingernail, cutting it down.

“What is?”

“This. It’s stupid. And sick.”

Jill is jealous. We know that the more popular you are, the more bruises you have, and the more the boys like you. The popular boys—the boys who talk about doing it, and who call girls raisins, grapefruits, or melons based on the size of their boobs. The boys who love Ava because she wears teeny tiny cutoffs none of the other girls can fit into. Ava, who already wears a 36B bra and she is only 12. Ava, who has brown skin and we are all pale and freckly. Ava.

Ava is carefully smearing on ruby lipstick, her face almost touching the mirror. I don’t wear any because I don’t like the taste. Besides, my mom

would shoot me. I dig strawberry lip gloss out of my pocket. Ava catches my eye. I know what she is thinking. We have to appease Jill. Jill is the kind of girl to fink if she feels it is for our own good, the kind of girl who writes everything in her diary. Dangerous.

"It's just a game, Jill," I begin.

"We're just having a little fun," Ava adds, peering over her shoulder and bending to make the denim stretch tight over her rump.

"Ever heard of assault?" Jill crosses her arms in front of her chest.

"Jesus, Jill. Relax," I say, as Ava spins from the mirror, faces Jill.

"You have to promise you won't tell."

"I don't need to promise." Jill is even taller in her blue striped sweater.

"You have to promise, Jill." Ava is really serious. A trickle of sweat drips under my arm. I focus on some graffiti behind Jill's head, *Wanda is a cow*, say nothing, avoid their eyes.

"All right, all right. But I think you're sick." Jill marches out of the bathroom in a huff, and Ava and I laugh, hands on blue-jeaned knees, heads close together, until we say, "Stop! Stop! I'll pee my pants!" These are the times with Ava I love the most. No boys. No other girls. Just us.

That night I have a bath. I carefully lock the bathroom door before peeling off my jeans. I look at my ass in the mirror: yellow, blue, and purple with thin red stripes where blood vessels have broken. For a moment I think of quitting the game. I touch my butt gently and wince. Do those guys have to hit so hard? I turn to face the mirror and sigh. Will my boobs ever grow? I don't even need a bra yet. Ava and Jill are both huge already. I take my pointless bra off and throw it at the wall just as I hear Mom outside the door.

"Kim? Honey?"

I lurch to the door to check the lock. "Can't I ever get any privacy?" Mom grunts and leaves. I slide into the scalding tub, gasping.

The next morning, Jill and I walk to school. Jill and I have a different friendship to the one I have with Ava. Jill and I talk about big things. We have plans for our lives. We want to move far away from these suburbs where there isn't even a movie theatre. We want to see the world, shop in Manhattan, sail down the Nile. Ava wants to get married and have babies. That is in the plans for Jill and me too, but near the middle of the list, not the beginning. Jill is smart. I am smart too. Ava is smart if she tries, but she doesn't usually try. Still, Ava is really my heart friend while Jill is my head friend.

“Mr. Jameson is taking the enrichment group to Vancouver.” Jill shifts her flute case to her other hand, adds, “My mother is worried, of course.” She pauses, grins. “She is sure we’ll be accosted by weirdos or something. The big city freaks her out.” Snide giggles as I hoist my Adidas bag over my shoulder. “Everyone in THIS town is just soooo normal, right?”

We are on the school grounds now. Up ahead I see Dom and Mike, both in jean jackets, huddling against the wall of the school. I feel every freckle on my skin, every movement of my arms and legs.

“You playing today?” Mike asks. I nod, noticing that he has spoken only to me and not to Jill, and we keep moving into the beehive of the school, dodging tiny kids with massive Star Wars lunch kits.

“K, about the game,” Jill begins, pulling on my sleeve, long-faced, but then we see Ava running toward us, and she says no more.

“Hi, guys, ready for the big game?” Ava spins around and touches her butt, eyebrows arching. I laugh softly, notice that Jill is slouching a bit, her neck bending to our height.

“I think I’ll do something else at lunch,” Jill says, and walks down the hallway, flute case gripped tight to belly.

Ava snickers, says, “It’s just that she doesn’t get any attention. She’s jealous.”

Saturday night my parents go out and Ava sleeps over. By 8:00 we are in our nighties watching *Nightmare on Elm Street* and eating chips. At about 9:00 we hear low-pitched giggles, and someone calls out, “Show us your tits!” We run to the sliding window and open it, wondering if the light from outside makes our nighties see-through.

“You pigs!” Ava yells.

“Come on,” Dom says softly, “You know you want to.”

“Don’t be disgusting,” I say. “Let’s go, Ava.” I move to close the door, but she shakes her head no.

“Anyway,” Dom says to me, “you don’t have any tits.” Dom and Mike burst into laughter. Ava runs outside and pushes Dom hard.

“Don’t be an asshole!”

“I was only kidding.” Dom wraps his arms around Ava, cups her boobs with both hands and then holds her arms behind her back so Mike can get a feel as well. Ava’s laugh sounds unreal, canned laughter, but I know it comes from deep inside. She finally pushes them away and comes to sit beside me in the doorway, eyes sparkling. I sit with my knees drawn up and my arms

crossed tightly around them, my nightie wrapping my feet, listening to Dom and Mike flirt with Ava. My butt is sore in this position. Soon, Dom grabs Ava's foot and tries to pull her outside again so he can get a peek up her nightie. I go inside.

When Ava comes inside I am already in my sleeping bag on the floor. Her nipples poke through her nightie.

"Why didn't you tell them to leave?" I swallow the lump in my throat.

"What's the big deal?" Her cheeks are flushed bright.

"They were mean, Ava."

"It was only a joke." Ava is fussing with her sleeping bag and fluffing her pillow. I can feel the cold of her skin in the distance between us. She lies down, pulls the covers up.

After a while, I say, "You can't understand what it's like."

"What do you mean?"

"All the boys love you. You have a perfect body and that is what they're after."

"But everyone likes you too, Kim. Mike likes you. Look how much he chases you." Ava tries to touch my arm, but I pull away, turn my back.

"Nobody wants to touch me." Ava says nothing, but reaches out a hand and strokes my arm as I go to sleep.

I choose my clothes carefully. First, three pairs of underwear, and I line the outermost pair in mini pads. This is my newest trick, and it seems to help. Jeans must be tight, but not too tight that I can't run. Top doesn't matter too much because outside I'll be wearing my jacket. Hair is washed and brushed shiny. A little lip gloss is the final touch—watermelon. Mike talked to me yesterday. It wasn't much—he asked if I was ready for the game. I said I was. He said he was gonna get me good.

We rush to eat our sandwiches, head outside. Jill has joined some club at lunch now, so she doesn't come. There are only a few other girls who still play besides Ava and me, but Dom and Mike spend most of their time on us. We are the targets of choice. In this game, I matter.

We see them. Their faces have that wind-bitten look that boys get from being outside in not enough clothing. I remember that Mike's lips, although I can't see them from here, are very chapped. I find this revolting, but put it out of my mind for now. They lean against the side of the school and pretend not to notice us. We do the same on the other end of the building. They



begin walking toward us. I feel squirrely. Their walk is determined and fast. Ava is doing a strange hopping thing, and her eyes are shining and bright. When we can stand it no longer, we run, together for a time, and then Ava moves toward the swing set while I head to the soccer field. I run fast, ears cold in the wind, weaving in and out of a soccer game in process. I can hear Mike's breathing behind me. I see him reaching out to grab me, but I dodge. I laugh and run across the field, nose dripping in the cold. I sneak another look behind me, but trip and fall, my knees and hands skidding along the pebbles of the field. Mike is right behind me, breathing heavy. The gravel presses into my knees as I lift one hand to see how bad the cuts are. Staring at my bloody palm, I feel the blow of Mike's runner hard against my ass, so hard I fall again, flat on my stomach. Mike's runners make a scratching noise in the gravel as he laughs, heads toward the swings.

A red-haired grade one girl in braids and purple tights asks if I am all right, and I nod, stand up, and try not to cry. Across the field, Ava is running from the boys, dark hair swimming over the red of her coat. I hear her laughing as both Dom and Mike near her, grab at her, clumsy and strong. Her hair covers her face and her hands reach out as she falls. My jeans stick to the blood on my knees as I limp toward the school. I find some balled-up Kleenex in my pocket, use it to dab my hands while I pick gravel out of my palms. The girl in the purple tights has joined the skipping girls on the blacktop. *Cinderella, dressed in yella, went upstairs to kiss a fella. By mistake she kissed a snake. How many doctors did it take? One, two, three, four ...* The skipping rope clicks each time it hits the blacktop, alternating with the sound of the girls' feet slapping down. In the distance, Ava shrieks again and I see her on the ground near the monkey bars, Dom and Mike trying to unzip her coat, get a feel.

I lean into the pebbled wall of the school, gently smooth my hair with aching fingers, reach into my pocket, smear cherry lip gloss across my lips, and wait.

# Livia

MICHELE ANNABLE

“Poor Clare, poor Clare,” sing the thrushes in the convent garden, unaware that they’ll grace our dinner table tonight. Just now, my sister rushes past my door with a basket for the birds she’ll pluck from the trap outside.

Sister Maria Celeste Galilei, my sister in Christ and my blood sister. First in my father’s heart. Charitable, loving, hardworking, while I am scheming, spiteful, lazy. So she says.

During my father Galileo Galilei’s rare visits to the convent of the Poor Clares—where my sister and I are confined—Maria Celeste stands in the front of the reception room, and I fade into the wall behind. I’m like the dark moon, forever held in orbit between these two powerful forces, my father and my sister.

I watch my father’s form, broken by the grille that separates us: his bold brown eyes that pierce the heavens, his fine white hands, his dust-softened boots. I know he and my sister are discussing his book, and that every night she copies over his shaky script in her own fine hand, for publication. I read the copies she keeps. I know Latin, too.

When they finish talking, it’s my turn to speak. “Sir,” I say. My mouth sticks to itself out of malice.

“Daughter, do you need anything?”

“Nothing.”

“You look so much like your mother.” After touching my fingers briefly, he’s gone.

Can he bring back my mother, with the leonine eyes, the lavender-scented hair, the laughing mouth? Can he bring her back, now that she’s gone from our lives, married again, and moved to Umbria? Can he get me out of this prison and give me back the world?

The morning after my father’s visit, I can’t get up. My job here is to bake the bread, but when I fail to appear in the kitchen, my sister comes to rouse me. My legs collapse like jelly under me, my arms slide away from hers. I spend the rest of the day in the infirmary, where I’m greeted with raised eyebrows by Sister Monica. “Again?” she sighs. “This is the third time this

month." Later in the morning, my sister brings me tea, and the hot liquid revives me.

Maria Celeste sits on the stool beside my mat, her tiny shoulders erect, her back straight. She has our father's face: the intense dark eyes and the fleshy lips, now pressed firmly together. I know what's coming: I'm about to be chastised. "You know that our job is to help and aid our father and that he would worry if he heard of your behaviour?"

"But he won't know unless you tell him," I say. A faint redness creeps across her cheeks.

I'm aware of what she writes to my father. After she falls asleep at night, I remove the letters from their hiding place under her alms basket. She writes about my "eccentricities," "difficult behaviour," and "frequent spells." I can't defend myself because these things are all true. My only power lies in fighting back against this tomb that presses down and sucks the breath from me.

"My dear, you must bear up. Give your cares to God," she says.

God. I've read my father's writing, his descriptions of Saturn and Jupiter and understand how deeply into the skies he's looked. The first time he let me look through his telescope lens, the stars loomed, large and frightening. I expected to see the face of God but could not see him anywhere.

When I'm released from the infirmary and back in my cell, I eat the stale bread that makes up my supper. I've lost weight, but even though my body lacks its former roundness, it still gives me pleasure. It's the only thing that's real to me any more. My hands caress my roughened nipples, skim the hollow of my stomach, and come to rest on the blades of my hips.

In the convent, I'm Sister Arcangela, but my real name is Livia and I don't forget it. Every evening in chapel, when I should be praying, I repeat my name over and over, savouring the rub of my tongue against my teeth. Until that other name is obliterated.

The autumn I turned twelve, my father and I rode to Florence to stay with my grandmother. I wore breeches and a hat, like a boy. I galloped the horse until it foamed at the mouth, and my father yelled at me, "Livia, stop that!" But smiling at the same time. Oh, the delicious colours of everything in that country: the dark olive greens of the twisted trees, and the ochre of the earth. After the greys and blacks of Padua, it was like riding into heaven.

I had my father all to myself, since my sister had already arrived in Florence. At each inn where we stopped for the night, my father read to me from

Petrarch, while he drank a glass of port. I fell asleep listening to his sonorous voice and watching his purple-stained mouth open and close like some fantastic sea creature.

When we arrived in Florence for the harvest, my grandmother's house was filled with the smell of damp earth and baskets of fruit and vegetables from her garden. In the kitchen, my older sister, Virginia—as she was then—strained grapes through a cloth for wine. I sorted the apples, tossing the brown and unripe ones into a sack for the animals. “I have something to tell you,” she began. “Father has decided to place us in a convent. Just until he can plan our future. I mean, if he can't find husbands for us.”

“What?” I asked. “But I don't want to go to a convent.” In my surprise, I knocked over a jug of wine and the stain spread across my white apron. My cousins had gone to convents, but I never thought I would end up in one.

I rushed outside to look for Nico, the gardener's helper. He sometimes winked at me across the lavender plants on the terrace. Pressed against me in the corridors when we passed each other. Boldly squeezed my breasts with his manure-stained hands whenever he had the chance. My father would never consider Nico a suitable husband, but I would. Surely, Nico would want me, want to save me.

I found him in the shed with the animals. We embraced among the mutterings of horses and goats, and on the muck and filth of the stable floor, I let him feel the warmth of my naked body. I wanted him to dirty me so that no convent would ever want me.

It didn't take long for Virginia to find me. The shed door opened, and she stood in the square of sunlight like a Fury. She slapped Nico hard and yanked me on my feet so roughly that my shoulders ached. “I will never tell Father,” she said. I was scrubbed with harsh soap until I thought my skin would fall off.

My sister took holy vows shortly after, and I a year later. I chose the name Arcangela, not as everyone supposed after Michael or Gabriel, but after the greatest Archangel, he who fell from heaven. Like the dark angel of Milton's story, I have a plan. I eat nothing. I eat nothing until I am as thin as a wafer.

In the convent, we sleep in our habits so that at the first hour of the night, we are ready to rise and file to the chapel for devotions. I am always the last to join the procession, because I sleep heavily, holding tightly onto the thin mattress until the final peal of the Matins bell. This night, the night

I have picked to carry out my plan, I join the line just behind Sister Monica. Bits of straw cling to the habit over Sister Monica's fat bottom as she sways along the hall.

When we reach the altar, we repeat the devotions after our Mother Superior. Then we must kneel, foreheads to the ground, and kiss the cold floor. I press my lips to the tiles. I take a mouthful of air as if it were wine or freedom. Then I hold my breath. The chapel grows silent. White lightning appears in front of my eyes. A red curtain descends. Blackness. I see my mother running down a hill, her cloak flapping behind her. "Hurry!" I urge her. "I'm waiting."

When I wake up, I have bandages wrapped tightly around my head. My sister sits beside me and holds my hand. She tells me that I fainted in chapel. She also tells me that Mother cannot come to see me, that my father is in Rome on business and cannot be disturbed. She says that the convent will keep me under much stricter supervision.

I spend a lot of time these days sitting in the garden with my sister. "Listen to the thrushes," she says. My ears are sharper now and I hear that their song is not what I thought.

"Livia. Livia. Live!" they sing, and I join in.



*Adieu*, by C. Caroline Schmeing  
2009; photograph  
91x61 cm



*Trastorno*, by C. Caroline Schmeing  
2011; photograph  
86x130 cm

# The Joy of Travel

MARGARET MALLOCH ZIELINSKI

*Memory is the simplest form of prayer*  
—Marge Piercy

lies in forgetting those sleepless hours  
on the night train to Varanasi, choking  
on grit, bunks too hard, too narrow and your  
stout neighbour's snores drilling the stifling air,  
the heated argument in Arles over what  
you don't remember, but you both sulked  
in silence for days. Forget too stomach cramps, diarrhoea,  
frantic searches through narrow medieval streets for toilets—  
non-existent in Umbria, unspeakable in Belarus, that time  
someone picked your pocket in rush hour  
on the Mexico City metro, the endless descent skidding  
down mountain gravel, round curve after curve,  
knees screaming, into Castellucia, at last.

Remember instead the fairy-tale towers  
and turrets of Tallinn—visions of Rapunzel  
and frog-princes, the heady scent of wild thyme,  
rosemary, sage lining the footpaths through Tuscany,  
that afternoon drinking red wine by the sea  
in Tucepi as you listened to tall tales of ancient Turkish  
raiding parties, the winding shoreline  
of Boka Kotorska and its misty seascape, the sun setting  
on the beach at Kunnikumari, the patient crowds  
waiting and the black silhouette of a teaboy's bicycle  
leaning against crimson.



# India

MARGARET MALLOCH ZIELINSKI

I live now inside the idea not  
the Taj Mahal rising through the mist

at dawn nor the ancient fort in Agra but  
the Tanga dancer on that *haveli* roof weaving

midnight through his fingers emerald kingfishers  
perched by the pool not the *stupa*

at Sarnath but the mass of nuns  
from Thailand chanting there chanting

memory in the present tense three tigers  
dreaming through late afternoon an old man crouches

for hours arranging paradise piece by piece  
a mandala of petals in a bowl of water a cripple

scuttles a spider between our legs at traffic lights  
my bus idles and a beggar girl performs a string

of handstands cartwheels eyes laughing  
till smiling I stretch out my hand with rupees they take

my breath away.

# Open Loop

ANN CAVLOVIC



My belly is as tight as a knot. Both in heavy wool sweaters, we're walking towards the car, feet scuffling. Jonathan slams the door as he drops into his seat, fingering the keys with his hand. We're heading out; we're heading out anyway, in silence.

At the trailhead Jonathan's dry lips make that circular shape. "Since this trail is a loop, why don't we start in opposite directions. Cool our heads a bit."

"Okay," I say.

I blink, and he's off. I see him from the back—a solo outdoors man, strong legs emerging from chunky hiking boots, broad shoulders. My path starts over here. It's not that bad. Walks in the woods help us both clear our minds, but will it work in—let's see—a three-hour trail, but he walks faster so ...

Stop.

Just stop. Always trying to plan things. Just start walking. My feet feel good in these new hiking boots, and it's nice to be rid of my winter jacket. Look around: there's the picnic area, and a child tugs at her mother's jacket for attention. Chipmunks are scouring below picnic tables. I'm not the only one who wants something.

I once called this my favourite trail. Grey-green cedars and leafless maples. After this incline there will be a view of the brown and green squares of small Quebecois farms. I hear pebbles dislodging under my feet—my energy is low. How about Jonathan rushing back to hoist me up in his arms? Very funny. This breathlessness is just a lack of exercise. I should do better.

I should do better.

I should show up more at dance class.

It's so grey out here, even the trees look grey.

Why did I sign up for dance in the first place? Oh, the tailor! The face he made while pinning my waistline, trying to pretend he didn't notice the discoloured granny underwear sticking up at the back. My girlfriends cackled over that one. But it made me want to feel less frumpy. Hair is in my face—tuck the wisps behind my ears; maybe I should shell out for a haircut

on Monday. Maybe Jonathan's just not attracted to me anymore. "That's not true," he said before.

Never mind, it's finally spring and I should enjoy it. The trees are packed in tighter here, and the last persistent clumps of vividly white snow are clinging to the edge of the stream. I'm trying to make a career out of nature conservation, but I'm walking around preoccupied amid all this beauty. It's his career too. He's doing better at it.

What will he do when we meet? Will we walk the last half together? More likely, he'll just nod and continue on. The last time I pushed him too hard to talk about this he kept the door to his study closed for the whole morning. But I want in. I want to scream and bite until he's open to me.

That's a violent thought.

I'm not that kind of woman.

Forget it. We'll work this out. The soil is softening and smells like good spring mud. Take a deep breath. My chest expands, and I feel the bunching in my shoulders, then I relax.

But there's this distance lately.

What's this distance?

People always said he was reserved. My mother says we call people shy when we like them that way, and reserved when we don't. But he opened up to me, out of all those women. It first happened in this park—skiing after work, we got to the cabin and warmed our wet clothes on a line by the wood stove. He set out a white candle on the wooden table, nearly dropping the fondue set, and poured ice wine with his strong hands. The other people finally left. The lifting of my chin with warm fingers. His broad shoulders and the delicious feeling of fitting between them. His soft and seeking lips.

An introvert, he describes himself as. I respect that.

We talk through things, especially with our legs entwined on slow weekend mornings. But at the breakfast table I ask more questions, and too quickly I see the side of his face as he's up making toast. Am I just too demanding? "You used to be so independent," he said last week. I never asked what he meant.

I want to be desirable again. I look down and see my baggy purple hiking pants riding high above my white socks. Fat ass. I put my foot on a rock to pull down one pant leg, then switch legs. It feels better, even though I'm alone.

"I still am independent, Jonathan. But it takes time to build up clients

when first starting out.”

That look again. “Can we not discuss this now?”

“But there’s never a good time.”

He looked down, picking up his fork: “Sara, you expect too much of me.”

“Just a few more months. Then you won’t have to cover my share of the bills anymore ...”

“Maybe it’s been too long.”

“What?”

“Sara, I’m sorry. I don’t think I can do this anymore.”

I’m doing it again.

He never said any of this. I’m hunched over, feeling sorry for myself. I’m a weirdo. I’ll stop here, relax my shoulders, quiet things down for a second. The stream courses loudly with melt-off—the rushing and splashing hits my ears now that the drone of my footsteps has stopped. I’ve done about a quarter of this trail, so I should reach the cliff soon. A bird flies overhead; I used to think this was some sort of sign. Keep going. Try to get happy again.

The sun is almost out from the clouds. The trail is narrow, but the ground has been packed down, so I must still be on the path. I should take orienteering too, but then Jonathan would think I’m following him. So maybe I’m not so independent.

Maybe I’m not so independent.

Come on, I’m stronger than that.

My stomach is still tight. I bring my hand to cup my belly. What if I was pregnant? By accident, of course, I’d never do that on purpose. I’m not that kind of woman.

“I didn’t expect this,” he’d say.

“It’s alright. I understand. Neither of us planned this,” I’d say.

He’d look me squarely in the eyes. “I don’t want to resent you.”

“I don’t want that either. I want what’s best for both of us. I’d only want to have this child together if we both can choose it freely.”

We’re holding hands. We’re embracing tenderly. We’re at a baby shower with balloons and ribbons and people are cooing over how happy we are. Some are even jealous. I’m smiling and radiant and beautiful.

I’m full of crap is what I am.

What happens if I forget these conversations haven’t ...

Shit! What was that?

Freeze.

A rustle of leaves, quick, within the trees.

What is it?

Listen.

A quick commotion. The rustling bursts forward. A short white tail, then a second, darting behind the first. Chocolate brown fur. The woods envelop them quickly, silently, safely.

Quiet now, so much quieter than a moment ago.

They're gone. My shoulders are drawn back and my neck pulled up. Such a delicate, beautiful sight. My eyes are open wide—I've been squinting until now. Look around: the sun is painting gold upon the edges of green-again cedars and white-again clouds. Birds dart between trees. Sweet moist air. I love this. My arms are warm so I pull off my sweater. The flash of sun finally touching my winter skin. Wrap the sweater around my waist—feels energising not to be buried in so many layers.

A little chilly but I'll just keep moving. Should have eaten more before I left. I should eat better.

Should eat better.

If Jonathan were here, he'd say, "Sweetie, don't be so hard on yourself."

Trees are younger here, more open spaces. They grow in tablespoons of soil between the rocks in the ground. That dying tree trunk is a condo for whole families of birds. Don't seem to be getting higher though. Couldn't be lost. Should see him soon. What will I say?

"Hi." Too simple.

"Hi, Sweetie." Too cute.

"Care to join me?"

"Dear, I respect your boundaries, and understand that you need to ..."

Fuck it.

Don't want to feel this.

"I don't want to feel this," I said to Jonathan the day my contract ended. He held me on the couch until I fell asleep, exhausted from crying. When I awoke in the middle of the night, he was on the floor beneath me in a sleeping bag, holding vigil.

I recognise those tiny flowers. Spring Beauty. They were the first to bloom in my Aunt Rheba's garden. Pink and white buds so early in the spring. As a kid I peeled back the green parts trying to help them along. Me in pink boots, pastel sky, those pink flowers blotted through a green garden. The next time we visited, the flowers I'd helped looked different from the

ones I couldn't reach. They looked scrawny. Feeble. Forced. I shouldn't have forced them open.

Oh.

That shudder in my chest like when I looked at the answers of the girl beside me in Grade Three and then saw the teacher's eyes, glaring.

Feet still crunching on over-wintered leaves. The breeze is cold on my arms. Chest is warm though, feeling healthy. Fill my lungs with crisp air.

There's nothing I need to do.

I don't recognise this section of trail. It's all right. I keep walking and my backpack slips rhythmically against my T-shirt ... ra-zah ... ra-zah.

Thirsty.

Jonathan has the water bottle. Drink from stream? But beavers, mud ... no. Salivate and swallow. Won't be long. The sun is just over the tree canopy. Nearing noon. Puddles like mirrors in the ground, gleaming, with sodden branches scattered otop. A big puddle here. Left boot sinks in. Slowed. Move again and right boot squishes down. Soil like a saturated sponge. Try to step flat. Socks are still dry. Just muck-muck through it. It's drier up ahead, where the trees are lower and let the sun bake the soil. Amongst the low-lying greenery are some fiddleheads, uncurling themselves in the sun, dignified little sprouts. First spring food for natives ... Jonathan taught me that. Take a few more squishy steps.

Tiny grey-green spirals, but don't eat the brown part. Reach down with both hands to snap one off, disturbing the stroll of a tiny bug now flailing in panic. Taste just a little. Fresh, bitter and grainy. Salivating makes a tart juice. Could I survive outside alone? Pluck another one for him and hold it gently in left hand. Leave the rest for animals.

Balance boots on roots and rocks to drier, lighter brown earth. Longer easy steps. More bounce. Trees shhhhh with wind, bending branches and clinging leaves. Ra-zah.

Ra-zah.

Wait. Listen.

Birds, leaves, mud, and breath.

Wind, cool over moist cheeks and sweat beading around collar. Breathing deeper and chest open            step

and step

breathe in

let it out

an opening in the trees

a smooth rock

sit there

alone  
elbows on knees  
hands by my chin cradle green spirals                      unwind one carefully ...  
it snaps back  
chipmunk forages under leaves                      —stay completely still—  
sparrow flies in close  
i love him, that's all  
heart is open full loving him, anyway  
i feel my shoulder where his fingertips like to fall,  
arms and belly, sun warming curves of cheeks and forehead,  
skin smells of sky  
sitting upright                      elegant                      giving him up  
of their own, hands relax at my sides,  
spilling what they were trying to hold.

# the dock: a place to tie nothing but the world

CAROL SHILLIBEER

Wandering down the mountain and you  
signing | tree apple? | | slow,  
| look |. One hand on the wheel and a nodding  
| yes |, we start up again, hot still  
in September and anxious, I am,  
to swim. Peering out, you—the trees  
flash, willow and dogwood—  
you thought that was funny. | dog wood? |  
Face crinkled, | dog not same |  
and I laughed too.

There are so many signs and places;  
the ground is where meaning ties  
its knot. We see the same tree, burn  
the same wood in the stove at night.  
You, for you, the distance  
between sign and life travels  
through a different country but we  
meet here driving the road to the river.

To the river requires obedience  
to land and its markers. The petroglyph  
rock halfway between ridge crest and what  
was once the river's sibilant edge—you  
rough tumble up the narrow path toward  
the top. | snakes | | say, | watch. | Only once  
you asked the meaning | why | of the bird,  
red winged still striving to fly pinned,  
pinions earth bound, lodged  
as they are in basalt.



Both of you, your mouths open. Once,  
when a golden eagle flew over the cliff  
I supposed I could hear the old cry  
of the petroglyph under your voice trying  
to yell | look look |. I want to ask you  
what it means to deaf-yell but just heel  
the path when, looking up, I start to slip.

That's another road that neither you  
nor I can really travel except in story  
and maybe Salish. It's this, the old camp,  
signs above the river, and further down,  
past the smuckum, yellow flowers long  
pulled inside the green arrow of their leaves  
pointing now to a roped safe-place  
for swimming where the salmon  
used to run.

Nearly every year someone's son or daughter  
drowns past the ropes and I try to tell you  
—grabbing your towel, nearly at a run—  
so I yell stay inside the ropes and my hands  
follow, after a beat, | stay inside rope |  
I laugh. Is my open mouth a failed sign  
because you are deaf or only because  
I find it so hard to route meaning  
through my hands? But at least there's that  
—the rope

and the straining bird, the eagle and the apple  
tree, a place to tie up all the journeys,  
the ancestors took, you and I, tied  
like the petroglyph, a chipped sign, an absence  
of rock, tied like us to an earthly dock.

# Final Turnings

JOANNE POTTER

A few ruddy leaves kicked up at the end of the driveway when we pulled out that morning. We left early, while Dad still had all of his wits about him, for the forty-mile drive to his favourite doughnut shop in Carson City. Clerks there filled the doughnuts to order, pumping them into sweet, bursting dirigibles, crunchy and sugary on the outside, warm and creamy on the inside. The shop tucked itself into a nook on an unremarkable side street, invisible to the casual observer. Dad never told me how he found the place, simply indicating the proper driveway with an imperious “Turn in here.” It figured. Just like all his secrets, Dad revealed this treasure without preamble but with flourish, as though he had instantly conceived it, built it, and staffed it solely for providing us with delight.

He ordered a fragrant round stuffed with raspberry jam while I settled down with an éclair, the end of which I tore off, spooning out enough filling to allow my mouth around what was left. I revelled in its cloud of eggy cream, perfectly sweet. I wanted to make this treat last a bit, but Dad had other plans. He wiped the last of the sugar from his fingertips. “Let’s go.”

I had to wrap half the éclair into a too-small napkin and jog behind him to the car. We pulled out for home, Dad silent in whatever part of flat desert sunshine the Jeep windows admitted. After we’d covered about ten miles of highway, he commanded, “Turn right here.”

He didn’t move, didn’t even look at me, but I started to squirm. “Where are we going, Dad?”

“Turn right here.”

He used to do this all the time when I was a child, when going for a ride meant Dad performing a deft sleight of hand on unknown roadways, new miles sliding by as shiny as a quarter he might have plucked from my ear. On these trips, he deflected the childish where-are-we-goings and are-we-there-yets with a shrug, sometimes for hours. Then he always, at an end known only to him, rounded one last turn as though he were snatching off its black silk cover, revealing its treasure. To my young eyes, he produced them from nothing, just for me, a wild garden meadow or a shining memorial to a fallen hero, or a deserted Indian village, like soft white doves fresh

from his sleeve, cooing for our amazement.

In those days, I rode with Dad for the miracle of it. Now, Dad had to ride with me, and the paths to his miracles didn't always connect properly. The last time he tried to find one of his secret surprises, we wandered in unmarked desert for two hours until his eyes filmed with shame and he dropped off to bewildered sleep. The time before that, we drove his ancient Oldsmobile up a loggers' road filled with ten-inch boulders. But once last year, he remembered how to find the familiar rabbit that used to live in his hat, and we turned the last corner to face a waterfall that laughed and shone in deep rushes, far from hiker or tourist.

"Turn right here."

I turned right. The road changed almost immediately to dirt, climbing sharply in switchbacks. Grassland yielded quickly to piney foothills, then to a narrow precipice carved out of the mountain's side. I downshifted for curves in quick succession while he gazed serenely at sparsely carpeted and shadowed rockscapes in the process of releasing a long summer.

Mountain roads play tricks with time and distance. Travellers have to slow, and canyons confuse the feel of miles. My arms started to tire from steering and my right calf to cramp from unexpected braking. We continued to climb. Trees slid by, spindled, then shrivelled, and disappeared altogether. The next moment, without warning, peaks levelled off all at once into high plateau, perfectly flat and seamless all around. The road stretched straight before us into high, clear sun. Dad pointed.

"Pull in there."

The roadside bellied out into a small parking area and when the Jeep stopped, Dad got out without a word. He still had long strides then, and I trotted to catch up. Abruptly, the grass turned from green to blue, and Dad stopped in the middle of it.

For some reason, grass here had yielded to flowers, a whole field of them, unplanted and untended. Impossibly small blue stars mounded on each other in waves, a thick, glorious mat like some kind of alpine comforter. When I raised my eyes, Dad stood, arms spread, glowing before the sun like a celestial-armoured Achilles on top of the Achaean ramparts, bestowing the beauty of this place on a world unaware.

He had done it again—uncovered glories where they hid in ignored silence, prompted gasps in a world that too often produces only yawns. And all he asked was for someone to know they existed.

Today, Dad wanders other fields. I miss our adventures and think about them often, but didn't understand until now what he had been teaching me, the reason we had gone down so many breathtaking roads together. Dad didn't create the wonders of this world, but it seemed to me that he did because he had the audacity to see them among lives all too often so ordinary. He showed me that this world cradles special beauty, fragile surprises only persistent exploration and willing eyes yield. Through him, I learned the delight of being amazed. I discovered expectation and welcome surprises. I found anticipation for every sunrise and every open road, enjoying the rare, quick harmony of heart and footstep, knowing with certainty that, just around the next turn, I am sure to come upon something wonderful.

# Las Vegas

EVELYN LAU

Ghost of smoke in the hallways.  
Sour stench in the woodwork, behind the gleam  
of renovation, the bamboo wallpaper,  
gilt mirrors, the bed sealed in its envelope  
of laundered linens. A dubious history.

Fremont Street, second tier to the Strip—  
toothy showgirls in bedraggled tail-feathers,  
pint-sized cartoon characters mugging for photos  
and spare change. In the souvenir store a bear,  
costume head tucked under his arm,  
pays for a Red Bull and a fifth  
of vodka. Sludge of spilled drinks underfoot,  
a sticky river of sugar and slurry ice  
glazing the first paved street in Vegas.

On stage a magician thrusts his arm,  
his leg, his whole upper body  
through a box of whirring steel blades  
and half the audience wanders away,  
suspecting a con. Nowhere for a tired tourist  
to sit but at a slot machine, numb  
to the jingle-jangle, the grind and swivel.

The girls of the Glitter Gulch boast banners  
across their bare chests that shout “Humph!”  
and “Indeed!”, as if this was some other world,  
fifty years ago. Above, an American rocket  
burns across the electric sky,  
this canopy of twelve million lights,  
shooting for the moon.

# Maui

EVELYN LAU

Remember the plump dove in the banyan tree,  
nestled like a blown flower between the root columns,  
not his starved cousins pecking our toes in the market;  
the thickets of golden bamboo  
on our hot hike to Twin Falls,  
not the disappointing destination, twin dribbles  
of water into a dank grotto.

Today, fires in the hills of West Maui.  
Smoke choked above the serenity pool,  
spark and smoulder in the shrubby ridges.  
Seaside cliffs perfumed with plumeria,  
hedges pinned with starry blooms  
like planets in the night sky.  
Waves bubbling over black lava rocks,  
crumble of charcoal.

A bird comes to share your breakfast  
on the lanai—tufted red cardinal  
stalks the table with a studied look  
of disinterest, circles your plate while pretending  
to peer in other directions, then chirps  
in gratitude for the muffin crumbs.  
At nightfall, frogs kick their legs  
in the lotus pond, lavender and lime flowers  
wink fireworks in the murky water.

The locals crowd the beachside shacks  
at sunset, tracking in a day's worth of grime  
from the shore, hair ropy with seawater,  
skin barnacled with salt crystals,  
dipped in a sugar crust of sand—  
shipwrecked sailors hung with shells,  
tattooed with symbols, bedraggled with blooms.  
Who you might be if you started again.

# Sedona Blues

EVELYN LAU

I.

The flat motel air.  
Lying across the bed, listening to a family  
play Marco Polo in the kidney pool.  
The desert a dry rasp in the throat,  
soft burrs buried in skin.  
A scrape of red rock  
against the cratered earth. I wake in the night  
forgetting how to breathe again,  
stumble past your sleeping form  
into the yellow cave of the bathroom.  
Where have the people  
who populated my young life gone?  
Boxes in the ground, handfuls  
of ash in the wind. Give me an incantation  
to shake their spirits, a magic word  
or crystal spell. The glittering rocks  
in the New Age stores lie coal-black  
and silent in my palm.

II.

The desert doesn't want us.  
Bakes my skin to cracked terracotta,  
spears a cactus prickle so deep between your toes  
it takes an hour to extract, sweat stinging my eyes.  
Blood leaks into our mouths  
from our parched nostrils.  
Here the dead are all around us:  
bear faces in a basket at the trading post,  
bins of raccoon bones, pheasant claws,



badger skulls. The clay earth  
stains our sandals with rust.  
Driving to Tucson past clumps of cacti,  
“The Star-Spangled Banner”  
on the radio at noon, the hot breath  
of the desert hunts us down.

III.

How could anything flower here,  
but it does—the stone and spike  
of cacti force out sleepy roses,  
cottonwood clouds haze the air.  
The ocotillo’s tongues of flame  
on the tips of thorny spears  
lick at the tile sky.  
These are the gifts the desert gives us:  
blazing days and freezing nights,  
heat rash and prickly pear blooms  
like brimming bowls of grace.  
A field of saguaro at sunset,  
ranks of green soldiers on the mountainside,  
arms raised over the skeleton ribs of the fallen.



*Walk Across the Bridge*, by Joanne Gallant-Chilton  
2003; photograph  
13x18 cm



*Surrender*, by Joanne Gallant-Chilton  
2003; photograph  
13x18 cm



## Europe by RV, Worldschooled on Wheels!

CLÉLIE RICH



Archie and Scout

In April 2011, Renee and Mark disposed of most of their worldly goods, and set off on a one-year exploration of Europe with Scout, their ten-year-old daughter, and Archie, their Jack Russell terrier. Travelling in an RV, parking it in some surprising places, they're giving Scout an education that far surpasses anything she could get from books. Renee's blog, [www.ramblecrunch.com](http://www.ramblecrunch.com), explores useful topics (such as exactly how to use a squat toilet). I've been keeping up with their adventures on the blog—and making myself jealous at some of the places they've been visiting. Their trip—a combination of travel and life-changing experience—is a perfect match for this issue.

**ROOM:** First things first. How's Archie doing? What does he eat?


**RENEE:** Archie is doing well in the van, but I wish he could spend more time running around free. We rarely allow him off-leash because we are afraid of losing him in a foreign country, especially while we are so transitory. Also, being a Jack Russell, his nose is in everyone's business so he can't run loose in packed campgrounds and annoy people. He eats whatever quality dog food we can find in the market, though I have to say he is eating more table scraps than he ever did growing up in Vancouver. He especially likes lamb bones.

**ROOM:** And what about food for the rest of the family?

**SCOUT:** The worst would definitely be German food. I've never liked sausages and big pieces of meat. The best would be Italian and Turkish food. I'm not sure about Greek yet, I haven't tried enough of it.

**ROOM:** Out of all the countries you've been to on this trip, which one do you

want to go back to?

**SCOUT:** I hope I'm allowed to choose **more than one.**  The Netherlands would be one. Amsterdam in particular. It might have something to do with the fact that it is the first place we visited. Next would be the Jungfrau in Switzerland. We didn't spend long there, but I had a lot of fun. All over Italy because who doesn't like Italy? Definitely Turkey. I would want to visit Cappadocia, because we didn't get to go there and it sounds fun. I would also like to re-visit Kilyos in Turkey. I loved Kilyos!

**ROOM:** When you're in a camp, how do you start your day?


**SCOUT:** Like any day at home. Staying in my pyjamas for as long as I can; eating Nutella on bread and reading fantasy books on my Kindle. I'm not an early riser.

And Kindles are fantastic. I would definitely recommend them to anyone on a long-term trip. (Or, for that matter, anyone just reading at home.) They are easy to read on and don't have any glare from the sun: they are incredibly thin but can hold thousands of books; and you don't have to choose what you want to read before you go out. Just bring your Kindle.

**ROOM:** How about friends? Are you managing to keep up with your Vancouver buddies? Making any new friends?


**SCOUT:** I email my friends from Vancouver regularly. Whenever I meet someone here in Europe, I simply add them to my *Stay In Touch With* list. Friends in Europe (and Turkey) include an Austrian girl named Pia who I met in Munich; an English boy named Leon who I met in Switzerland; and, most recently, an English girl named Josyan who I met in Athens.

**ROOM:** How many languages have you picked up bits of so far?

**SCOUT:** I know various words in German, Italian, and Turkish. About a third of those words are the basics, like *please* and *thank you*. The other two thirds are mostly related **to ice cream.** 

**ROOM:** You're getting lots of history, geography and language experience on this trip. What about sciences, or are your textbooks all stored safely away for later?


**SCOUT:** I do Math in the form of a great independent course called ALEKS, and I love my English program.

**ROOM:** Renee, **What** do you like best about the trip? 

**RENEE:** I love having our house always with us. Whether we are parked in a lot, a wharf, a forest, or a downtown street, we are always home. And having so much family time is gratifying. Mark is home with us instead of at an office all day. It brings us all closer together. Of course, seeing so many places has been wonderful.

What I like least are the language barriers. I wish I spoke more languages—besides rusty German and even rustier French—and could converse easily with more people. Intermittent and poor quality Internet access has been difficult in terms of blogging, homeschooling, and trip research. Schengen<sup>1</sup> visa restrictions prevent us from travelling as slowly as we would like. Also, between homeschooling, blogging, and travel research (and having an über-verbal child) I have less quiet, contemplative time than I was expecting.

When we departed for Europe for a year-long trip, it sounded like a lot of time. It is a lot of time. But I am amazed by how short it really seems. Because of the time restrictions imposed by Schengen, the first three months felt so compressed. Most of all we are disappointed by the lack of contemplative time, due to the ongoing trip research required. On another note: nothing beats world-schooling as a way to educate children. Nothing. We do some book work (math, writing, and of course tons of general reading), but the geography, language, culture, history are all real world learning. It's wonderful!

For most visitors, the Schengen Treaty allows free-flow travelling between treaty countries. No borders. No security guards. It's like driving from one Canadian province to the other. But for long-term travellers like ourselves the treaty has really impacted our plans a great deal. One good outcome is the time we are spending in Turkey. Turkey is not part of the Schengen **treaty**,  are there on a three-month hiatus. We have grown very attached to this country and its people. Turkey is great.



Images (clockwise from top left): The Süleymaniye Mosque, Istanbul, Turkey; Pompeii, Italy; Archie, Scout, and Mark; Neues Palais, Potsdam, Germany.

*All photos property of Ramblecrunch!*

**ROOM:** How have you changed since you've been roaming around?

**RENEE:** I used to wake up in the middle of the night feeling trapped because we couldn't travel. Now my gypsy soul is at peace because I'm engaged with the wider world again, seeing new things every day, and giving my daughter the experiences required to make her a good global citizen. I always *suspected* we could live with a lot less stuff and a lot less space. Now I *know* it. As I said above, being together every day, Mark feels closer to the family.

**ROOM:** I lifted this quote whole from one of the comments on your blog: *Seriously, how can a young person make the best choices for themselves if they haven't travelled much?* What kind of travel did you and Mark get to do as kids in your respective families?

**RENEE:** My family travelled to Europe frequently until I was five and my mother died. After that, my dad and I took fishing trips to Northern California and B.C. I didn't travel outside of North America again until college. Mark didn't travel outside the U.S. until he was an adult. His father once accepted a post in Paris, but backed out at the very last minute—much to Mark's disappointment. Maybe that is why this trip is so important to him.

**ROOM:** What places did you and Mark think were the most important for Scout to get to know?

**RENEE:** Of course singling out a few is difficult. Mark wanted Scout to see the great art sights of Italy. The Uffizi in Florence. Michelangelo's statue of *David*. Il Duomo. The Vatican. The Pantheon. In short, all those places he has studied and felt were important for her to see. I was excited to show her Germany and German culture—excepting the food. Because Germany is such a relatively young country, much of our focus drifted toward places like Dachau and Hitler's Bierchesgarten bunker—which was fascinating for all of us. Scout's interests included seeing some of the places she read about in ancient history coursework she did a year ago. Especially places in Greece, such as Thermopylae and Delphi. She's a big fan of Greek mythology.

**ROOM:** Do you find you go to a place anticipating a certain kind of reaction from Scout? How often does she surprise you?

**RENEE:** Anticipating Scout's reaction is an Olympic sport for us. She has



surprised us many times. In Florence, we were not expecting how much she'd like Il Duomo. She took a lot of photos and wanted to stay longer than we planned. Her lukewarm impression of the Acropolis and the Parthenon was unexpected. This was a place we had all wanted to see, and she found it much less inspiring than her parents.

**ROOM:** Do you and Mark see a difference in the way Scout is thinking, reacting, and approaching her world now? And what about the two of you?

**RENEE:** I am not sure I do see a tangible difference at this point. I expect to see a change in perspective later, as she grows up. She's a cool cucumber, though I know she's absorbing a lot by the unexpected comments she will occasionally make to us about a particular cultural detail. Mark and I would firmly state we are seeing a difference in how Canada and the U.S. are perceived by the rest of the world. Perspective becomes clearer when you are outside looking in.

**ROOM:** What sticks out most in your memory?

**SCOUT:** The Pantheon, the Blue Mosque, playing on the *I amsterdam* sculpture, the Meteora Monasteries in Greece.

**RENEE:** Hiking in the Swiss Alps. The Coliseum, the Acropolis, the Anne Frank House, Hitler's Obersalzberg Complex, the Meteora Monasteries in Greece, Istanbul and all of Turkey, Pompeii, Munich beer gardens, Rome ... I could go on forever ...

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<sup>1</sup> Europe's borderless Schengen Area covers 25 countries. Visitors may travel freely for 90 days within the area and must then leave for 90 days before returning.

# Take One, Leave One

MICHELLE KHOLOS BROOKS

You remember this doll from your childhood; the alabaster skin and expressionless blue eyes that only blink when you tip her over. She seems to watch you from her perch, sitting prettily on a heap of sun-faded and scratched but optimistically scrubbed plastic toys. Until this moment you didn't remember the doll so to be confronted with it at the recycling centre is unsettling. It's "Take One, Leave One" day but you didn't come here with the intention of taking or leaving anything. And you certainly didn't come to this island to confront memories; to revisit this porcelain doll with tiny heart-shaped lips and the straight, perfect nose that, now that you think about it, looks suspiciously like the one you convinced your plastic surgeon to duplicate ten years ago.

Surgery: It's an odd choice, coming here. You could have chosen a prominent treatment centre but you wanted to be away. Isolated. And this is the flattest of the islands off the coast of Seattle so it appealed to your perverse sense of humour. When the ferryboat took you across Puget Sound, you knew you had made the right decision. You would leave part of you, your disease, and you wouldn't return. The oncologist here doesn't push you to reconstruct.

Two weeks after the surgery you are driving by the recycling centre when you suddenly remember the pamphlet preserved in a plastic sleeve in the room where you waited to be prepped for surgery. Endorsed by the local Visitor's Bureau, the pamphlet proudly detailed the "Take One, Leave One" program started by the concerned citizens of a local composting club. The pamphlet describes the custom of bringing one GUI (Gently Used Item) to swap for another GUI of your choice. There is no bourgeoisie concern for parity. You are welcome to leave an old shirt (as long as it is a GU shirt) in return for a coffee table. It is on the honour system; no one monitors the exchange. It makes you smile to think of a quaint island full of earnest uber-recyclers. You imagine dropping off one of last season's designer purses in exchange for, perhaps, an adorable, antique table lamp, inadvertently tossed by some unsuspecting islander who doesn't understand its true value; a charming lamp you could show your friends back in the Bay Area

with a wink about your slumming at the town dump. You haven't brought anything so you don't intend to take anything but you think that stopping here, amongst discarded things, might help you feel better.

Without touching the doll, you can conjure the feeling of its straw-like hat beneath your fingers and the sound it made twenty-five years ago, slightly crunchy; the kind of synthetic crumple that gives your spine a little shiver. You see her chocolate-coloured lace bib draped over her old fashioned dress and you remember, with amazement, your childhood wish to dress like that, covered up from head to toe instead of the shorts and T-shirts that made boys look at you like you wanted something. But it was so hot where you lived—a desert dweller outside of Tucson—and the lightest clothing felt as heavy as armour. You couldn't wait to be old enough to move somewhere damp; soaked with moist ocean air and reliable rain. It was in the days of the doll, you were only about eleven, when you suddenly woke in the night to the discomfort in your chest, not yet knowing how to roll yourself around to avoid your burgeoning breasts. You were horrified by the revelation of them. You hated lumps of any kind; you always made your bed so that it was as smooth as your doll's hair. You liked your mashed potatoes the consistency of cream. You despised bug bites on your arm. And breasts were a particular insult since you couldn't do a whole lot about them except watch in horror as they grew and grew; it seemed impossible that they should attach themselves to you of all people, and it didn't take long for the unwelcome additions to somehow define you. Eventually you learned to bend, just the slightest if you wanted this particular thing and then that particular thing. But that was later when that fast girl from the eighth grade took it upon herself to school you when all the other girls gave you a wide berth.

The doll doesn't have any breasts. She is as flat as the state of Nebraska where Joe took you to visit his family. You remember driving across the plains, knowing you could have only fallen in love with a man from a state without mountains. His family felt soothingly two-dimensional; level and unfailingly polite. Except then there was the night you couldn't sleep and you were standing at the kitchen sink, filling up the teapot. Joe's father must have snuck in behind you without slippers because you didn't hear, or maybe you were thinking about something else a little too intently because you do that, don't you—try to make yourself smaller by losing track of the space around you. You were shocked when a hand slid around and grabbed

your left breast. It took a moment to realize it wasn't Joe and during that six-second life-altering pause, Joe's father thought he was given an invitation; thought it was a game when you fought him and was delighted by it but he didn't know that you were strong. Just born that way. And you managed to get an elbow wedged between his surprisingly supple body and yours and you pushed back the hardest you've ever pushed. You pushed all the indignity, the stares, the grabs and the assumptions into Joe's father and sent him crashing to the linoleum floor, but not before he smashed his arm into the heavy oak kitchen table. He yelled, like a bear, you thought; he roared. And like mice the rest of the household came scurrying out and he pointed with his good arm and called you a whore. Joe tried to get past blaming you for his father's weakness and you had to give it to him for trying. But it just wasn't in him and that was too bad because you loved him more than you ever loved anything.

Since then you've barely felt the trips under the knife to make the adjustments here and there that seem to be helpful in keeping the interest of men who come sniffing around. It is as if you have interchangeable doll parts because it's astonishingly uncomplicated to purchase a slightly straighter nose or to sharpen a cheekbone. Shrinking your silhouette is an afternoon at a spa. You flirted with the idea of simplifying your breasts but then you felt it was safest to wait until you got too old for them to matter. So it was strange when you were told they would have to go. At first you were enraged. But then, when you sat in it for a while, your anger felt almost compulsory, as if it were the emotion you were expected to embrace. The truth was that you were relieved. It had to be done. There was freedom in the inability to equivocate. Your plastic surgeon was furious when you chose not to reconstruct. Hadn't he done a beautiful job on every other part? When it came to breasts he was the unsurpassed master. You are still avoiding his calls.

You look at the doll and wonder why you never kept yours in the small box of childhood mementos you've held in hopes of a daughter. You think that she will probably never come, that your chance of love and children will disappear with this final slash of the surgeon's knife. But then you think that maybe, once you've fully recovered, you won't feel so desperate about being loved. Maybe it was the attention that fuelled the need. So you reach forward and release the doll from that place, stuck hopeless on the mountain of abandoned playthings. You run your hands along her hair, feel the

familiar crunchiness of the hat and brush out the few minor wrinkles on her long, smooth dress. You blow off the dust and watch the particles sparkle in the soft island light. You wish you had something lovely to leave at this place in return.

# How to ride into the future with a broken heart

DIANE BUCHANAN

*inspired by Packing for the Future: Instructions by Lorna Crozier*

Don't reverse  
there is nothing behind  
but wasps, ruts and road kill.

Remember Lot's wife

Dress in layers  
that you can peel off  
when you begin to feel  
the sun again. Wear steel-  
toed boots, there are  
angry rocks to kick aside.

Dye your hair red.

Change the locks  
Close the gates.  
Bury his cell phone in the manure pile.

Mount carefully so as not to disturb  
the wildflowers blooming all around you. Leave  
the bag of weeds and unsaid angry words  
to be picked up with the garbage .

Take your dog—that kind of love.

Pack your saddle bags  
with the frozen box of Turtles saved from Christmas,

the lavender we bought at the market last Saturday  
and your grandfather's war medal. Don't forget  
your toothbrush, tampons and toilet paper.

Leave room for tears.  
Leave room for laughter  
You're bound to meet both on the trail.

Wind your watch.

Grab a rainbow, wrap it tightly  
around your chest where the rattle  
of your heart wakes you in the night.  
Let it speak to you of light  
after dark clouds, pots of gold  
and promises unbroken.

Throw away your spurs.  
Take the hobbles off  
your mare and ride her  
bare-back so you  
can begin to feel again  
her warmth between your thighs.

Dream of cutting his hair.

Let the star of Venus guide you.  
Let the aurora borealis illuminate the darkness.  
There may be barbed wire fences,  
fallen trees and sloughs to block your path.

There is no map

for where you are going. Just trust  
your horse, grab hold  
of her mane, give her ribs a squeeze  
and hang on.

Hang on.

Morning waits  
just over the fence,  
across the next pasture.

Don't hesitate,

take that leap  
through the moon's  
silver horseshoe.

Mama Quilla, Mother Moon, knows  
she will show you  
the way back  
from the end of the world.



# Ecstasy

PORTIA CARRYER

North past the border,  
the wind-buffed

the salt-tang  
hills bent their knees

toward the city,  
toward the sea.

City shod in stones.  
Him and me: cold,

at least not alone.  
We turned our backs

to the lights. Winter laid  
the streets all snow.

The gulls reeled above.  
We were aching

so we sank to the bottom  
of the sea.

I wanted him to take me,  
take me home.

To colour the skin  
of my thighs, my cheeks.

He tightened  
the clutch,

the clasp,  
my pearling throat.

There was an open door  
in the place

his eyes went, where he took me  
when I said please.

When I came to  
the salt-tang

the wind-buffed hills  
bent toward the city,

toward the sea. When I  
was deserving.

I wanted to be named.  
I wanted *Please*

to be a silent  
kind of violence.

This time, to leave  
with all my parts—

licked clean  
reassembled.

&

We took ourselves  
down to the bottom

of the sea at night,  
moved through the thick

high buzzing  
in our skins. I collected

bruises, welts. Darren—  
what do we have

left to show—A barefoot dance  
in the morning kitchen. After

a thousand thirsty nights,  
the hills

keeled finally  
to the water & we began again—

& again & again &  
the choreography,

the music, the lines  
all the same.

There & there. Here & here.



# The Cabin

DAWN SERVICE

“The illusion which man has that his will is free is so deeply rooted that I am ready to accept it. I act as though I were a free agent. But when an action is performed it is clear that all the forces of the universe from all eternity conspired to cause it, and nothing I could do, could have prevented it. It was inevitable.”

—*W. Somerset Maugham*

Morning snow fell as lightly as a man’s breath on the back of my neck, but there was no man. I was alone, wrapped in the cocoon of my sleeping bag beneath a layer of quilts in the back of my Toyota 4-Runner in the back yard of the cabin I’d purchased last autumn. It was late April. I awoke with the first light, sat up to the wonder of pine, spruce, poplar, and willow being dusted with warm Pacific air that had risen over the Coast Mountains and chilled to crystals large enough to cover the end of my tongue. I lay awake listening to the wet joy of winter’s last speech: a snowfall so tranquil even the birds and trees appeared to abide the perfect stillness. Tucked beneath the warmth of the quilts, I watched the sifting spring sky fall to the earth until I fell back asleep, and when I next awoke, found myself in semi-darkness no longer able to see outside, so thickly had the wet snow clung to the truck windows. I was alone inside the silence of a great cocoon.

I first saw the cabin the previous summer of 1996. On the drive across the Chilcotin Plateau from Williams Lake to Bella Coola where I often went to hike, I’d noticed the *For Sale* sign on the side of the road, eight kilometres west of the community of Anahim Lake. A gravel road turned north from the highway and led to a T-intersection, where another sign on a pine tree indicated a left turn. From there, the road curved to the right and made a short descent into a yard thick with weeds, rose bushes, and juvenile pines. From the driveway, appeared the back of the cabin.

It perched on a small hill that sloped toward the lake, was unkempt, forlorn, and had been left to the sun and the rain and winter’s cold embrace.

Aged logs grey from exposure rested one on top of the other. A pit toilet with a shed roof sat next to the cabin. Log ends, remnants from construction, were strewn across the ground. I kicked at them, rolled them over, noticed the hollowed galleries where the cream-coloured eggs of carpenter ants hid. A gnarly patch of wild roses snared my pant legs as I made my way to the front of the cabin.

Visible from the deck, a narrow opening in the trees revealed a glaze of silver water reflecting the feathered edge of white spruce and lodgepole pine that lined the lake's perimeter. A small trout leapt from the cover of water, somersaulted, then disappeared. To the northeast, the soft undulations of old volcanoes formed the Itcha and Ulgachuz Mountains. In the west rose the Rainbow Range, a refuge for mountain caribou, where I'd once watched a herd we'd surprised plunge into the icy waters of an alpine lake and majestically make their way to the other side.

The shingled roof of the cabin ended at the front wall, but the roof purloins cantilevered out over the deck like the fingers of an outstretched hand. The log ends in each of four corners extended beyond the protection of the roof. They were all punky with rot from repeated exposure to rain and snow. Three openings had been cut in the front wall and ill-fitted with French doors made of Douglas-fir. The gaps between them were large enough to see through. Broken, jagged bits of glass were all that remained in some of the small panels. The centre doors served as an entrance and were secured with a simple garden-variety latch. Neither the door nor windows would keep out a Chilcotin winter.

I peered through the broken glass to ensure no one was inside, flipped open the door latch, and stepped in. The plywood floor heaved and sighed like sea swells, and was covered with squirrel dung and clumps of pink insulation torn from a pile of batts that were stacked in the corner. An old, plaid-patterned couch with a burst seat sat in front of a cheap imitation of an oriental carpet. There were no windows on the back or side walls, no inside walls, no lights, no cupboards, no bathroom, no water lines or water, and only a single electrical plug on the back wall. A kerosene lantern hung from a bent nail in one of the purloins. I opened the small door to the Sears model woodstove, smelled the ash, and leaned down to examine the condition of the firebox. It was warped.

In the back corner, leaned against a warped floorboard in the loft, was an old wooden ladder. I climbed the rickety rungs afraid I might end up face

to face with a beady-eyed rat, peered over the edge of the floorboards, and had a look into the partial loft. Instead of rats, there was a large pile of 1" x 6" tongue-and-groove pine in very good condition and obviously meant for the loft ceiling. The floorboards had dried and twisted so the tongues no longer fit into the grooves. Sunlight flooded the loft through three skylights in the roof.

In the abandoned chaos of neglect, I imagined hardwood floors, a small bathroom, a kitchen with maple cupboards, lights, stairs to a new loft, my antiques and books against the log walls, and my feet up by the fire in winter or out on the deck in the summer. It was a place where I could look out and not see anything but trees, dream unencumbered, where I could be idle, listen to bird song, where my imagination might swirl and boil like white water in an eddy, and where I could disengage from the culture of patriarchy and its illusory world of power.

My desire for a cabin in the woods reached back into formative experience. In the late 1970s, I'd travelled with a boyfriend up the Alaska highway to the Yukon Territory in an old Willey's Jeep whose windshield wipers didn't work. When it rained, we drove as if across the bottom of a great sea, so blurry had the outside world become. When the rain stopped, the dust rolled up through the holes in the floorboard. On the Dempster Highway north of Dawson City, the road spanned creeks that rushed through culverts; the cold, clear water had sculpted out a pool on the outflow side, creating holding areas for fish we caught on hooks baited with cheese. Around us the hummocks of the tussock tundra were already tinged with an August autumn. I looked off into the distance to the unglaciated, limestone ridges of the Ogilvie Mountains and imagined we were the only two people in a circle that extended as far as the eye could see. There was no other movement along that isolated stretch of road, but a moose and calf foraging a few hundred yards from the roadside. The expanse of that wilderness inspired a divine awe.

Before we left Dawson City, I stood on the steps of Robert Service's one-room log cabin, looked in, and fell for the quaint simplicity of a cookstove, a sink, a bed in the corner, a window to gaze out and ponder, a porch with a rocking chair, and a writing table with a typewriter, and so dreamed of a similar place for myself. But was it really *my* dream, or could an ache for something be a vague premonition of divine destiny? A window we are not

allowed to see through? A view as vague and blurry as that drive up north? If formative experiences are windows into soul, then the quietude wilderness engendered, and the seductive lure of the simplicity of a cabin in nature, were the two hinges upon which the door of my destiny was hung.

I slipped out of my sleeping bag, got dressed, and went out into the morning air: an invigorating aroma of wet snow and piquant pinesap. The snow had sculpted itself on top of fence posts, rooftops and conifer limbs, and would stay there until the sun licked at it and bent it like warm ice cream. In the outhouse, I learned how to bathe with a pail of hot water and a bar of soap. Cobwebs hung from every corner crevice. Snow fell through the slats in the timbers of the roof and wetted the toilet seat.

Later the sky cleared and the woods livened with chickadees and the sound of woodpeckers drilling tree boles. Two female ruffed grouse dashed across the top of the snow, zigzagged their way toward the drum of a distant male. From my outhouse perch, I saw a small woodpecker spiral up and down an old willow stem, hammer with its sharp beak, and throw off bits of bark. The small red spot on the back of its head and its white back identified it as the downy woodpecker, the smallest in the Chilcotin. Snow clumps fell from treetops, down through lower limbs, causing small blizzards of explosions in the descent as one storey fell to the next.

Inside the cabin, I lit a fire in the woodstove, boiled a pot of water on the hot plate plugged into the only electrical outlet, stabbed a piece of bread with a barbecue skewer, sat on a log stump in front of the stove and toasted it in the smoky firebox, while I sipped a strong cup of black tea laced with cream and honey. Firewood crackled as the bread browned. While I waited, I considered the work projects that needed to be done and the tools needed to do them. After breakfast, I set up a makeshift kitchen with a small table, cutting board and washbasin, drafted a floor plan, and drew it out on the plywood floor.

From the porch, I threw out chunks of bread and watched the grey jays tear off pieces and fly off into tree limbs to peck at the harvest. I filled a bird-feeder with sunflower seeds and hung it next to the hummingbird feeder. It didn't take long for the mountain chickadees—distinguished from the blackcapped chickadee by the white stripe of an eyebrow over the eye—to find the seeds. Their activity drew the juncos and the purple finches and the red-winged blackbirds that struggled to fit their large bodies on a small

perch not intended for them.

The female purple finch sat on the perch of the bird feeder. How different and distinct she was from the male. He was all rosy and she all stripes, yet they recognized one other. Two males stood on the deck, faced each other with their heads pointed straight up. I went to the window and looked up too, expecting to see what it was they were looking at, but there was nothing there. Motionless for some time, they ruffled up the rosy feathers around their necks, vibrated their wings, then flew at each other in a display of aggression.

A junco sat on my deck and chewed a sunflower seed. He gnawed at it, shuffled it from one side of his beak to the other, as if he couldn't figure out how to crack it or what to do with it. His head shifted from centre to left, back to centre, right, centre, left and so on, as he continued to shuffle the seed from one side of his beak to the other. Then another arrived and the two began an aerial dance. With flank feathers ruffled, and tail feathers splayed to reveal a flash of white, they flew at each other, breasts touching, circling, twittering and chattering, until one renounced and flew away. What ancient raw nerve fires a message that splays a tail feather? What evolutionary path? This was bird vernacular. Spring song and time to mate. Time to pluck a few raw nerves.

A bird with an orange eyebrow, throat, and belly, and distinct black V-shaped band at the throat, rustled leaves on the ground, tossed them into the air and over its back with great vigour, then flew into a pine tree. I wanted to shrink myself to the size of a robin and walk along its branches, through a secret garden of green needles and copper cones so I could meet this bird—the varied thrush. The red-breasted nuthatch ran up and down the boles of trees like an acrobat. I was surprised to see a mountain chickadee jump from the pop-bottle feeder to the hummingbird feeder, then stretch his legs and neck up to look over the edge to something beyond. It is speculation and curiosity that causes a human to stretch, to look. Does a bird wonder?

By mid-morning the sun came out and melted most of the snow that had fallen, but the ground had not yet thawed and small patches of snow remained in the darkness of north-facing slopes. I walked through the forest west of the cabin, stopped occasionally to consider small patches of ground still held tight with frost and could detect, just barely, an earthy odour about to rise and proclaim itself, but then it disappeared into the cold slap of a



snow bank, not yet ready to give into spring. The earth held the odour of spring in the same way a lake holds warm water, in pockets where I wanted to linger.

Pine needles, cones, twigs, and last year's leaves lay on what was left of the snow, their contrasting darkness absorbing and emitting heat, creating private little melt holes as if a kind of collaboration between the dead and dormant living. The leaves of fireweed had clung all winter to a dead stalk, and not until spring had they shed on top of the snow. It was as if the plants and trees who waited for spring, gave the snow gifts of old needles, twigs, and desiccated leaves because of what they would receive in return. *Hurry, hurry, melt the snow*, they said. Out of the darkness of winter, comes spring.

The shrill of a red-winged blackbird played out in the top of a spruce tree near shore, while the trill of chickadees rang out from the cover of conifer limbs. In the dry, bare patches of ground beneath conifers, desiccated leaves stirred and danced a decay which was not yet complete. Rainwater begins the process of decomposition, leaches soluble minerals and organic compounds from leaves, but much of the water is shed from sloping limbs, and so falls at the drip line creating an acidic desert beneath the tree. Nature's tent.

I saw the white flash of tail feathers and the spotted breast of a bird I hadn't seen before, but it flew away so fast I couldn't identify it. After several sightings and a search through my bird book, I discovered it was a male northern flicker. With a salmon-pink moustache stripe that extended from the base of his bill to the back of his head, and a black crescent bib, he was so well-dressed he looked as though he belonged at the opera and not in the forest. The stark contrast between the black spots on his breast and the surrounding tan colour held my eye. He hammered away at the broken top of a rotten poplar tree, preparing the season's nest. I heard his *ka-ka-ka-ka-ka-ka* and saw, with the aid of my binoculars, his black bib vibrate as he sat in the top of a nearby tree calling for a mate.

At the end of the trail on the point that juts out into the lake, Canada geese swam in the open waters near the outlet to the Dean River. Lake ice snapped and cracked, moaned, then echoed into the woods behind me. Pressure cracks had risen like small mountain ranges as the tension sought an escape route. A thin layer of water slid across the surface of the ice along the shoreline, carrying with it all manner of twigs, reeds, and small bits of organic matter. Surface water, which only a moment ago was drifting west

toward the river, changed course and headed east, enticed by the caress of the breeze that swept over it. Willow buds, the same colour as the junco's beak, hung their small heads out over the cold shore.

West from the cabin, the lodgepole pine forest stretched for miles across the immense expanse of South Tweedsmuir Park until it transitioned to subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce. On the northeast horizon, the soft undulations of old volcanoes formed the Itcha and Ulgachuz Mountains, and to the west lay the Rainbow Mountains. Eastward, the forest stretched across the Chilcotin Plateau to the Fraser Canyon. In the monotonous repetition of pine trees, I felt a rhythmic simplicity far removed from the pension treadmills and workaday grind of the city.

As I walked back to the cabin, I had this desire to stop and listen, to still the body so I could hear nothing but silence—a strange yearning for there really is no silence in nature. Wind rustles the crowns of trees, bends tree-tops sending pops and creaks down trunks. Squirrels chatter as they harvest cones. Songbirds sing. Insects drone. What I really sought was peace, a quiet mind free of the weight of human chatter and empty of my own thoughts. I wanted to hear nature's rustlings, stirrings, songs and drums, in time to the pulse of my own blood.

My first weekend at the cabin, I saw the magic of Chilcotin starlight so bright, so expansive, shadows fell from the boles of trees stitching land to lake ice, securing me to the fabric of the landscape. The night before I left to return to my job in Williams Lake, I lay in bed in the back of my truck and revelled in the blessing of the land. I felt safe in the arms of that neglected cabin, felt a sense of power over my fate as if I was in control. I thought I chose it. I didn't think it possible then, it could have chosen me.

The yip of a coyote echoed across the lake. I was home.

# bridge burner

CHUQIAO YANG

I spend summers passing through  
cages made of clocks, cracked moons  
and still, I never tire of you.

to say the least is to speak the better language, you  
are the better half of me, you  
are the sound of egg shells in my memories.

I share with you this season of bridges, learning  
to sink beneath water, to love  
the taste of stones, I have reached your  
tripping roads, language arcs along your palms  
are now the road home.

the earth beneath rumbles and your voice speaks  
alive a trembling river for this bridge.

tell me again of your mother's hands, your lover's  
golden eyes, those two faint years spent in wuxi

give me your dreams and I will make a shelter  
out of memories.

strange birds ask me why I do not hold them, but they  
have never felt month long embraces, seventeen years  
and then a visit, I am made full  
but I am none the wiser.

# letter to a friend



CHUQIAO YANG

in winter I felt you slipping, upstream  
in the tub with your hair mottled,  
the evening brought too many surprises, and

cheap rosé overwhelmed us with thinking.

ah, this is life, out east, alone and fierce—  
our thoughts made real, then plundering

months later and still, you, my  
girl, are promising.

to hear of your sadness is to envy the wind, cold arch  
and a whisper in the evening, how I long to greet  
you on the streets, warm words and an embrace,

oh my friend, our homes are makeshift dreams and  
we are minnows upturned, wheeling in the currents.

let me carry you over the fields,  
your sadness shadows sunflowers, backyard gardens  
wry with ageing, one thousand letters sent fluttering  
in the air, six thousand poems and an embrace,  
my friend, you are not alone  
and where you go, like fresh water,  
let me follow.

# charles darwin

CHUQIAO YANG

in the language of your ancestors, there are  
one thousand ways to speak of snow,  
yet no words to tell a stranger why  
a mouth turns words to the white outside, this is a story;

tuesday, spring

falling

says, give me trees so that I may make a fire, so that I may see,  
melt your country into memory I fear,

I am leaving

you no beginning, come again, old storm  
save this man who

climbed the andes, thinking  
he had reached the tip of god's tongue; silent  
only to discover marine fossils

thinking in the silence, alone, I am  
alone

top of the mountain, napoleons in cages of gold,  
frost stains your burning body

hospice nurse and you are eighty  
the universe looms in iris, your iris, still.

Speak in a language of loss: silence  
dancing on trembling lips, our ancestors  
have given us snow but we must

burn their voices away

caged bird, that unmistakable melody, gone

you are  
three crinkles on top  
of the bed, extinct

on top of the world

# Cartographic

CHRISTINE MCNAIR



sleep with your back to me  
echo back catcall each name

find edge and lose border  
ink lines bled perfunctorily

wreckage clogs arteries skeletal  
crew shoulders the vault flat green  
of your eyes—a shallow sea

beasts bare teeth bones  
of old ships burn a tide on the rise  
and you a caw in my mouth

if this does not lift  
we may not make harbour

# Homecoming

JEN BRUBACHER

We touch down at YVR so early in the morning that the lights of Grouse Mountain are still a chain of stars showing against the sky. I'm with a plane full of travellers whose internal clocks are eight hours ahead of themselves, so the half hour of waiting between landing and arriving at the terminal is almost too much. The air in the cabin no longer sustains us—it's our own breath, everyone else's breath, coming back to us scented with upholstery and sharply preserved food. During the flight we've all acquired matching shadows under our eyes, but otherwise we haven't bonded.

I haven't been home in years. But this homecoming doesn't feel victorious. Shuffling through corridors that could be anywhere in the world, the first sign that I'm somewhere familiar is the customs area, newly refurbished with a waterfall and First Nations motif. There's nothing like this at Heathrow, so I can feel a bit patriotic. The sight is quickly forgotten as we turn the corner and see the line-up at customs, winding and eternal. The line is divided between Canadians and others so that somehow Canadians have the longest queue. Even at home I'm a part of *everyone else*.

All I need is a stamp and a wave from the customs agent. But when I get to the front he welcomes me home, and I mumble.

He says, "You don't look too happy about it." He seems honestly concerned.

I'm stumped. For all the customs questions I've answered at a dozen checkpoints throughout the world, I've never been challenged like this. I want to look happy. I want to hold my head up and know that I'm home, that somehow I'm safer than wherever else I've been, and I belong here. But I'm tired. I've slept an hour, maybe two, since yesterday morning. My stomach growls around tasteless meals eaten at awkward times. My head is full of pressurized air. My legs are switchblade cramped and promise to stay that way no matter how long I'm standing.

I tell him, "I'm tired." I feel like I've failed. He stamps my passport anyway, and waves me on to pick up my baggage. The country takes you in whether you want it to or not.

As I pass through the doors to the main part of the airport a line of



strangers glance at me with hope. Family, friends, drivers with black-marker signs. Their eyes flick over and past my face without recognition. There's no one here for me, because I'm not finished coming home.

The shuttle to the South Terminal comes when it comes. The place to wait is beneath an overpass with taxis and buses idling their waste into the chilly morning. So much for fresh Canadian air. I can't even see the sky. I'm standing on the pavement, which I remember now is the *sidewalk*. Ahead of me is the car park and I have to think for a moment to know it's the *parking lot*. The lorry that drives by is a *truck*. The apparatus carrying my bag is not a trolley, it's a *cart*. There's English, and then there's English. I've nearly forgotten my own language. When the shuttle arrives I'm the only one on it, so the driver tries to make small-talk and I don't know how to respond. Not because of the language, but because it's so mind-bogglingly friendly. We'll never see each other again. Why does he bother? And when did I stop caring?

As we drive to the South Terminal I see the SkyTrain track that connects the city and the airport, built before the Olympic Games. I've never seen it before. Finally something makes me smile. This, I can respond to. I wonder how much of a scandal there was about Olympic spending, and who was displaced by the construction. My whole life I've taken the bus out from Robson Street to YVR, and the idea of taking a SkyTrain now is frankly a little strange.

This is who I am now: someone more comfortable with the strange than the familiar. I want to look out the windows of the little shuttle to see dawn over the skyline, to see traffic on the right side of the road and a streak of gold and blue through the brightening sky. But I'm almost afraid because I've seen it before. Because I know that skyline and what each shape means. In London I marvelled at Westminster and Big Ben, in Rome I stood in the Colosseum and felt history draining up from the dirt and stone floor. The shapes of these places led me from one country to another and everywhere I looked it was new, and I was new. The world unravelled huge at my feet and I walked it without fear.

But now I'm afraid. Now feels like an ending.

The bewildered driver who believes I've been rude and unfriendly drops me off on the *sidewalk* by the South Terminal, with my bag. I drag the thing inside and wince because the building is so small compared to the Main Terminal, compared even to hostels where I've stayed. It has a little gift shop—

closed, today—and a cafeteria that will sell me a bottle of water for four dollars. Have I been gone that long, that four dollars is all right to charge for water? Now I feel ripped-off as well as dislocated.

And above from the brown rafters hang the worst of all insults. Paper maché planes, ungainly shapes. No sleek Haida designs for this terminal. Just oversized school projects threatening to crush us from above. Whose idea was this? What were they trying to say?

I'm shrinking in myself. This is it. Abroad, in Berlin and Barcelona, I was my entire country. I represented Canada with my accent and my unavoidable personality. Too friendly to be British, too polite to be American. Again and again I tried to explain my home without resorting to comparisons, and failed. What is Canada in the absence of the rest of the world?

Now I'm back, and I've shrunk. I'm one in thirty million. And the smear of culture that was too simple to describe from afar has split back into the personalities of all these people. The kid selling water at the cafeteria. That driver who tried to be friendly in the shuttle. The customs agent who wondered why I didn't look happy, coming back after all this time.

And me. I can't forget me.

A man nearby starts to speak into his phone. It's a physical shock. That's *my* accent he's using.

I'm home and I'm homesick. What if I never get it back? What if I'm never again glad to be where I began?

It's an hour until my next plane leaves, but an hour after all this time is nothing. I stare up at a paper maché aircraft again and think it isn't so bad after all. It certainly contrasts with Bill Reid's bronze sculpture in the Main Terminal. This smaller terminal services small communities with smaller airlines. Paper maché versus bronze? Why not? It fits.

Everything about this terminal fits. As I trickle down through the funnel of the world to the pinpoint of my home, things should get smaller. I should get smaller. I've placed a thumb tack on maps across the world to show the spot I called home. And now I'm circling it, narrowing everything I've seen in the last few years until I see it again. And I will see it again.

My next plane is about the size of the South Terminal shuttle. We pass over Stanley Park and then Vancouver is gone. The two-hour flight north over the Coastal Range is a tour everyone should get to see, snowy cliffs with the orange glint of sun at their edges, and bright, impossibly blue glaciers peeking from beneath the frost. At times looking out the window

it seems the whole world is this winter wilderness. On my flight south years before, I remember, I was comforted to know that it never changed, no matter the season, and no matter where I went in the world. This place remained, empty of human beings and yet absolutely full of Canada. What is Canada without even its people?

On a bus tour of the highlands of Scotland the driver embraced his stereotype to throw the words *hairy coo* and *loch* over his shoulder in repetition. He described the hills as *braes* and the streams as *burns*, and then turned to me to say, “Ah bet you dinnae have mountains like these in Canada!” I smiled and said nothing.

On a train through the Swiss Alps I was the only one looking out the window, the track balanced between cliff and abyss. The rest of the passengers stared at books or gadgets on their laps, avoided eye contact and their own voices. I stared out at a wooden house clinging to the rocks and thought of home.

The last half hour of flight coming into Terrace Airport is a blind gamble. Dropping into cloud, the runway obscured in its valley, it used to be that the pilot made two attempts to land and then gave up and moved on, either to Prince Rupert or back to Vancouver. If you were waiting for a flight in the terminal building below you could see that the fog was low in the sky, and you could hear the plane go by, the engines—once, twice—and then you knew you’d be waiting a little longer for your flight. Or a lot longer, if the bad weather held.

Better technology has all but solved this issue but anyone who has lived in this small northern town remembers, and they hold their breath with me as we begin to descend through white to the valley. There’s nothing below us, nothing but cloud, nothing but a glow from the sunlight above. We might be over the ocean for all we can see, and we drop. A few meters here, a few there. Stomachs shifting, hearts in our throats. We drop. Settling, settling, shifting through the atmosphere.

Cloud clears suddenly and there’s the earth again, a razor field of tree-tops. It might be seconds and we’re on the runway, a bump, and then with relief and the fact that almost everyone on the flight knows each other, we applaud. Because we made it. We’re home.

I’d lost myself for a moment in remembering. I’d become one of them again. We taxi and I peer out the window at the walls of evergreens. I catch sight of the terminal building, which makes the South Terminal in Vancouver

appear tall and modern in reflection. A few steps to the tarmac and suddenly I'm shaky. I must be tired. So long without sleep, so long analyzing my every reaction to a place where once before I had only felt comfort.

Through the windows I see the line of strangers, family, and friends, scanning faces. It seems like there are hundreds of them but I know it's just a few dozen. I can't pick out one face from another. It's all of Terrace waiting for our arrival. I breathe fresh air and hope I'm not going to snap at anyone because I'm so tired. The glass doors slide open and I walk in and there I am, and the strangers' eyes catch on my face and someone says my name. It's my mom. Her arms are open. She's smiling. So I am, too, smiling like an idiot, forgetting my accent and my unavoidable personality, fitting into my mother's arms.

Did I ever wonder if I had a place left for me in this vast country? Did I actually wonder that? How foolish I was.

I'm home.

# RoomReviews



***Gulf* by Leslie Vryenhoek, Oolichan Books, 76 pages, \$17.95**

The four parts in Leslie Vryenhoek's debut collection of poetry, *Gulf*, clearly indicate the author's focus: "The Last Safe Place," "New World," "Failing Geography," and "Leap." Identity and place are inextricably linked, and relocation, especially for a child, has definite consequences.

The first poem, "Ursa Minor," sets the tone with its opening lines: "A neighbourhood, no matter / how known, will not slip whole / into your knapsack. A house / is imprecise, an address / too easily mislaid." Vryenhoek works magic connecting place and emotion. In "Dirty Secrets," she writes about the taste of dirt and wonders if that signifies home, and then she transfers smoothly to adult loss of love while maintaining the connection to earth.

Although the poems in this book focus on movement, they are multifaceted in their examination of both physical and emotional change. In part two, "Metric Conversion" delineates the speaker's shift from a Fahrenheit to Celsius system and the difficulty in shifting cultural awareness. "Gladiolus borealis," another poem in this second section, follows the life of a plant: "Summer returns. Dug deep / into dirt your papery skin / bursts." Roots, whether human or botanical, matter intensely. Part three tends to the adult experience a bit more than the first part, but Vryenhoek keeps the tension of place and identity vibrant and perspicacious. In "Failing Geography," for example, the speaker marvels at those "who won't / get thrown by the clever roofline / of their first family home / when it comes into view." The Canada-U.S. border plays a role in "My Parents' Past," as the parents started in Canada and moved to the U.S. while their daughter moves to Canada: "No one mentions the border, / that thin line a wide gulf / between us, how

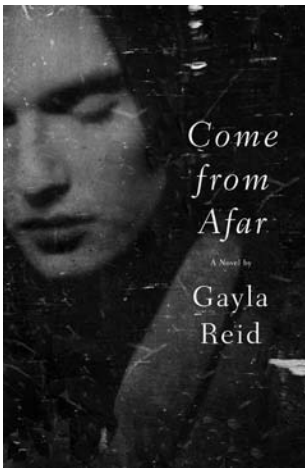
indelible / our silent dissonance becomes.”

The beauty of these poems lies in their economy and recognizable feelings. Relocation turns to dislocation, of the body and of the heart. In part four, the poems dazzle with adult love and loss. “New Tenant’s Lament” is a splendid comparison of a relationship to the occupation of an apartment: “I moved into you / like a desperate tenant / on the eve of eviction, frantic” and the structure of connected three-line stanzas works seemingly effortlessly to show need for love and fear of the “previous tenant.”

Like the speakers in many of these poems, Vryenhoek was raised in the U.S. and moved to Canada as an adult. She went first to Manitoba and now lives in St. John’s. Both countries have interior differences, as well as differences between them, and Vryenhoek’s short poems tell eloquently of these differences and their effects.

**Candace Fertile**

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***Come from Afar* by Gayla Reid, Cormorant Books, Toronto, 2011. 363 pp, \$32 (hard-cover)**

The Spanish Civil War is a romantic lost cause but has continued to attract the attention of writers since the days of Ernest Hemingway, who drove ambulances on the rebel side. Telling the tale from a woman’s perspective is still a unique task all these decades later. B.C. writer Gayla Reid fills this gap admirably with her novel *Come from Afar*. Reid—originally from Australia and one of the founders of *Room*—has created a

multi-dimensional character in Clancy Cox.

A young woman eager for adventure, Clancy travels from an Australian ghost town to work in England. She marries the brother of the man she actually loves, and the couple move to a small fishing village in Catalonia, Spain. Here Clancy begins to absorb the soul of the Spanish people: “The

local women, mending the brown nets on the beach during the day, did not sing. But the women down at the inn sang. They sang in the house above the bar and in the impressive garden they tended beside and behind the inn.”

The fishing village becomes an important touchstone in Clancy’s psyche and provides a central stage for much of the hardships ahead. She is abruptly widowed, and when civil war breaks out between the fascists and the rebels in 1936, she throws herself into the cause, volunteering as a nurse. Clancy is an ally to the male volunteers who pour in from around the world and form brigades to fight Franco’s soldiers, financed by Hitler and Mussolini. Weary from a four-year European war and economic depression, the world’s democracies passively look on.

The war is present not so much in bloody skirmishes, aerial bombings, and political intrigues, as in the details of the makeshift hospitals, where Clancy labours to help the wounded and dying. She believes in her own healing powers as she faces the greater losing battle.

Clancy also meets other stoic doctors and nurses, and even the cellist Caslos, who comes to play for the patients. “A melody edges on into the strangeness of things, coming at last to an open place that sounds like joy and sorrow fused, nothing less.” At the hospital she also finds her true love, Douglas Ross, a soldier from New Westminster, B.C., and a member of the Mackenzie-Papineau Brigade (the Canadian Mac-Pacs). More complications of the heart follow.

Reid researched actual nurses’ accounts, producing compelling details as Clancy describes her work: “The afternoon brought more stomachs, legs, arms, hands. And the worst, the head injury cases. By the end of my shift, forty-nine men had been classified.” Reid also read widely about this pivotal four-year civil war, as indicated in the historical notes and bibliography.

Expect graceful storytelling, with only subtle references to historical fact. Reid truly carries the reader from afar with Clancy, embarking on valuable experiences and the promise of the ‘lights of home’ at journey’s end.

**Janet Nicol**

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***Exit* by Nelly Arcan (translated by David Scott Hamilton), Anvil Press, 192 pp, \$20**

There is or, shall we say, was nothing ordinary about Nelly Arcan. From the striking good looks that defied conventional stereotypes of a writer's appearance to the firsthand knowledge of the taboo subjects she wrote about, Arcan was an unprecedented figure. Her sensational first novel *Putain* (2004) enjoyed immediate critical success and was a finalist for two of France's most prestigious literary awards, the Prix Médicis and the Prix Fémina.

In her most recent and last novel *Exit*, which has been nominated for the 2011 Governor General's Award, Arcan takes on the timelessly controversial matter of suicide. While reading *Exit*, one cannot help but be reminded of Oscar Wilde who held in his 1889 essay "The Decay of Lying" that "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life". On September 24, 2009, shortly after completing *Exit*, at the age of 36 and, arguably, at the peak of her literary career, Nelly Arcan committed suicide by hanging herself.

In Montreal, in the not too distant future, the bedridden paraplegic narrator of *Exit*, Antoinette Beauchamp, 32, wants to die. Ennui has consumed her for as long as she can remember, and as it becomes overwhelming she beckons us into a limbotic realm, where she becomes obsessed with death. At the beginning of the novel, she tells us: "Existential pain is an eel sliding between your fingers: the eel itself can do nothing about its lack of grip, it can't stop itself from being elusive, it is powerless in the face of its own slipperiness." Through her Uncle Léon, who might be a manifestation of Antoinette herself, we discover *Paradis, Clef en main*, the mysterious provider of "fixed-rate" suicides. Antoinette undergoes *argot rigmarole*—interviews—that *Paradis* demands of her to prove that she wants to die.

Arcan charges *Exit* with both metaphorical and literal intertwining of paradoxes. This becomes disorienting at times, yet it induces a new state of perception. As Antoinette scrutinizes our orthodox beliefs and under-



mines them by interplaying their inherent contradictions, she compels us to examine our conventional motivations for living. Arcan also shows us that Antoinette is so consumed by emptiness and sexual repression that we can identify with and understand her need to die.

Arcan liberates us from the accepted norms and conventions with this courageous and profound novel. She does all of this while bathing the reader in scatological vulgarity, which leaves neither pretense nor pretension to hide behind. In a sense then, Antoinette is an abstraction of Arcan.

Arcan's experience as a sex trade worker undeniably gave her an intimate view into the uninhibited human psyche that both empowered and victimized her, and her impending suicide was intrinsic to the unremitting darkness of her final novel.

**Jenny Smith**

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# RoomRecommends



## UNION STEAMSHIP CO. MARINA (USSC)

<http://www.ussc.ca/marina.html>

We were on our way into Snug Cove on Bowen Island, B.C. when I picked up the radio to say, “Union Steamship, Union Steamship, this is the *Robin Dawn*, *Robin Dawn*.” I waited with tingly nerves for the reply. This was my first ever VHF call, and I knew what to say thanks to Chelsea’s help when I called days before to make our slip reservation. Then she was there on the dock waiting to catch our bowline as we pulled in. That is the kind of support new and seasoned boaters (motor and sail alike) can expect from the Union Steamship Marina. What struck me most was how woman-friendly this marina is, right from the wharfinger herself to each of her assistants.

Two of the Marina’s many notable features are the fantastic book exchange shelf crafted from a large wooden rowboat in the boaters’ lounge, and the meticulous showers: at the generous rate of one dollar for ten minutes.

When venturing into Howe Sound, I recommend a first stop at the Union Steamship Marina, 66A on your VHF radio.


**Lorrie Miller**




***(OFFICIAL DENIAL) TRADE VALUE IN PROGRESS***

Artist Leah Decter. Curated by Jaimie Isaac.

[www.leahdecter.com/official\\_denial/home.html](http://www.leahdecter.com/official_denial/home.html).

“We also have no history of Colonialism,” Prime Minister Stephen Harper said about Canada, in a speech at the 2009 G20 Summit. It is this claim that inter-media artist Leah Decter responds to in (official denial) trade value in progress. 

It is a charged and engaging work of art, social commentary, and activism. Constructed of multiple Hudson's Bay blankets, cut and reassembled, along with embroidered text, the work provides a place for dialogue and expression. Participants respond to the (official denial) text  along with the other responses, in their own handiwork, as tidy or as tangled as the individuals choose.

Leah Decter and curator Jaimie Isaac are currently touring Canada along with the artwork. To participate in an upcoming event, or to host a 'sewing action,' visit the website.

Lorrie Miller

# Contributors

**Michele Annable** writes and teaches English in West Vancouver. She has written numerous short stories and is now working on a novel.

**Jen Brubacher** grew up in British Columbia and has recently moved to the United Kingdom where she continues to write. Her fiction has been published in *Northword Magazine*, *Outburst*, and anthologies including *Nothing But Flowers: Tales of Post-Apocalyptic Love*. She is a librarian in London, England. Find her at [jbrubacher.blogspot.com](http://jbrubacher.blogspot.com).

**Ann Cavlovic**'s writing has appeared in *Event* and *SubTerrain*. "Open Loop" was a finalist in the 2005 Writers' Union of Canada Short Prose Competition for Developing Writers. Her non-fiction has appeared in *The Globe and Mail* and *Alternatives*. She lives in Ottawa with two sweet people named Peter and Kiran. Find her at [anncavlovic.com](http://anncavlovic.com).



**Diane Buchanan** is a retired nurse who lives and writes in Edmonton, Alberta. She's published three collections of poetry. Her second, *Between the Silences* (2005), was short-listed for the Acorn-Plantos Award for People's Poetry. Her latest book, *Unruly Angels*, was published by Frontenac House in 2011.

**Portia Carryer** has lived and studied in California, Illinois, the U.K., and Germany. She is currently an MFA candidate at the University of Victoria. She would probably write more poems if she didn't spend quite so much time watching her cat sleep.

**Candace Fertile** teaches English at Camosun College and is a member of the *Room* editorial collective.

**Joanne Gallant-Chilton**'s photography received national attention in 2003 when the cover of *The Antigone Review* featuring her work won a top award from the Canadian Magazine Publishers Association. That same year



Joanne was featured in a CBC television documentary *Artiste dans l'âme* entitled "Parallel Worlds". Find her at [mindfulcreations.com](http://mindfulcreations.com) or [wildwomantwofeathers.com](http://wildwomantwofeathers.com).

**Michelle Kholos Brooks** is primarily a playwright with works staged in both New York and Los Angeles. She received a BA from Emerson College in Boston and an MFA in fiction from Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles. She lives in Venice, California.



**Evelyn Lau** is Vancouver's Poet Laureate. She has published ten books, including five volumes of poetry. *You Are Not Who You Claim* won the Milton Acorn Award; *Oedipal Dreams* was nominated for a Governor-General's Award. Her poetry has appeared in the *Best American Poetry* and *Best Canadian Poetry* anthologies, and has received a National Magazine Award (Silver). Her most recent collection, *Living Under Plastic* (Oolichan, 2010), won the Pat Lowther Award.

**Sara Lier's** poetry has appeared in over twenty publications. She lives in New York City, where she is currently attending Brooklyn College's creative writing program and working part time at the public library. She sleeps poorly, reads excessively, and dreams of leaving it all behind to live by the sea.

**Landon Mackenzie** is one of Canada's leading painters. She has had a major influence on a generation of artists through her twenty-five years teaching at Emily Carr University of Art + Design in Vancouver. Her work is exhibited and collected in Canada and internationally.

Born in Scotland, **Margaret Malloch Zielinski** lives now in Ottawa. Her work has appeared in several anthologies as well as in *The Antigonish Review*, *Bywords*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *Geist*, *Quills*, and *Room*. Together with five other poets, she recently published a collection of travel poetry, *Whistle for Jellyfish* (Bookland Press, Toronto).

**Christine McNair** has been published in *Arc*, *Descant*, *cv2*, *Prairie Fire*, *Poetry is Dead*, [ditchpoetry.com](http://ditchpoetry.com), and sundry other places. She was shortlisted for the 2011 Robert Kroetsch Award for Innovative Poetry. Her first collec-

tion of poetry (*conflict*) is forthcoming with BookThug in spring 2012. She works as a book doctor in Ottawa.

**Marilyn Moriarty** teaches English Literature at Hollins University in Virginia. Her work has been published in a number of journals or anthologies including *Faultline*, *Nimrod*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Quarterly West*, and *SurrealSouth '11*. She is the author of the creative non-fiction book *Moses Unchained* and the textbook *Writing Science through Critical Thinking*.

A freelance writer and ex-member of the *Room* editorial collective, **Janet Nicol** also teaches history part-time at Killarney Secondary School in Vancouver.

**Barbara Parker** lives and writes in the Canadian Rockies, in Canmore, Alberta. Her work has appeared in *spring*, *Toward the Light*, *Transitions*, and *FreeFall*. She is a past participant of the Banff Centre's Wired Writing program, and is currently working on a collection of short fiction.

Though retired from teaching, **JoAnne Potter** has written and published for more than twenty years. She wrote "Final Turnings" in 2010 shortly after her father died as the seed for his eulogy and is pleased to honour him further with its publication. Find her at [joannepotter.weebly.com](http://joannepotter.weebly.com) and [joannepotter.blogspot.com](http://joannepotter.blogspot.com).

**Clélie Rich** is a freelance editor and poet. She was part of *Room's* editorial collective in the 90s and is happy to be back for a second time. She lives in Vancouver with her herb garden, far too many books, and one small but determined cat.

**C. Caroline Schmeing** is an avid world traveller, capturing images of daily life while backpacking in Asia and Europe, living in Oceania, and jetting off to Africa during her work breaks. Her current journey is exploring the microcosmos outside her Toronto door.

**Dawn Service** has been running from the fate she's longed for most of her life. "The Cabin" is the first chapter of a manuscript she was unable to run from. When she finds a publisher, she might call it *Wilderness Bliss* or

perhaps simply *The Cabin*.

**Carol Shillibeer** writes, reads, blogs, thinks, and works when necessary. She has been published in *Other Voices*, *The Malahat Review*, and *Foliage Oak*.

**Jenny Smith** lives and works in West Vancouver, B.C., where she raises her daughter. She is a self-taught painter and creative writer. She is currently working on a series of oil paintings which represent her views on contemporary feminism.

**Taryn Thomson's** "The Game" was long-listed for the 2010 CBC Literary Prize, and shortlisted for the Writer's Guild of Canada Short Prose Competition for Developing Writers. A past participant of the Banff Centre's Wired Writing program, Taryn lives with her children in East Vancouver where she teaches and writes.

**Chuoqiao Yang** was born in Beijing and raised in Saskatoon. She is currently attending university in Ottawa. Her work has previously appeared in magazines such as *Grain* and *Ottawater*, and on CBC Radio. Most recently, she received two Western Magazine Awards for her non-fiction piece "Beijing Notes."

## CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

### ROOM'S 35TH ANNIVERSARY VOLUME

Creating *Room* for 35 volumes has been for many a labour of love, and because of this, we've chosen the theme of **labour** for the closing issue of *Room*'s Anniversary Volume, issue 35.4, to be edited by Lorrie Miller. We are looking for quality writing and art that reflect all aspects of labour: labours of love, birth, women in the labour movement, as well as traditional and non-traditional women's work. Check out our guidelines at [www.roommagazine.com](http://www.roommagazine.com) and send us your very best work.

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E-mail [news@roommagazine.com](mailto:news@roommagazine.com) with the subject line **SUBSCRIBE** or use the sign-up form at [roommagazine.com](http://roommagazine.com).



Room

a space where women can speak, connect, and showcase their creativity. Come inside and original, thought-provoking works that reflect women's strength, sensuality, vulnerability, and wit.

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Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*



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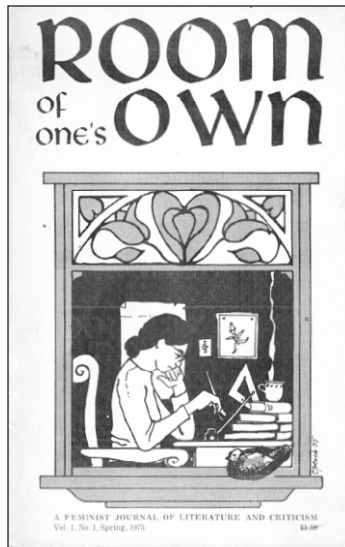
# Room

30.1  
"F" WORDS

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# Roomies

CLÉLIE RICH



When Virginia Aulin wrote her introduction to *Room's* 25th anniversary issue, she looked at the history of the magazine, and of women's writing in general. When Lisa Manfield and Karin Konstantynowicz wrote their introduction to *Room's* 30th anniversary volume, they did the same.

While this piece has some elements of a retrospective, my interest is instead the collective, the group of women who have chosen to come together to create, maintain, and nurture *Room*. Every collective member has Virginia Woolf's quote engraved on her heart. "It is necessary to have five hundred [pounds] a year and a room with a lock on the door

if you are to write fiction or poetry." All well and good. Virginia was also blessed with servants, who are of course never mentioned. Consider us, the collective, as those servants.

A new Roomie recently said that the collective seems like a secret society. In the past, we've always focused on the magazine, rather than the women behind it. But that's beginning to change. In our newsletter we now introduce the editor of each issue, we welcome new Roomies with a brief introduction, and we say fond farewells to departing Roomies. We're even considering some kind of blog on our site to enable our readers to get to know us all even better.

*Room* is one of a handful of Canadian literary magazines that is not attached to or administered by an educational institution. It's a magazine run solely by volunteers, and as our lives and interests change, the members come and go.

For readers this means the magazine itself constantly changes to

reflect the interests and experience of the current collective. This is perhaps most obvious in the women we choose to profile in our interviews, and in the themes we choose to work on.

For collective members, it means something else entirely. Where else to go to learn all aspects of publishing a literary magazine? Roomies do everything for the magazine, from paying the bills to soliciting commissions, maintaining the website, learning to copy edit and proofread, marketing, handling subscriptions, etc. Everything. Collective members can rotate through all these departments if they wish, taking with them invaluable skills when they move on to other endeavours. In the ten years since our 25th anniversary, Roomies have gone on to become editors, graphic designers, web developers, and GG-nominated and award-winning writers. Our mandate may be to put together the best quality literary magazine by Canada's emerging women writers that we can, but in doing so we are also in a position to train some of the next generation of Canadian publishing specialists. And that's rewarding!

Here is a list of some of the Roomies who have passed through the virtual doors of the magazine since its inception. And if you are a *Room* alumna whose name is not on here, please forgive me for leaving you out. Sadly, we do not have copies of every single issue, right from the very beginning. Please send me your name and the years you were active. We'll include you in future lists. (And if you have a copy of an early issue that you want to part with, we'd love to give it a good home in our archives.)

*Mindy Abramowitz*  
*Mary Anderson*  
*Sylvia Arnold*  
*Virginia Aulin*  
*Laurie Bagley*  
*Patricia Bartle*  
*Meghan Bell*  
*Robin Bellamy*  
*Tanya Berish*  
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