

# louden singletree

WRITING *from the*  
UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY



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# louden singletree

THE UFV ENGLISH DEPARTMENT'S JOURNAL  
OF CONTEMPORARY WRITERS AND ARTISTS

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ISSUE 4

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# Editor's Note

For the 2011/2012 edition of the Loudon Singletree, the editorial board focused on continuing what is becoming a great tradition at the University of the Fraser Valley. We followed the framework established by previous boards by utilizing a blind reading process and continuing to establish a consistent and recognizable image. However, we also sought to make the Loudon a more familiar publication on campus. Our work represents a step in the right direction: what is published is the product of over 150 submissions and the tireless effort of more than 35 dedicated readers, greater numbers than previous years.

While the editorial board utilized the same publication style, we strived to include fresh content. Though the calibre of work in each publication has been high, this year's board has focused on including a wide variety of genres and literary styles in the published submissions. The works chosen by the board reflects the diverse background of its members, and as such, reflects the diversity of the student body as a whole. Our publication represents a wide spectrum - the pieces feature subjects as diverse as a video game plumber and a child from a war-torn nation.

As a board, we would like to thank those who made the Loudon Singletree possible this year. Firstly, to our faculty advisor and directed studies instructor, Andrea MacPherson, thank you for being an invaluable source of knowledge and insight from the time of our first meeting and at each subsequent step in the publication process. We would also like to acknowledge the various departments in our University who have contributed financially: the Student Union Society, the English department, the Visual Arts department, the Cascade, CIVL radio, and the library. Further thanks go to Ironside Design Manufacturing Inc., a local business and supporter of the arts. To the professors who supported the Loudon by helping to promote our magazine, thank you not just for your time but for inspiring so much of the work included in our publication. Finally, thank you to the readers who were able to dedicate themselves fully to the process, and to the many more who expressed interest in helping. You represent a growing artistic community, on campus and off, of which we can all be proud.

*- from the 2012 Loudon Singletree Editorial Board*



LANE ANDERSON

## Urban Eve

There's a moment each day before the coming of dusk  
when the sun settles softly into her salty sea bed  
before the Pacific tucks her in for the night  
the sky reddens guiltily as she loses her light  
it's worthy of pause in the rush of one man  
planted and silently absorbing the sight  
but it's his back that is turned unto the proud shore  
his stare is misguided to a carbon copy instead  
towering trees of glass seed sprouting from the grey soil  
enthralled by the beauty of a rosy reflection  
while a far greater show goes on ignored  
the authentic will not be outdone by a mirror

DUSTIN DEJONG

## Beyond the Weave

Two broken arms: not enough to curb that travel itch.  
I found you sometime after my wreck, before our trip:  
a time when pain plotted to disrupt my peaking passion of a new world.  
You comforted me, in a way few had touched me before.  
You looked sharp and stood bold, and had an air of independence about you:  
you would walk into whatever situation I did, without hesitation.

I have left behind many passing companions of travel:  
when they failed to see the path parted by the peering morning sun  
igniting roads to elsewhere with pastel brilliance,  
or when they were too blind to see beyond mysterious mists  
to the adventures cloaked in secretive shrouds around the mountains.  
You though, you weren't left behind once.

You sensed that tingle in my skin, and together  
we felt that desirable heat between our thighs as  
we straddled the black leather saddle, warmed by morning rays  
and we became one with the robust rumble of the motorbike.  
We rode from ridge to ridge playing connect the dots with mountain peaks.  
Together, we experience what sleeping eyes could only dream of.

SCOTT SPARROW

# The Crimson

The blood – I caught notice of – had splattered  
more beautifully than I ever could have hoped.

This I thought as I ascended upwards through the room:  
a fraction of my once physical being, recently put down.

The brass piano lamp – now sitting painfully askew amongst  
the scrolls and quills as if to slant its suspicious eyes at me –  
had always been too weak to brighten up our life.

But somehow in this perverse collection of moments  
its light crawled out through the webs which bound it  
to become manifest in a sharply accenting gleam,  
illuminating the many crimson splatters on the wall.

The skin of Emma's body – drained of any ounce of colour now –  
became muted, along with all else in the room which seemed as if  
hastily sketched with nothing but black and grey pastels. This was true  
of the entire room, except for the fantastically mural-soaked blood-wall.

The images I could create for myself – as I continued to rise –  
from its nuanced and compassionate patterns were endless.

Much like those symmetrical splotches of ink I was once dared  
to identify: lustful lovers, betraying fucks, and a breathless bride.  
Those splotches weren't mine, but what I saw was; I kept the hallucinations  
to myself. But these bloody illustrations were different. They belonged to us.  
I played with them.

The small bit of spray which entranced me most  
began to resemble a gift she once gave me, a simple flower:  
a long stem rolling its way down the wall. I had always been fond of her  
crimson garden. Its honesty was unmistakable. Delicate petals; deadly thorns.

The pleasure of that moment was perfect – I gave myself to it.

But as moments do, this one slipped through me, and gave way to relief.

A smothering formlessness swept across the floor, engulfing both corpses.

I heard the dry thud of the gun drop from my wilted hand.

And just before an eternal blackness pervaded me

I took a last look at the crimson flower:

my last gift to myself.

STEVE THIESSEN

# The Passion of the Plumber

Don't lose hope sweet princess,  
for I am here to unclog your kingdom  
of goombas, hammer bros., and lakitu.  
I will conquer ice, wind, and water –  
all this I do for you.

Do not fret my love.  
I have plunged into cavern and lake alike,  
for you I use mushroom, fire flower, and shell,  
for I am plumber and  
for you I go through hell.

Fear not the Bowser King –  
flush away your worry, I am coming  
past the flag and into his lair  
through maze and pipe.  
I conquer with panache and flair.

I am here dearest Peach,  
deftly I jumped past firebar and Koopa.  
I have conquered Bowser, not once was I hit.  
Toadstool!? Where is the princess?  
She's in another castle! Man that's bullshit.

LACEY HALL

## High Maintenance

You told me you won't ever say those words:  
don't want to feel that way, don't hold your breath,  
don't get your hopes up, don't force it.

Just let it happen.

We met in the summer, started dating in the fall,  
got serious over winter, were inseparable by spring.  
The seasons slunked by, slowly, precariously  
and still I waited,  
watching other couples pass promises  
into each other's hands, drinking in more than just tea,  
drinking in each other, saying what they want,  
feeling what they want, no roadblocks,  
no need for license and registration please.  
Jealousy ballooned like a bullfrog, and I tapped  
your watch to make sure the hands were still moving,  
and you preached patience, yet your face told it all,  
I just needed your mouth to do the talking instead.  
And when I looked at you I felt it,  
pulsing like a strobe, pushing me forward  
with my vision tunneled trying to get to you  
to scream "Just let it out!"

I steadied myself on others around me,  
reached out to you and, surprise, just as  
I worried my hand would grasp nothing  
I finally caught you in your door well,  
October the thirtieth.

You drunkenly said those eight letters, and I said  
"No you don't really mean them, take them back,"  
which caused your voice to reach decibels that could  
shake a sleeping giant and you repeated yourself  
over and over again, until eventually I believed  
your slur and said them back proudly.

KATIE STOBART

# Magnolia

The trunk of this tree, bred  
in captivity, was planted  
East of the path I take  
on my way home. Its branches  
curl and twist,

its white buds gleam in the dark,  
petals pressed tight  
like two hands clasped  
together at the fingertips.

This dryad, wild in prayer,  
never seemed so naked  
in the winter, when her skin  
was brittle and stark, stripped  
of her summer dress.

SHANNON MCCONNELL

## gaps

in lucid moments  
her arms are free  
no longer strapped  
to the bed

skin drenched bones jut  
from her faded olive sleeves  
curled fingers of an open hand

shallow tributaries cross  
her washed-out forehead  
sunken eyes narrow

we stare

she scrunches her face  
trying to figure me out  
the shared features  
dealt through generations

she does not recognize  
the scars on my teenage skin  
or the name I repeat  
over and over

at the end of the bed  
I fold black-rimmed glasses  
untangle the elastic  
holding back sorrow and hair

we stare

she rests a finger  
against her temple  
skin limp and failing  
pinpointing  
where the pages scrawled with  
my existence  
are being torn from the spine  
shredded and dispersed

we stare

JOSH FREDE

## Cool it, kid

A simple fragrance, a kindly forced smile  
a sentence fragment, a mildly coherent style  
one timely quip, two freely given cents  
one shiny whip, no dings, dints, or dents

An amicable arrangement, a heart like mine  
a favorable estrangement, a sweet aged wine  
a guilty pleasure, a vague, nostalgic dream  
for extra measure, an unrestrained scream

No sound of music through theatre rings  
but these are a few of my favorite things  
soft cherub lips, a sudden seductive glance  
firm, natural tits, a slightly suggestive dance

Too fair to say, a fetishist at best  
I'm on my way, soon as I have redressed  
the situation, requires a gentle push  
one stipulation: provide a pinch of kush

Pot, Food, Girls, Booze  
whatever is a boy to do?  
Water, Air, Earth, Fire  
erode to show my true desire!

A reasonable question, a well developed point  
a seasonable erection, a sticky chronic joint  
with such inclination, 'tis not too hard to find  
so much inspiration, so little fucking time.

SHERYLYNN NIEZEN

# high standards

I saved a spider once  
a potential rain victim and bird bait  
kept him safely in a jar

he put up silky decorations  
in appreciation of his newfound home  
I fed him many special flies  
to jump start his second chance in life

oh how he loved his saviour  
he would climb and crawl in awe  
he was friendly and loving  
as he waited patiently by the lid

(if my mother knew about him  
there would have been screams  
closets opened and vacuums started  
he had to be my secret special friend)

we visited and dined together  
oblivious to our lycosidae-human relationship

but a pattern soon emerged  
I would serve            he would eat            I would serve            he would eat  
he just sat around and failed to help or clean  
I failed to let that go

so my special secret pet  
became an unbearable pest

I felt time and space would do us good

so forced him back into the wild  
we set a place for us to meet  
after we both had adventured alone

when time came I returned to our meeting bush  
even with all his means of transportation  
not even two of his legs brought him there

rumours started I must be hard to live with  
but I will have it known  
I will show my bitterness to every spider  
that dares to take advantage of me

MICHAEL ARTHUR

# Unforgetting

the sun is setting, this last cigarette the only  
light, you are thinking about the end  
I can tell  
from the smoke and your sigh it's starting to sink  
in.

You were always so sure but now  
her trembling lips are a story you tell  
yourself, though you cannot recall the taste  
of salt, the red, gold leaves, the frost, the last  
goodbye

You cannot say for certain you were ever really there.

no wonder the face that meets your face  
in the mirror is a stranger's.  
No wonder you can almost see yourself  
in the warm glow of your alarm clock  
waiting,  
like a thief,  
for you to fall  
asleep.

SARAH BROWN

# The Philosopher Queen

There, then: souls determined everything.

A bronze soul was destined for a life of labour—carpentry, cooking, waste disposal. A silver soul meant intelligence, but not enough; the bare minimum to receive a uniform, become a guardian of the state. Protect health, fight crime—still better than bronze, because sometimes a gun was included. And then the gold: rarest of all, well-read, intent on understanding the workings of the world. That part was especially important; it designated those souls to govern, lead. The brightest ones could even become King or Queen.

On a cold, bright morning, the rumours had started. Word had it that Tracy-Lee—Tim Crawford’s girl—had been born with a golden soul. Right there, smack dab in the middle of western Alberta’s finest trailer park.

“Oh, I coulda called it!” Kathy McDonald cried, the gossip hot on her tongue like morning coffee. “I remember her toddling around out here, just a baby. I’d watch her sometimes on Sundays, y’know. And I just knew it. I knew she was different.”

“You didn’t know,” Bertha Tram said stubbornly. “Stop showin’ off.” She was right, though. They didn’t know; their souls were bronze.

The two women quieted as the police car reappeared on the gravel. It inched past the off-white walls, the grimy fire pit, the backdrop of spruce trees. The driver tipped his hat; sun caught on the black and bounced off. In the back, staring out, was Tracy-Lee.

The following had just occurred:

Three officers had knocked on the Crawford’s door. Three times, mildly. It opened. “Hello?” said Tracy-Lee. She looked startled. “What’s going on?”

They tipped their hats to her in unison. “We’ve been sent from the government, miss,” one explained. He looked her over: fifteen, flaxen-haired, plump from Mountain Dew and frozen pizza. She didn’t look golden—minus the hair. Still, they had instructions to follow.

“Who’s there?” A woman surfaced from behind the screen door. No doubt the mother, she squinted at the strangers, then gulped. “Tim! Get over here!”

A man appeared from around the corner, wringing a towel thick with axle grease. “What’s the big deal?” His tone was casual enough, but upon spotting the officers, his brow creased.

“Not to worry, Mr. Crawford,” an officer began. “We’re not concerned with you; we came for your daughter.”

“Which one?” Mrs. Crawford exclaimed.

“This one,” he said, pointing. Tracy-Lee flinched.

“I don’t believe it,” her mother said adamantly. “Not this one. You probably got her confused with one of the other ones.” She stuck her head through the doorway and yelled, “All of you, get out here!”

A grumbling parade filed out: Tommy, Tasha, Tony, Tabitha, Tina, Trent. They stood single-file along the trailer’s side. The older ones eyed the officers suspiciously. The younger ones shuffled, swung their arms to keep warm.

“No, ma’am,” the officer said, kindly but firmly. “We’re sure it’s Tracy-Lee.”

“But what could she have done?” Her father was perplexed.

“She stole something from a museum in town.” Yet the policemen were smiling.

“And what was it?” her mother said urgently.

They smiled wider. “A book on Plato.”

“Play-Dough,” her father said, dumbfounded.

“Play-toe,” Tracy-Lee corrected, softly.

“Well, that’s ridiculous,” her mother said promptly. “What would she want with—*don’t hit your brother, Tony*—”

“Mrs. Crawford,” said an officer, “your daughter’s been tracked for a while now. It’s an extraordinary thing; sometimes a good report card can be written off as coincidence, but so many...and the bookstore incident, that’s what’s convinced them.”

“Convinced them of what?” Tina called out impatiently, snapping her gum.

He cleared his throat importantly. “That Tracy-Lee has a golden soul.”

There was a short silence. Neighbours, who had been peeping from behind their windows, now rushed out, abandoning all illusions of disinterest. Bertha Tram was slack-jawed, still in her fuzzy moose slippers. The six Crawford children stared at their sister as though she’d grown horns.

“How’s that possible?” Mr. Crawford said, stunned. “All I do is fix cars. My wife, she can’t even fry an egg right.”

“Hey,” grunted Mrs. Crawford.

“Sometimes,” said one officer, “the world works in mysterious ways.”

“But most of the time,” another officer added quickly, “it doesn’t.”

The crowd was beginning to mutter, point, elbow each other. Mr. Crawford rubbed his forehead. “Well, what happens now?”

“We’ll take her to the airport, see her off to Ottawa. There, she’ll get a high-class education, meet members of Parliament, have ample time for studying..you never know, maybe she could even become Queen one day.” The officer looked at Tracy. “Pretty exciting, huh?”

“I—I don’t want to go,” she threw out.

There was a collective gasp. “Wha?” said Tommy, mouth agape.

“I don’t.” It was true. She only wanted to watch T.V., play with the dogs. Read Nietzsche under the covers with a flashlight, like always.

“Don’t listen to her,” her mother said hastily. “She’ll go. Doesn’t know what’s good for her.”

But the policemen were nodding knowingly at Tracy-Lee. One of them gave her a good-natured pat on the shoulder. He leaned in. “That’s what they told us you’d say.”

They drove for a long while, snaking through the mountain roads. Tree-studded cliffs of rock stood on one side; for a while, if Tracy-Lee craned her neck, she could still make out flat ground on the other. Sometimes, large clumps of the land looked wrong: beetles had gnawed away at the pines, leaving skeletons behind. Tracy-Lee had never been this far away from home before. In other circumstances, it might’ve been exciting.

“We’re spending a night up here,” an officer explained. “Tomorrow morning, we’ll make for the airport.” He peered in the rearview mirror at Tracy-Lee, who was chewing her lip, still staring out the window.

“They said it’d give you time to reflect,” he added encouragingly.

“On that note—” Another officer unearthed a small cassette player, inserted the plug into an opening on the dashboard. The dash was a wall of lights, little coloured dots blinking on and off.

“Most of the time, things for us are pretty quiet,” he continued. “I mean, sometimes, people get out of control—but they’re just lost. They just need to be told where to go. We bring ‘em in quick so they can get help, learn their place. But most of the time, things are pretty quiet.”

“And when it’s quiet,” another officer added, “we sing.”

He popped in a cassette. A fuzzy recording, a keyboard swooning in reggae, played pleasantly. Soon words came, and the officers sung along.

This is what they sang:

*“Don’t worry about a thing*

*'Cause every little thing gonna be all right  
Singin' Don't worry about a thing  
'Cause every little thing gonna be all right"*

They had clearly practiced, many a time: one a reedy soprano, one alto, one a deep, low baritone. Tracy-Lee smiled politely, but pulled her sweater tighter around her shoulders. The sun was slowly fading.

The officer switched the car's high-beams on. They turned off the highway, drove down a narrow dirt road, came to a stop at the foot of a small hill. There were two wood cabins sticking out of the hill, ram-shackle. A dusting of snow covered them.

"Here we are," the policeman said as they climbed out. He pointed to the smaller cabin. "There's your accommodations. Small, but it'll do. There's a battery-powered light in there, but sadly, no running water. You gotta go, you're gonna have to make do with that." He gestured to a little wooden box off to the side, presumably an outhouse, and sighed apologetically. "Hopefully it's been kept clean."

Tracy-Lee shrugged. She was fairly sure she'd seen worse in the trailer.

He motioned to the larger cabin. "We'll be right over here if you need anything. Otherwise, be up bright and early tomorrow morning!"

"Right at 06:00 hours," another officer confirmed.

Tracy-Lee watched them trek to their quarters, all three whistling merrily. Slowly, she made her way to her cabin, pushing the door open with a *creak*. Inside, it was sparse: a cot, a cookstove, a pot, a knife. On the small table lay a book. She walked over, touched it: The Republic. Identical to the one she had stolen.

Sticky notes, yellow and pink and blue, stood out from the pages. At home, she'd only made it through a quarter or so, but flipping through, she saw that sections were highlighted until the end. Its text beckoned her; she felt the familiar tug, that word-seeking worm squirming in her stomach. Pulling out the chair, she began to read.

*Let us suppose that philosophical minds always love knowledge  
of a sort which shows them the eternal nature not varying from  
generation and corruption.*

*And further, let us agree that they are lovers of all true being;  
there is no part whether greater or less, or more or less honorable,  
which they are willing to renounce.*

*Truthfulness: they will never intentionally receive into their minds falsehood, which is their detestation, and they will love the truth.*

*We shall also acknowledge that such a union of qualities is possible, and that those in whom they are united, and those only, should be rulers in the State.*

Tracy-Lee paused, frowning. She flipped a few pages forward, scanned down.

*God in fashioning those of you who are fitted to hold rule mingled gold in their generation, for which reason they are the most precious—but in the helpers silver, and iron and brass in the farmers and other craftsmen.*

And they'd told her she had a golden soul! She stared down at herself, at the raggedy sweater which enfolded her body. There was a Spaghetti-O stain on its hem. Certainly, they had been mistaken about her.

She searched through the sticky notes until she spotted 'soul' scrawled onto one of them.

*Let us never say that the soul even comes close to being destroyed by a fever or any other disease.*

*But what it is like in truth, seen as it should be, not maimed by its partnership with the body—that we can only see by means of rational calculation.*

That wasn't enough, though. Tracy-Lee needed proof. "You just won't be able to sleep without knowing," she muttered. She pinched her skin, popped her tongue out, expelled a huge breath—but no soul came out.

"Hmm," she said, frustrated. She pulled her ears, shook her head back and forth, stamped her feet. Nothing. Then she spied the knife.

"A little door to coax you out," she instructed, placing the blade against her arm. It sank in; nothing appeared but a drop of blood, glistening.

She cringed, dropped the knife, regarded her limbs as if furious with them. With a great huff, she stalked over to shut off the light, then slid into the puffy sleeping bag

covering the cot. She lay there in the darkness for a while, making out the faint shade of the ceiling, the little cut itching her skin. Then, rising as if near-crazed, she thrust off the sleeping bag and returned to where the knife lay.

She picked it up, pressed harder into her arm. “Ah—” Teeth clenched, the steel sliced deeper. Wet red rivers trailed past her wrist. It felt like a dog-bite, but Tracy-Lee persisted: she was close now, perhaps, close to unearthing it. She felt faint—was something coming out? The room wavered; she sunk to the ground. And now, a mess of sparkling lights swam before her, muddled and twinkling, thickening the air. Tracy-Lee drew a faint breath and squinted. In this blur, they could’ve been any colour.

It was another cold, bright morning. The three police officers whistled in unison as they walked over to Tracy-Lee’s cabin. They knocked on the door: three times, mildly. When there was no answer, they exchanged a puzzled look. One officer pushed the door open.

At first, it was difficult to see anything: the room alit by the dawn’s blinding glare. The first officer inside made out a heap of golden hair on the ground. A book lay open on the table. The text was blurred, unreadable, covered in stains.

“Holy Toledo!” he cried. “Go call for a helicopter.” The other two officers scrambled outside. He heard car doors open, their radios buzz.

Sunlight flashed onto a shiny object; quickly, he bent down to seize it. “Yeesh!” he exclaimed, as the blade of the knife bit into his skin. A drop of blood formed on his index finger. It hovered there, wobbling slightly: the same shade as the puddle at his feet. Despite himself, he paused to watch it trickle down his finger.

“Medics are on their way,” came a voice from the door. His fellow officers had returned, breathing heavily.

One gestured at the scene. “What a shame.”

The other was shaking his head. “I guess they were wrong about her. Never heard of them being wrong before.”

“Poor kid,” the first officer said, sadly. “And we’d really got her hopes up.”

With that, they turned, making their way back to the cruiser. The radio was buzzing again, beckoning them away: an important politician was flying in, requiring police escort at the airport. The cold of the mountain air grazed the men’s faces, nibbled the cut on the first officer’s finger. He stopped walking. The sun’s brightness had caused his eyes to fill with water.

“You all right, Frank?” another said, looking back in confusion.

Frank slid on a pair of Ray-Bans and continued.

There, then: souls determined everything.

AMY VAN VEEN

# Oliver

The medicinal smell of Oliver's formaldehyde cocktail seeped through his verdant green face mask. His latex gloves already felt the sudsy sponge bath he gave his client, as well as the deep tissue massage given to alleviate any tensions the body may have felt after such a monumental passage of life. The eyes were closed without horror, the mouth sat with dignity, completely closed and positioned in almost a half-smile as if the client had just heard something amusing. The table upon which his client lay already captured most of the now useless scarlet fluid while his own personal blend of preserving perfection eased into the once occupied roadways lying beneath her pale, aged skin.

This first part of the process was what lay the necessary groundwork for the real artistry to follow. He understood the biological purpose behind each and every step he took, and he appreciated the man who first put it to practice. The second half, however, was where the true honor lay.

For the ladies, he used a lavender shampoo, one that would give their visitors an olfactory illusion of a natural, vibrant garden. The men got what they were used to: a quick and thorough clean. As he looked down at Mrs. Winifred Williamson's peaceful face, he began to weave the story she lived.

Based on her petite and delicate frame, Winifred, he decided, had been studying the fine art of dance in France when the war had been declared and took the advice of her teachers by going with three friends to the untouchable land of Australia. There, while performing in small theaters to keep up her end of the rent with her roommates, she had met a man. William Williamson. It was a ridiculous name to give a child, but even more so it was a ridiculous name for a man to bear.

Oliver moved from the hair, to begin the minute details of her face. The trick was to capture the beauty of youth - as all of his clients had, no doubt, been stunning in their prime - and give them the kind of last hurrah their young selves would be proud of.

Within a month, the two strangers were married. Mrs. Williamson was forced to quit her life of dance when she became pregnant, and Mr. Williamson was never around long enough to care. As a result, Mrs. Williamson raised three healthy and beautiful girls and one boy. After they had grown and her husband had died, Mrs. Williamson took the time to see the Europe she never had the chance to when she was in Paris. Even after she settled in Chatham, she took every chance she could to catch a ballet in some small production theater or another.

Oliver, of course, knew nothing specific about Mrs. Williamson. He knew she lived in their small Ontario town when she died at the glowing age of 94, but beyond that, everything was just conjecture. She may not have been a dancer, she may not have been married, but by giving his clients an imaginative farewell, he could give them one last life.

His scrubs were replaced by a light cotton button-up in a bright tangerine hue. His booties exchanged for classic brown loafers, tasseled and shined. As he peered out the office window, he noticed a few unthreatening clouds peering down at him with a smile, and he knew today had been a good day. As the wristwatch on his right hand ticked slowly, easing its way towards the 4:30 alarm, he pushed his blonde hair back and away from his soft face. He had to leave before the cleaner came in. The one thing he could not be confronted by was the lingering scent of the alcohol-based disinfectant that filled every inch of his office and his mind, throwing him back to the days of his father's biting breath. His routine was securely set and at the sound of one, two, three chimes, Oliver silenced his friend and began his walk home. Chatham, ON was not a small town, but it also could never compete with the likes of Windsor or Brantford. The streets were tickled by the summer's cheery glow peeking through the bright oak leaves leaning down to tease the tops of pedestrians' heads. Oliver's workplace was located three blocks east of the town's main road and his own apartment was a mere block west of Main and two street corners north. The cinnamon brick storefronts hinted at a distinguished history, the kind of history Winifred herself probably enjoyed, while the crisp white window frames and automatic doors knowingly signaled modernity. This town was an interesting mix of demographics. On the one side of life's hill were those who had made camp in Chatham for decades and whose need for automatic doors had led the town council to motion a change to business bylaws, while on the more naive side of the hill, the many quaint houses were being occupied by newlyweds ready to settle down and begin their new families. It was thanks to the former that Oliver's business was booming.

Street by street, cobblestoned crosswalk by cobblestoned crosswalk, Oliver made his way towards his equally balanced home. The research he had done had indeed given him several possibilities of where to apply his talents, but it was only upon personal inspection of each contender that he had been horrified to find mass states of disarray. One town had the audacity to allow some Main Street businesses to display garish neon signs, while others kept quiet with their hand-painted postings. Another town had taken chaos to a new level with circular road patterns. The ugly realities of the disordered world were inexcusable, but it was the charm and consistency that had given Chatham a rousing yes.

As he rounded the final corner, Oliver could see his apartment building. The brick was

a warm caramel color while the doors and window frames boasted the same natural white as the rest of the town. By four forty-five, he was in his apartment, carefully taking the time to secure each of his three brass locks. Jacket in hand, he hung it up on one of three coat hooks fastened securely to the natural white wall on the left. To the right of where he entered, he came upon his kitchen island where three stools topped with black leather and held up by polished brass legs offered a place for him to eat. His kitchen cupboards blended easily into the wall behind them and it was there he set about making his dinner for one. It was Wednesday, and on Wednesday nights after dinner Oliver always accepted a scheduled invitation to join Mrs. Kazlauskas for dessert and tea.

Mrs. Kazlauskas was an older woman who lived in the apartment above his. She was the ideal upstairs neighbor. Even though her floors were hardwood, she would never move an inch without her marigold yellow bunny slippers. She'd told him on more than one occasion that she saw their frivolity, but couldn't help but smile when she looked down to see those little marble eyes peering back up at her. The apartment building was four floors, with one apartment on each floor. At precisely six o'clock, Oliver unlocked each of his three brass locks, closed and locked the door behind him and took on the dark maple stairs left foot first. When he reached Mrs. Kazlauskas's door, he knocked once, twice, three times before she opened the door. As he took a seat, she pulled the tiramisu out of the fridge.

"I made it this afternoon." Every Wednesday, she would pick a different dessert to make him.

"It looks delicious, Mrs. Kazlauskas."

"Oh please! Call me Edie!"

"You know I can't do that Mrs. Kazlauskas." She'd been trying to get him to ever since they first met, but he couldn't risk impropriety with such a casual address.

"Well, I still think you've got it in you, but I guess I can let it slide tonight. Would you like some tea?"

She made a point to offer him tea every time even though they both knew the original invitation six years ago included tea, and they've never strayed from their tradition.

"I would, yes. Thank you."

"Would you like to play bridge tonight? Or perhaps a more lively game of poker?"

"Whatever you'd like Mrs. Kazlauskas."

"Poker it is, son!" Before she could stop herself, she turned pink at the slip of such a name. He too couldn't help but avert his eyes for the sake of a moment's composure. Neither one acknowledged it happened, and so the game continued.

The night passed as it usually did with Edie talking about her husband who had died twenty years before. She talked of when they first met when she spent a summer abroad thanks to her parents. They had offered her money for school at one of their Ivy League alma maters, but she preferred the money go to more 'cultural' experiences.

"I want to taste life," she had told them sixty years ago and now recollected to Oliver's patient and grateful ears. "I want to live! I want to love! I want to see all there is to see!"

"I had hoped they'd let me go to Paris, or Prague. Somewhere my travel magazines had hinted glamorously at. But instead they sent me to..."

"...your second cousin on your mother's side..." Oliver continued the well-told story.

"...who lived in..."

"...Finland."

"Finland! What kind of a world was a young girl going to see in Finland! Snow and yaks? So I left Finland the minute I arrived at the airport..."

"...and you trekked off to find Paris..."

"...the City of Love. I was a stupid girl, but thankfully I didn't get very far. I was waiting anxiously for a boat to take me to the next country over. I had hardly read a map! I thought Paris was a few hour train ride on the other side of the coast - at most. Thankfully, I forgot my luggage when I stepped out of the harbor lobby."

"...and who should have found it, but..."

"...my knight in shining parka, Ramunas."

"Mr. Kazlauskas."

"Oh my dear," Edie scolded as she saw him fold, "you must at least remember my husband by his first name. Ramunas is such a strong name, such a calm name. He was the constant in my ever wavering life."

"Alright, Mrs. Kazlauskas."

When Oliver had moved in to the apartment below, she had been worried. She didn't want a young bachelor keeping her up at all times of the night, but from the minimal noise she heard downstairs, she knew he hadn't been anything to worry about. The week after he moved in, she had seen him coming down the street from her third floor window. She'd only had one child. He was a magnificent child. Strong, independent, warm like his father, blonde like his father, before he'd been taken from her too early. When she saw Oliver, she saw her son's golden hair, strong jaw and stolen youth haunting her. It took her two years to get over the shock he had caused her, and several weeks after their confessions of shared loss before their Wednesdays began.

Dessert had been eaten, tea had been supped, and the poker game had ended with

Edie as a runaway winner. As Oliver bid his goodnights, Mrs. Kazlauskas closed her door already planning for the following week's dessert.

The next morning began as every morning had. His eyes opened to his natural white ceiling, one minute before his 6:30 alarm was expected to go off. After one, two, three faint bleeps of his clock, he was out and beginning his morning bathroom routine. By 6:45, he was getting his breakfast together and making his coffee. Like clockwork, 7:30 rolled around and his day began to gain momentum. He peered outside at the formidable clouds forming and chose against a simple shirt, opting for a lighter sweater instead. His precisely pressed chinos on, marine blue sweater secured and black and white umbrella in hand, Oliver's tasseled loafers began their morning commute. As he walked into his office that Thursday morning, his secretary notified him of who his client was today. In anticipation he waited for the possibility of a story to arise.

"Mr. Thomas Doyle," she relayed.

As he walked to the room, his spirits dropped and his nose stung with the lingering smell of disinfectant. No story today.

Friday followed much the same pattern. Saturday was his day of errands: grocery shopping, laundry, cleaning the apartment. Sunday came and went without much consequence other than several more books read and several lonely hours acknowledged. By Monday, he was looking forward to a new week of tales and possibilities that lay behind the lives of his clients, but once again he was faced with a dead end and his heart hiccupped in anger.

"Mr. Jack St. Cloud."

His walk home Monday night was deflated; he barely had the energy to notice the freshly painted white trim around Chatham's information board. Four blocks west, two blocks north. Street by street. Cobblestoned crosswalk by cobblestoned crosswalk.

Tuesday morning he went to work, not hoping for anything different than what the few days had served him. There would be no stories to imagine, no pasts to reignite. He would continue to work until Wednesday evening's dessert and tea. He would remember to ask her how her usual Monday night visit at her friend's in Essex went.

"Good morning, Oliver," smiled his secretary.

"Good morning."

"Are you alright this morning?"

"Yes, I'm fine," he reassured, hoping to not have to explain.

“Well your...um....”

“Client. You can call them clients,” he reassured her calmly.

“Your client is here.”

“Alright, and what’s his name?” He couldn’t help but assume.

“Mrs...”

A smile began to break.

“...Edith Kaz...”

He felt the blood rush out of his head.

“...Kazloh...”

It drained from his fingertips.

“...Kazloss...”

He stood there. Empty. Stuck in that state which he massaged his clients out of.

“Kazlauskas,” he stated.

“Yes! Thank you! She’s in the room,” she told him before the phone rang once, two times before she answered, completely unaware of the storm of emotions painting themselves across his usually steadfast face.

He slowly moved through the doors, into the hallway. Without changing into his uniform, he pushed himself across the disinfected threshold. There. On the table. On his table of imagination and potential, of happiness and honour. There she lay.

“Eddie,” he choked.

He wasn’t accustomed to seeing those he loved in this state. He was accustomed to death; any young man would be if, at the age of sixteen, he lost his parents in a house fire. Gloveless, he grabbed the sterile table for strength. That fire. The one night he wasn’t home. The one night he had chosen to leave his mother alone with him. Oliver knew he couldn’t be trusted. It was his fault he was ill and it was his fault he refused to deal with it. He couldn’t stop his mind from going back to that morning when his father’s sloppy hand had caught his cheek for the last time. Oliver had spent every day helping his mother get his father out of the house. Out to find help. He didn’t have to remain ill. He didn’t have to remain dangerous. But he chose to. That son of a bitch chose to. That one night. The night Oliver decided to take back his life, to take back the youth his father had stolen from him, was the night his father’s alcohol soaked fire took two.

There hadn’t been bodies.

Now there was a body.

She had a story. He knew her story. His knuckles tightened on the hard metallic table before his body hit the floor.

LEAH JACOBSON

# Happenstance

Every step she took was a question addressed to the floor. With knitted brows and bitten lip, she weaved through the classroom on hesitant feet, her fingers lingering on the edges of desks as she passed. She looked utterly lost, and I wondered if she had walked into the wrong room by mistake. But she continued on to the far end of the classroom without looking back and dropped herself heavily into a window seat.

“That’s El,” my self-appointed personal informant told me. Sara. With no H. That was how she introduced herself. Straight-faced, but with a silent dare for me to question it. I didn’t.

I also hadn’t asked her who the girl was. But Sara No H, apparently, saw it as her duty to cure me from New Guy Syndrome and ensure I was seamlessly integrated into the student body of Astoria High School. She was guiding me through any potential embarrassments—such as misspelling her name—as if I was a displaced alien visitor, though I hadn’t even moved here from out of state. Mom and I were former residents of Ridgefield, Oregon, which is separated from Astoria by only a handful of towns. We’d relocated for occupational purposes, but my mother insisted that the name itself was worth the move.

My mother had a bizarre affiliation for unusual names. I had to persuade her once not to legally change our last name from “White” just because it was “not even a *colour*.”

Hence my unfortunate name: Sylum.

I was one letter away from a nut house.

Maybe Sara No H had the right idea.

Hello, I’m Sylum Please Don’t Put An A In Front Of That.

The girl next to me was tapping her fingernails against the desk. They were painted black to match her hair. She must have thought El needed a conditional introduction as well, because she added after an appropriately dramatic pause, “She thinks she’s psychic.”

“Psychic?” I repeated, though I didn’t think I’d misheard her. It was just what you did when someone said something you had not predicted.

The curve of her mouth took a nasty turn. “We were best friends in middle school. She told me during a game of Truth or Dare.”

Around us, the class filled up. No one took the seat next to the girl who thought she

was psychic.

“I didn’t really believe her, of course, but I played along. I asked her if our basketball team was going to finally beat Knappa that year...”

El didn’t turn to notice the emptiness beside her. Her head was craned to look out the window, her chin buried in the palm of her hand.

“...But she said it didn’t work that way. She could only see ‘certain things.’ Whatever that means.”

The early sun stretched its arms into the room like a drowsy cat. Her hair that I had initially thought of as the colour of milk chocolate was red under the sun’s gentle fingertips.

“I told her that that was pretty convenient.”

I wondered who would notice if I left my seat to sit in the same patch of sunlight as El, if I reached out to touch the halo of light on her hair to determine if it felt, as well as looked, as though it had been set on fire.

“Honestly, if she was going to claim to be psychic, she could have at least made it convincing.”

The answer to that was fairly simple—El, Sara No H, and everyone else in the room. It was so inconvenient being visible.

A hundred years too late, I recognized the fat silence sitting between Sara No H and me. The heavy, loaded kind that begged me to say something, to laugh and agree with her observations.

I started to speak and realized, with my mouth open like a goldfish, that I had no perfect line to mend the tear in the fabric of our exchange. And like the stupid goldfish I was, boasting only a ten-second memory, I bubbled out the first words that swam through my mind, forgetting they weren’t the correct ones for the moment: “What does the ‘L’ stand for?”

“What?” Sara No H’s eyebrow raised. It was the classic look of disquiet and uncertainty, the one that made me fear I had been found out. “Oh. No, El is a nickname. Her real name is Gabriella Rebane.”

“Gabriella,” I repeated. Not for confirmation. It was just what you did when someone said something that made perfect sense.

I needed to draw something. The ache was spreading from my fingertips to the muscles of my forearms, louder than the growl of my stomach. I was the only student migrating

away from the smell of cafeteria pizza, and I cursed my eccentric artist mother for passing on her eccentric artist genes.

Outside the back double doors there was nothing but an empty field with grass trimmed into neat submission. The air here smelled just like it did in Ridgefield—damp, a perpetual promise of rain—but with a saltier edge. I made a mental note to sketch at the beach sometime this weekend now that it was only a hop, skip, and a jump away.

I recognized the perfect patch of grass when I saw it. Turning around so I was facing the school, I sat cross-legged and settled in. Something was off. I should have been able to see more of the chain-link fence to my right. I shifted slightly. Yes, that seemed right.

I extracted my sketchbook and felt my way through the pages to the drawing I'd begun last night after unpacking the last of the boxes. The image had skulked through my mind while I removed cookbooks and tea towels from the box labelled in Sharpie as *kitchen crap*.

The *squiging* sound of footsteps across soggy grass reached my ears as I was penciling in the gentle slope of an eyebrow. I folded my sketchbook closed, tucked it under my left knee, and looked up to see the girl who thought she was psychic.

Eight more *squiges* later and she was within arm's reach. I had to crane my stiff neck skywards to see her. Shadows sat like drops of ink at the corner of her eyes where they had a clandestine meeting with the line of her nose and the whisper-quiet curve of her eyebrow.

El dropped onto the damp grass like a stone thrown into a silent pond. The ripples crashed into me, and all stillness was shattered.

Floundering for nonchalance, I only managed a weak, "Hey." Let the record show that this was the first thing I said to Gabriella Rebane.

"What're you drawing?" she asked with a tilt of her head toward the offending evidence unsuccessfully hidden behind my leg.

I shrugged noncommittally.

"Can I see?" She was wearing a T-shirt depicting multi-hued birds sitting on a wire. There were seven of them.

"No," I said.

"Why?"

My fingers flexed, begging to shove my sketchbook into the depths of my book bag, away from potentially prying eyes. "Nothing personal," I said. "I don't show anyone what I draw."

"Not even your mother?"

My hand had been inching through the grass towards my sketchbook. It froze.

“She’s an artist too, isn’t she?”

My goldfish brain did not venture to consider other options outside its glass bowl—it was singularly focused, swimming around and around the same plastic castle. “You really are psychic?” I blurted.

Her stare remained even, and in a voice just as controlled she asked, “Is that what Sara told you?”

I opened my mouth, let loose a few bubbles, and closed it again.

“My dad’s a realtor. I help him with his open houses some Saturdays. You know, rearrange furniture and bake cookies to subliminally brainwash potential buyers into feeling at home.” The evenness of her voice was rumpling around the edges. “I met your mom when she was house shopping. Did you know she has every one of your school photos in her wallet? That mushroom cut in grade six was a rather unfortunate look for you.”

There was a hole in her jeans at her left knee. It was about the diameter of a nickel. Horizontal lines of white threads were exposed beneath it, tapered like the tail of a comet. I said, “I don’t even show my mom.”

Seconds passed, tight as piano strings. Instead of doing the reasonable thing and leaving me to suffer her silence, she said, “That must drive her crazy.”

I considered the conversation she must have had with my mother in order for her to come to this conclusion. With a grimace, I said, “Yep.”

“Is that the reason you do it, Sy?” Her lips spread into a grin, revealing a slice of teeth.

“Sy” was what my mother called me when I was exasperating her. She thought the homonymity was hilarious.

I cursed my eccentric artist mother for her big mouth.

“No. It’s private,” I said. “You wouldn’t walk down the halls passing out pages of your diary, would you?”

“How do you know I keep a diary?” El pressed a hand to her lips and gasped theatrically. “Are you *psychic*?”

“Lucky guess,” I muttered.

She fingered the hole in her jeans at her left knee. “You know, I never actually said I was psychic. I think the word I used was ‘clairvoyant.’”

“There’s a distinction?” I asked, watching her widen the tear in the fabric.

“Psychic is a blanket term for someone with extrasensory abilities. So if I was a precognitive psychic, I could see the future, and if I was clairvoyant, I could see the

present.”

“Can’t everyone see the present?” I asked, a grin brimming over.

El rolled her eyes. “See things that are happening elsewhere, present-time. Which is fairly useless because you can watch it happen but can’t actually do anything about it.”

I swished the words around in my mouth before I said them, taste-testing for their possible effect. Then I let them roll slowly off my tongue: “You would have the same problem if you were precognitive. The real issue is of proximity, isn’t it?”

El finally looked up from the blemish she was picking at. She studied my face, searching for and finding the same absence of doubt in my features as she’d heard in my voice. And I recognized the look in her eyes for what it was now. Amazement and relief and gladness—all from the simple knowledge that she’d spoken and been heard. It was a look I could try a thousand years to duplicate in graphite and never succeed.

The bell rang, cleaving the moment in two.

“Reality’s calling,” El said, a smile turning up the corners of her mouth. “Thank you, Sylum. And let your mom know that I kept my promise to make sure you didn’t spend lunchtime sulking by yourself with your sketchbook.”

I wanted to thank her, too—for whatever it was we were thanking each other for. I wanted to tell her I’d walk her to class, even though I didn’t know the way. I wanted to tell her that I would follow her anywhere.

But she was up and gone before I could say the words I wasn’t supposed to.

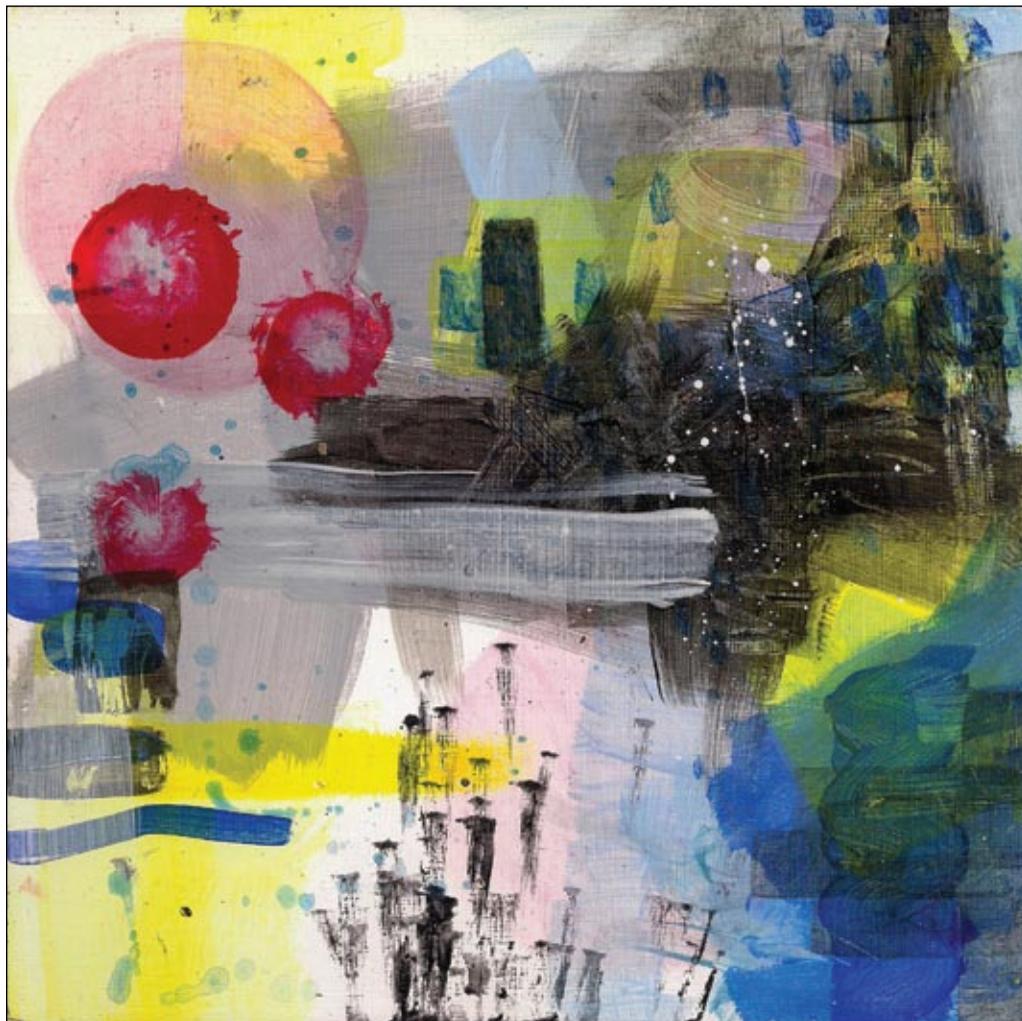
I picked up my sketchbook again. And I thought of the advertisement for large, affordable studio space clipped from the Daily Astorian and the business card for Alexander Rebane, AREA Properties agent, which had ended up among the clutter on my mother’s desk.

I found my page again and opened my sketchbook to a drawing of a girl sitting cross-legged in a field of grass, wearing an incomprehensible look and a shirt with seven birds on a wire.

Carefully, I drew in the small tear in her jeans at her left knee.

RENÉE HARTWIG

# Industrial



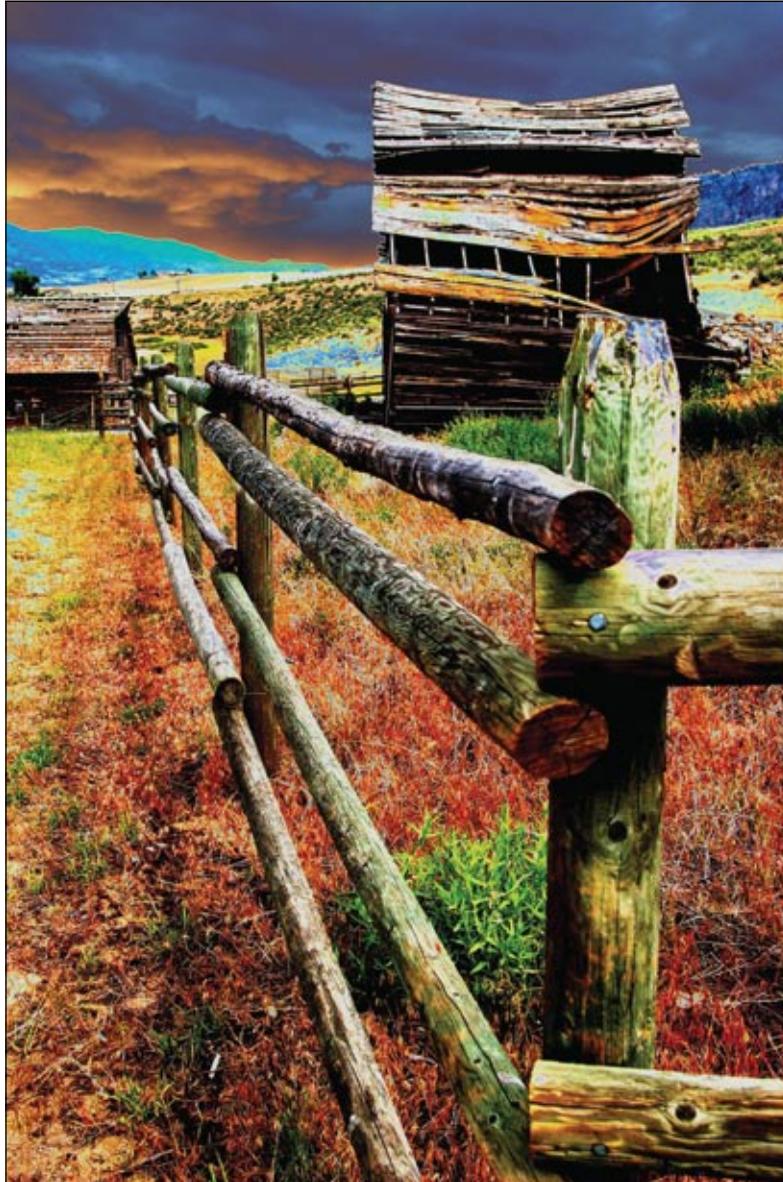
JESSICA WARKENTIN

## The Face of Burma



JENNY HAMILTON

# Harvest



RENÉE HARTWIG

# Understudy



NICK UBELS

## Scavenger

Murphy flattened his damp, black hair with the sleeve of his trench coat as he entered the hideous split-level. His hair looked darker when it was wet, hiding the incipient grey that was creeping into his once-youthful curls.

He shut the rickety door behind him and pulled a silver lighter out of his breast pocket. It had once belonged to a man he met in the colonial marines. It still bore his initials, R.X., and a hand-etched inscription that read “There is a light that never goes out.” Murphy chuckled in spite of himself. Easily flicking it open, he ignited it without looking. Reg was always a sucker for oldies.

While his eyes slowly adjusted to the modest light that surrounded him, he glanced out the living room window. Limbs had begun splintering off what few, ancient trees remained with far too much ease, cracking severely as they careened down the unlit street. The charred remains stood ominously regal, like harbingers of an unknown horror. The storm was picking up. That might buy him some time before the mob would be on the move again.

He briefly surveyed the decrepit house before taking the stairs two at a time in spite of his impaired vision, rocketing towards the door at the top where even now the faint chimes of a timid music box made themselves known amid the din of the gale. Chopin’s Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2. Murphy skidded to a stop when he heard it. Every cell in his body was buzzing with terror at the realization that someone else –

Instinctively, he withdrew his electro-pistol from the inner fold of his trench coat, affixing a retrofitted ‘32 Wichita Screamer to the chamber. There could be a ‘Rauder in there. Or worse. He couldn’t afford to take any chances.

Carefully, Murphy inched towards the door along what remained of the composite wood-panelled wall. He saw the rusted handle. Wrenching it open, he straightened himself and pointed his gun at the room’s contents in one swift motion. Silence. Dust rose in the shape of a parabola, framing his silhouette in the door.

Puzzled, he stared intently at the blackness. He cautiously lowered his pistol and placed it on the desk that floated near the door. Once again he flicked open the lighter marked R.X. and held it in front of him like a talismanic shield. Sheets of gleaming white paper littered the floor. They were inscribed with row after row of the same, crowded five-line pattern. There were dots and lines and other strange notations pencilled in.

Murphy couldn't believe his luck.

His right hand groped for the first piece that lay in front of him but the acrid surface singed the tips of his fingers. Murphy wanted to howl in pain as he waved his hand frantically back and forth to cool the burn. Moderating his heavy breath, he eyed the paper jealously. He removed a torn handkerchief from his jacket and wrapped it tightly around his throbbing limb and started towards the sheet again.

"You don't want to ... do that."

Murphy whirled around to face a thirteen-year-old girl strangely illuminated as she sat on top of an EZ lock dresser covered in benign, felt-tipped messages from a long-forgotten childhood. Murphy relaxed and smiled at the image.

"You're just a guardian, a projection," he said. "Why should I listen to you?"

He continued to eye the figure as he stepped closer to its lofty position.

"It doesn't belong to you."

"Yeah, well if you care about it so much, why'd you leave it here?" He brushed a brittle potting plant off its perch, sending it crashing to the ground.

"In fact, judging by the condition of the place, you've been gone at least half a century. In my books, the statute of limitations has run out on your claim to ownership of any of the stuff in here."

The hologram glanced furtively towards the tattered curtain that was all that stood between the girl's tiny bedroom and the storm raging outside.

"I'm sure she doesn't mind, but I do. She left it in my care and I aim to make sure it goes to good use."

"Wait, are you trying to tell me that you, a hologram, have some kind of vested interest in the protection of this shit?" Murphy laughed broadly. "Well I'll be damned if that isn't the craziest thing I've heard this week!"

"I wouldn't think it's so funny if I were you. All it would take is for me to raise the alarm and the 'Rauders would be crawling over this place before you even."

Murphy's expression went deadly serious in an instant. He pointed his trembling finger at the pale blue figure.

"Don't you ever mention those fucking 'Rauders to me."

"What? Are you scared?"

"Hell yes, I'm scared. Those... things would put the fear of God into Satan's own child."

"Well there's not a chance you're taking those papers."

"Listen, uh, what do you go by?"

“Tamara.”

“Tamara, a man like me could really use something organic, something I could trade. Judging by what you’ve got lying around on the floor here, I could probably upgrade to some kind of prop cycle.”

“And what would become of my music? Kindling for a bush fire? Writing is sacred. Paper is sacred.”

“Bullshit. Paper,” Murphy said, clasping one sheet with his handkerchief-wrapped hand, “is power. Paper is security. And I’m in need of precisely that so if you’ll excuse me...”

Murphy began to gather the sheets into a loose pile, stacking them on top of a second handkerchief he produced from his jacket. Tamara watched with increasing discomfort. His task complete, Murphy moved towards the door.

“Wait!” Tamara shouted.

Murphy turned again to face the digital figure.

“Could you... Could you wind that music box, there on the table?”

Murphy didn’t say anything, but picked up the fragile device and slowly cranked its copper key. A strange paralysis came over his body. He wobbled like a drunk for a few moments before hurtling suddenly down to the floor, throwing the neatly-gathered package of loose leaf into the air like confetti. When it landed on his face and exposed arms, it seared his skin. But Murphy didn’t feel a thing.

Murphy gasped. He was naked, except for a grubby loin cloth and a handkerchief that covered his right hand. His body was blistering under the desert swelter; his face felt like the sun. He frantically surveyed his surroundings and noticed a sheet of paper attached to a nearby signpost. Murphy groped for the note and began to read:

You can catch a colonial transport in town,

Four and a half kilometres if you follow the arrow.

Thanks for keeping the music alive.

Using the handkerchief to protect his tender hand, he tore the page off the rotted wooden pole and folded it neatly inside the handkerchief. Murphy looked west, in the direction indicated by the sign. A tiny array of combat barracks stood out in the barren waste. At least he had something he could trade.

JENNIFER COLBOURNE

# Art

Once there was an artist. He must have been a good artist, because he had shows in Zurich and Milan, and people paid a lot of money for his art. Eventually he could do almost anything and people would admire his work, because he was told he had Creative Genius.

One day the artist's wife had a baby. The wife died in childbirth; however the artist found he soon forgot his grief upon the realization of what he called his Great Epiphany.

His Great Epiphany occurred the first time he held the baby. Holding the baby out at arms' length, he noticed the baby had his nose. It was then his Great Epiphany came into being.

"I have created this baby!" he declared aloud, momentarily alarming the nurses.

"Sir-" began the head nurse, with every intention of quieting him down- until, of course, she recognized him as a Great Artist and demurely left the room.

"I have created this baby!" he cried again.

He paused for a moment, then declared:

"I shall call it Art!"

It was a fortunate set of circumstances that Art's mother had passed away while bringing him to life. She wouldn't have liked to call him Art. She had intended to call him Trevor or Brian, Jess if he was a girl.

Soon after came a prestigious show. All the fashionable artists were asked to contribute their work, and the artist was immensely pleased with the opportunity to show Art. Very carefully he set his exhibit up on a broad, flat pillar. He kept an attentive eye on his work, for everyone knows not to leave a baby unsupervised on a pillar.

The first art patrons came by. The artist studied their reactions closely.

"This is not visual art!" one cried aloud.

"Absolutely not!" concurred another. "Whatever is this doing here?"

At this Art began to wriggle and whimper.

"Ah ha! See- just what I thought," said the first voice. "This is not visual art. This is performance art!"

“An exquisite piece nevertheless!”

“Undoubtedly!”

The artist was troubled by this. Did Art belong in performance? He supposed that he did. The artist had never done anything in the way of performance art before, but was great enough to acknowledge that his abilities could easily extend to the challenge.

In the meantime, the artist took a picture of Art, enlarged it, signed it and hung it on the pillar for the remainder of the show dates.

It was acknowledged by all to be the hit of the show.

Those in the performance art circles welcomed the artist with open arms. He brought prestige to their obscure branch. He found them eccentric.

The artist did not take to performance art. Admittedly “Tantrum 1” and “Tantrum 2” were a timeless success, and “Sleeping 8” highly praised by reviewers, but he found that he preferred the glamour of the old shows, and ultimately went back to his original medium.

This did not necessarily entail abandoning Art, and although he did a few different side pieces, Art was still the focus of his career. He painted Art on canvas, he painted Art on sheets. He took Art’s shoes and sprayed them gold, and stuck them on a pipe. He captured Art in as many ways possible, and still occasionally displayed him in shows alongside his other Art pieces. This was considered the revolutionary start of Performo-Viz art.

As Art grew older, the artist found him too much of a handful for just a housekeeper, and employed a governess to raise him. As the artist was none too particular in his wishes regarding Art’s upbringing, the governess found it an easy job. She enjoyed the travel, high wages and spending long indolent days on the beach.

Art learned that if he kept quiet, he could do what he wanted. (He didn’t do much).

He didn’t like the governess though. It was fortunate, then, that she didn’t last very long.

It was at a private art exhibit in Milan that the artist discovered the Nefarious Collection of Found objects: it only took only a glance to see that Art’s Shoes 1, Art’s Shoes 2, and Art’s Shoes 3 were in fact displays of Art’s very shoes. The governess had been selling objects to collectors. The anger of the artist bordered on terrifying.

Actually it was pretty astonishing that it took this long for the artist to notice the

thefts. Art had been running around barefoot for months. Then again, the artist never really noticed Art much, unless of course he was on display.

Needless to say the governess was fired. However, Art was such a quiet child that the artist decided he was probably old enough to be left to his own devices. He got the housekeeper to ensure Art had tutors, but they changed cities so often that Art often went months without studying. This, however, was of no consequence; Art behaved himself remarkably well. He mostly spent his time just sitting quietly in the corner. Occasionally he'd draw with crayons on a little pad of paper. When he was being particularly adventurous, he would watch the artist at work in the studio. More often than not though, the artist would make him sit. Art didn't like that.

When the artist made him sit, Art found it impossible to be still. Even though he sat quietly enough on his own day by day, for some reason when the artist made him sit, all sorts of funny emotions began coursing and bouncing through his veins, like chimps run wild in a circus. He had to move. He couldn't sit still. He concentrated on not moving. He fought the energy but it was so hard-

“Sit still!”

He tried so hard to sit still. He sat on his hands. He ignored the restlessness spurring him to run, run, run. The demons whispering wayward impulses to throw the paint, throw the brushes. Smash a painting. Fling the statues out the window. But he mustn't, he had to concentrate-

“Sit still!”

He was so itchy. His skin had hundreds of ants running up and down his arms, up and down his legs-

“For Christ's sake!”

And so it would continue. This was why Art hated sitting for the artist.

A few years later the artist decided to do a “natural” series. It was called: “Art In The Natural Surrounding”.

Art didn't like this series at all. Instead of being called into the studio to pose, the artist followed him around the house, sketching him at his everyday life. To a boy accustomed to solitude, he found the constant monitoring nerve-racking.

At first Art could not be natural at all. The artist's presence made him as tense as in the studio. Art had never seen the artist at home much. The artist principally dined out and attended Important Functions when not at work.

However, the artist was so persistent in this project that after a few weeks, Art began to resignedly ignore his presence. Fortunately he never yelled at Art for moving (in fact two of the most famous pieces from this series became “Art Descending A Staircase” and “Art Opens The Door”) and he was so silent one might sit hours outside the room they were in, and hear nothing but the faint scratch of the artist’s pencil.

One day the artist came to observe Art and found him doodling with his crayons on his little pad of paper. At first the artist paid no attention to what he was doodling. In fact it didn’t register that Art was drawing at all. The artist quietly outlined the crayons in pastel; he did a pen and ink impressionist sketch of the pad of paper; he diligently worked a cubist depiction of Art’s hand moving up and down the sheet- yet it was only when he came to naming the piece that he realized it should be called “Art Drawing”. “Art Drawing”? What kind of title was that? Art couldn’t draw.

He later renamed it “Art Doing Something”.

In the meantime, the artist wanted to know what Art was drawing.

“Bring that over here,” he ordered him.

Art looked up surprised. The artist hadn’t said a word to him in days.

“What are you dawdling for? Bring it here!” he demanded again.

Art got up quickly and brought the artist his notepad.

The artist glanced at it. It was a colorful sketch of the artist sketching Art. This was quality; despite the tenderness of Art’s years, even the artist had to admit the piece was extremely well done.

The artist didn’t like it. Art had managed to capture a look, a certain something in his bearing that he didn’t like. He tore the paper to bits. Art passively watched as his work was shredded to pieces before his eyes.

It wasn’t a complete loss, however. Later the artist saw the colorful bits, glued them to a canvas, melted some wax and then set the entire piece on fire (not a very large fire, just enough to char and burn it a little). He utterly forgot that those bits had once been Art’s work; but Art never forgot.

Years went by and Art became a man. He was as quiet and reserved as he was as a child; he had no friends, and he was quite content to keep entirely to himself. For lack of ambition, Art never found a reason to leave the artist’s household. The artist couldn’t care less; he had long retired and was enjoying the fruits of his labor. They would often not see each other for months on end.

It came, therefore, as quite a shock when one day the artist returned home to find his studio completely ransacked. Although he had sold many of his major pieces, he'd still retained the majority of his artwork for the occasional show and his own personal pleasure (coincidentally this also happened to drive up his market prices).

Every piece was destroyed.

The artist was enraged. How could this have happened? His property had tight security; the studio was barred and locked. There could only be one answer.

Art was nowhere to be found. He tore apart the house looking for him, but to no avail. He yelled. He screamed. He fervently interrogated the household staff. No one had seen Art.

It was only later when he attempted the salvage of his studio that he found him beneath a shredded pile of canvas.

Art was dead.

KAREN ANEY

## Siren's Revenge

*Night again. I can crash under a tree or something, but what's the point? Walking when you can't see where you're going is freeing. It's dark enough now that even the headlights of the passing cars fizzle out and dissipate into the endless black. You can't see shit with this storm. Maybe, if I walk long enough, I'll find some inspiration. Write the shit out of something, make sure people know my name when I die. Fuck. I'm like Odysseus – journeying to prove myself, somehow lost along the way. Pissed off the wrong person. Escaped the Sirens, though. That's something. Maybe my family would be proud of me if I could do the same thing.*

*Fuck them.*

*Fuck them all.*

*I'll find my inspiration. The coke will work eventually, I just haven't done enough yet. One more hit, just one more, and I'll find it. My inspiration. I need to find my inspiration. Then I can write, I'll be famous. Just gotta keep on my path, find enough of it to make it happen for me. Somewhere out there is my magical hit. But what about cash? I spent all of it on the last hit. It was worth it – man, that felt amazing – but nothing's worth this fucking low. I need some more.*

Danny immediately stopped walking, drawing himself up out of his slouching gait to his full six-foot two-inch height. The jeans he wore were long enough to accommodate his legs, but only because they sagged to below his rear. His hood slid back, exposing his shock of bright red hair, rising in small spikes from his skull. He had spied the sign in the distance, finally illuminated by a stream of moonlight filtering through the damp trees overhead. Its white letters glowed on a green background, advising him that Elkford (population 1802) was 2.8 miles away.

*Probably can't see it because of this fucking rain. The clouds are creeping doom, cancer in the sky. That's fine, drugs are like currency in these small towns. Maybe this is it; maybe this is my inspiration.*

He walked quickly, moth to flame, and once he reached the town he continued down the main street (which isn't as impressive as it sounds, as it was the only street running east-west, and had only seven meandering lanes shooting off it in northern or southern directions). Towards the end of the buzzing metropolis was the town pub.

*Garish neon lights. They look like bottled biohazards, but at least they're bright enough to be seen all the way down the street, even with the streaks of dirt all over them. Ah, and double swinging doors – how quaint. Do they think they'll attract tourists if they look like they're from some fucking western? What kind of saloon had a neon cowboy hat over its door? They're like the fat girl at prom, only the whole town is the desperate nerd with an acne problem. At least it's familiar – every one of these places is the same. There's miners, here – must be a coal mine somewhere. But the rest is the same. Sad old men, sad old women. Waiting for someone interesting. Someone like me. Someone's gotta have my inspiration here.*

*Maybe that one in the corner – too much makeup, but at least the eyes are nice. They'd be seafoam, but the years have dulled them to a stormy blue. Is that a warning? Never swim in the ocean during a storm, the tide will pull you in; will she pull me under? She'll know where the drugs are, though. You can see it all over her body – the bitch has seen a lot of life. Track marks on the arm, sunken sockets, the twitchy motions; she can't leave her face alone for a second. This will be easier than candies... or babies... or something...*

He sat down next to the woman, who looked 50 but was probably 40. She twitched in his direction, eyes darting to the sides at regular intervals rather than focusing on his face intently, as he was on hers. He reached out a hand to brush a strand of hair behind her ear –

*Christ shit, it's like straw. How many bottles of bleach has this mop seen? It's not going to clean your soul, sister.*

"Hi".

*"Hi yourself, darlin'". Does she think accentuating the drawl like that makes her sound clever? Oh look, we're in a fake western bar, aren't I just the most precious thing EVER? Sugar pie, sweetie, wheatfield fucking ranch? Twitch. Twitch.*

*"Do you like ... having fun?" I hope she gets it. I put enough emphasis on it. Shit knows, I don't want to fuck her – she's probably drier than a nun's cunt.*

*"Well, shugah pie – Ugh, called it. "It's been such a very long time since I've ... had fun. But I'm sure I could still teach you some new tricks, darlin'." Danny - 2, Cougar whore - 0.*

*"That sounds delightful, ma'am." Maybe if I play the part, she'll give me the shit. "But..."*

*"But what, darlin'?" Can't she be a little more creative?*

*"I need some... well, I can't... you know... without..." play the shy young gentleman. Play the role, get the dope.*

*"Say no more, sugah. I've got what ya need. Come back to my place – it's real close,*

over yonder.” *Your twitching gets worse when you laugh. It wasn’t that clever, stop giggling. You’re probably hooked on every drug you can get, and it took you how long to figure out that I wanted a hit? Damn whore. Whatever, a hit’s a hit.*

With that, he got up and followed her out of the pub. They walked – she darting, he slouching – down the nearest offshoot lane that lead north. She twitched her way up the front steps of a dilapidated rancher with dead ferns hanging from a basket by the front door. Her head twitched to the side convulsively as she unlocked the door, seemingly unable to cease her body’s movements despite the need to maintain steady hands to complete the task. Danny followed her inside reluctantly, balking as the smell of stale cigarettes amalgamated with cat piss assailed his senses.

*The stench is so tangible – like a heat wave. I’m surprised it doesn’t cling to her clothes like brambles. Whatever – that cabinet she’s twitching in front of might have my inspiration in it...*

“Well come on over, shug.” *Enough with the drawl, bitch. Wait – is that paper she’s pulling out? What the fuck is that shit?* “Here ya go, darlin’. Is one enough?”

“Well, you see...” play the part, cowboy. “I was hoping for some dust.”

“Aw, sweetie pie. I ain’t got none left.” *Twitch, twitch. She’s worried I won’t give it up now. No sweet love juice for this saloon bitch. But I guess it’s better than nothing – maybe this is my inspiration, maybe this is it. If nothing else, it will keep me out the dark until I can get my next hit.*

“Better make it two”.

They each took two little tears of paper, letting it dissolve on their tongues. The cougar’s eyes rolled back in her head as she slowly rolled her tongue back into her head, her eyelids fluttering, throwing the deep blue veins across them into relief. Afterwards, she took his hand and pulled him out the back door, explaining that it would take a while to take effect. They walked through the field behind her house, hand-in-hand, waiting for their trip to start. The cougar twitched and giggled, acting silly though it would be at least an hour before the drug could be cited as a cause of stupidity. Danny followed along, quietly reciting bits of Dante’s *Inferno* under his breath.

“Midway upon the road of our life I found myself within a dark wood, for the clear path had been lost...” The cougar ignored him, shudder-twitching her way towards a grove of trees.

“... so did my soul, which still was flying, turn back to look gain upon the pass which never had a living person left...” Twitch over the boulders.

“...and she has a nature so malign and evil that she never sates her greedy will, and

after food is hungrier than before.” Twitching out of her shirt, hungry eyes taking him in.

“Thy soul is hurt by cowardice, which oftentimes encumbereth a man so that it runs him back from honourable enterprise.”

“I come from a place whither I desire to return.”

“One ought to fear those things only that have power of doing harm, the others not, for they are not dreadful.”

“I am made by God, thanks be to Him, ... and when he had moved on, I entered along the deep and savage road.”

*But what did God make*

“This miserable measure the wretched souls maintain...”

*This world is fucking fake*

“... maintain of those who lived without infamy and without praise.”

*Why would you rhyme*

*This world is too much for me*

*And me alone*

*Fuck it all*

*Fuck*

*It*

*All*

“Mingled are they with that caitiff choir of the angels, who were not rebels, nor were faithful to God...”

*The wretched ones, the fucked ones*

“but were for themselves.”

*I’m better than that, better than*

*Them*

“The heavens chased them out in order to be not less beautiful...”

*What’s beautiful – a cougar, a panther, a canary?*

“nor doth the depth of Hell receive them...”

*Receive me, hell, for I am yours*

“because the damned would have some glory from them.”

*Purgatory it is, purgatory for the soul*

*Purgatory from life, from coke, from art*

*You can’t make poetry in an artless world*

*The art needs to be*

*Yours*

*But also of the world around you*

*Speak in poetry, speak in verse*

*The drugs that make life into art*

*A mermaid with limp fins*

*Makes me hers*

*By a creek, not a bed*

*Poopoo creek, she says, and the river is shit*

*Flowing brown like before, but now it's so much more*

*Mother nature is shit, but shit is beautiful too*

*Can I be? She is*

*White arms, veined with royalty*

*Legs twined*

*Nun's cunts are wet, too*

*Grinding, shuddering, convulsing*

*Spastic*

*Beautiful*

*Shit*

*What's real, what's not?*

*The mermaid swims 'round my pole*

*Float, mermaid, float, too regal to grip, too classic to hold*

*It's a race, who can finish*

*Swim, mermaid, swim*

*Spot on the horizon*

*Drive it home, Sammy*

*Stick, bat, pole*

*Zeus*

*Black*

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Danny woke up by the creek, which was indeed flowing brown, but it was a typical creek brown, borne of dirt and detritus. The cougar was gone, much to his relief; but this meant that he had nothing to do but continue his journey. Ignoring everything dead poets had taught him about streams of water, he trudged through the creek. The water's squelching hold on his feet didn't register.

*Acid is poetry. That's how it works. Purgatory is poetry – why shouldn't the creation of art mark a personal hell? A descent to hell, a descent to true poetry – it seems a fair trade. I need another hit, though. Gotta write it down, the sex was shit stupid, it already burns when I piss. Poetry shouldn't be wasted on a burnt up whore with a disease. It's for the beautiful ones, the ones they let into heaven – or at least the ones that find glory in Hell. Might as well keep walking – Elkford's too small to keep me solvent.*

*The next town, I just gotta get to the next town. If I walk, I'll get there soon enough – and I won't risk giving my burning gift to a lonely trucker. That's a sainthood qualification, right? Can saints do hits, too? Satan wouldn't care. Keep walking, just keep walking. Mark the hours by the sun – look, it's already behind you. It's been at least six hours, thinking about sainthood and sex. That sounds like a poem – hold onto it. But – what's that sound? The thump, thump, thump – is it my heart? There are no cars near, it can't be a stereo, but it sure as fuck sounds like it – maybe they have a hit, maybe they can give me some more, I need another trip, but this time with a pencil. One more trip, just one pencil.*

Through the trees, Danny spotted another pub – it seemed to rise from the ground, the walls an organic extension of the curling roots and ashy dust. It was if Satan himself had inspired the earth to grow an extension of his kingdom. This was the source of the low and steady beat. Danny assumed it was a live band, and walked towards the doors, transfixed. The heartbeat was a siren song.

*Thump, thump, thump.*

He entered the bar, and once again, scents assailed him. This time, it was a sticky sweet smell, faintly familiar and evocative of rust. The lights were dim, the floor sticky – it was just like any other local watering hole, except the place was empty aside from the band on stage. Danny slouched towards them, his shoes slowly parting themselves from the floor, held as if by magnetism to whatever substance lay there.

*Thump, thump, thump.*

The band was composed of all females. Strikingly different, they seemed to represent each facet of womanhood, each possible incarnation of feminine beauty. Despite their

differences, though, they were stunningly beautiful - Amazonian in composition - but dressed like bikers on a sex binge. They were clad in fishnet stockings and leather corsets; grommets and torn, blood-red tulle. Their wild hair swayed as they performed: one, her hair black as ebony, purred into the microphone. A second, her blond hair straight as cornsilk, drummed with a fury that juxtaposed with startling clarity against her placid face. The third, the brunette, strummed her guitar using a fake nail of the deepest scarlet. The fourth was the one Danny locked on – the bass player, with flame-red hair, gripped the guitar’s neck like it was a throbbing cock, stroking its frets while flicking its strings.

*Thump, thump, thump.*

Danny stared at them for hours, too transfixed to notice his surroundings. Odd posts stretched from ground to ceiling at irregular intervals; they could be called columns, but they were wrapped from base to head in random assortments of fabric. The colour seemed to drip down the posts, languidly reaching downwards, longing to join the rest of its tacky brethren on the ground. The sun set, but the moon never rose, again blocked with startling efficacy by the surrounding trees.

When the sun rose again, Danny had disappeared; the band was simply a memory. In their place was a new post – wrapped from base to head with fishnet stockings and leather thongs, a corset angled around a protruding oval shape. It looked like a perverse maypole, with the snatches of denim and jersey bulging out from behind the black textures. Thick red honey dripped down the post, and at the very head, a shock of red spikes peeked between some blood-red tulle. Grotesque to a fault, the sirens had their revenge.

NATHAN WILLIAMS

# The Dance

*A Chapter from a novel*

*“Let’s dance, dance the Macabray,  
This old man and your daughter at play.  
Can you see me through the age and gray,  
Or am I free to dance the Macabray?”*

As I finished mumbling those words, I could feel the presence of the server beside me. He was waiting for me to acknowledge that he was *waiting* on me. He had come to the far corner of the pub, because my table sat apart from everyone else’s—and I liked that. Ever since my return to this city, this drinking hole had become like my own personal hideaway. It was dark, lively, and the rooms smelled strongly of cigar. For some reason it reminded me of an old Negro jazz club I used to frequent, barring the music, of course.

I kept my glance on the page lying on the table, wondering how long it would take for the server’s patience to run out and say something. But the boy was patient; he didn’t make a sound. This fellow was a new server—young, inexperienced and too timid to disrupt me from my writing. Perhaps his mother was an overbearing martinet who wouldn’t stand to be interrupted. It was no matter; the boy insisted on being quiet, so he would wait for my acknowledgement. Yet, before long, he crept closer, shuffling one foot in front of the other. Then he leaned closer and closer towards me. This whole charade became almost comical when his shadow started to cover my paper. With a hidden grin I continued to wait and refrain from acknowledging his presence. It was one of the few pleasures left to an elderly man. His youth had aggravated me. It emphasized how far along I was into the evening of life. He was my server, and therefore not my equal. And even in such a paltry affair as this, my decision to wait would remind him of where he stood.

However, the standoff had gone far enough. If I waited too long he might have inferred from my age that I was senile. I was amused enough anyway, so I granted him a look. All at once the boy took a step backward and postured himself as if our silent encounter had never happened. Now standing at a customary distance from me, my server said, “Is

everything okay? Is there anything I can get you? Would you like a menu?"

The boy's questions were making up for his previous silence.

"No, everything's fine," I said.

His voice became quieter as he spoke, and he no longer looked me in the eye when he said, "Would you like something to eat? More wine? Your glass is almost empty."

"No," I paused, "I'm quite content."

He turned to leave and accidentally knocked over my glass with a menu. In response, the boy burst out with apologies and left embarrassed. He came back with a cloth, and what I assumed was a complimentary glass of good, solid wine. I looked him over as he wiped my table. The server looked about nineteen or twenty years old. He had blond hair and blue-eyes. At the sight of him I chuckled, covering it in a cough. In another time and place that gawky boy might have been showcased as pure Aryan masculinity.

When the boy finished wiping my table I presumed he would leave. Instead, he quietly said, "Excuse me if I'm interrupting, but I couldn't help notice that paper on your table there; it's a poem right?"

"Yes boy, it's a poem," I replied emphatically.

The server's eyes widened slightly in response. He then said quietly, "Well, I saw its title, *Dance of the Macabray*. I've never heard of it."

I despised common conversation or any exchange of pleasantries. I wondered if the thin Aryan boy was simply feigning interest in my affairs in order to make up for his mistake with the glass. His interest could be genuine, but why would he choose to linger with an old and hardly affable man? Besides, the boy had other customers.

I responded nonetheless, "It's a poem about the *Danse Macabre*; a medieval trope in which Death would lead both the alive and dead in a dance. It symbolizes how everyone, young and old, alive and dead are equal in death."

My response was met with silence, until he let out an articulate "Oh."

His face was calm, but his eyes darted upwards. I presumed he was struggling to find something clever to say. I was wrong. He simply said, "That's really interesting."

I was done with him now. A person who says that something is interesting is hardly ever an interesting person himself. Besides, I didn't want to keep asking myself why the boy stayed here with me.

The server spoke again, "I'm Keith by the way, that's my name—"

"Well it's nice to meet you Keith. If you don't mind, I think I'll go back to my writing now.

"Yes, I'm sor—"

“It’s fine.” And with that I sent the boy away and I started to write.

*I remember the night I died. The curtains were drawn and a single lamp was on in our house. That lamp and its yellow hue were all I needed in order to see. I could live a thousand lives and still remember the precise tinge of yellow that wrapped her body. It laid there limp, lifeless and delicate—I caught myself staring out of pure curiosity. Amazing how she still looked exactly like she had a minute ago. We left that night. They found her in the river, but they never found me. Of course, that means I was missing. But if I waited long enough, they’d presume I was dead as well. It’s been what, eighteen years? And it still feels fresh. Of course I shouldn’t be writing this, but there’s a sense of danger and play in it.*

Perhaps that was a touch theatrical, but my conventional writing had been disturbed by the emotional nature of the day. I had been caught with a little girl of six. Sitting on my bench, in that small neighbourhood park, Heather had spied me talking to her daughter. I was only an old man telling a story to a young girl; who would see the harm in that? But any suspicion could be my undoing. The girl, Regime, had also looked at me with such innocent eyes. Such innocence had reminded me of the days when Heather had been my everything— my little girl. But sometimes we lose things when we play our hand in life.

I was beginning to feel melancholy. To see Heather after such a long time was difficult. Surely, I had just been an old man beside her daughter. She had been quite a distance from us, and to her I was dead. Hopefully a face at that distance could be masked by eighteen years of life. However, it didn’t matter, I had been too bold. In the future, I would have to time my visits with Regime for those times when Heather was either at the hospital or sick in bed. Her treatments were usually on a weekly basis. I knew she had one tomorrow, but I needed to find out about the rest.

I tried to let the wine relax me. The day had felt like fantasy. Here I was spending my night plotting against an unsuspecting family; it was too cliché to feel real. They and I were living our different lives— separate, but connected in the most important way. And the Macabray—it was like our parable. Life was beginning to feel like the Macabray. I was the living dead, dancing in two directions that both promised death. If I succeeded, and that was unlikely, I could escape this place with what I was after and die an older man. If

I failed, I would exit through a different door. Yes, it would be nobler to die by the sword of life; but if life would not yield what I required, then I needn't live disappointed.

It was time to wear the mask again. It was a new day and the mistake of Heather seeing me with Regime could be put right. I knew one way I could preserve a facade of innocence: Ms. Hatcher. Her trust and confidence would keep Heather from suspicion. Ms. Hatcher was a smart woman; she really did have a remarkable grasp of the English language. But as to the depth of her character—I would not go swimming. Through my life I had found it inevitable that feelings of a certain kind might naturally develop for a woman. However, in the case of Ms. Hatcher, I never had a problem. The woman had the nose of a Weinstein and the body of a Holstein.

There she was; of course I couldn't miss her. Ms. Hatcher was on the perimeter of the small park where I'd begun the enticement of my innocent little Regime. As expected, Ms. Bruce was accompanying her. If I wanted to be clear of all suspicion, I'd also have to keep Ms. Bruce from mistrust. But it was no easy task; I hated the woman. She had all the allure of a sheep, and I wasn't Scottish. I walked towards them, and got their attention when I was perhaps twenty feet away. I smiled at the women. Of course, as I smiled, Ms. Bruce frowned. Maybe if I had tripped right then, she would have grinned. But it wasn't all bad; the old bag was probably past eighty, and they don't do autopsies past sixty five without just cause.

I had been frequenting the park for maybe three months by this time. In my hopes to quietly mix into the background of the park, I had to meet, greet, and befriend this twosome. They considered themselves the neighbourhood watch. And while I pitied the children that they helped oversee, these women had become invaluable. With their tacit approval I had been able to come in without a single parent batting an eye.

Having reached the two crones, I lifted my hat and gave an exaggerated bow. Then I stood up with a smile on my face and contempt in my heart.

"To what do we owe the pleasure Gerald?" asked Ms. Bruce, in a manner that could explain the meaning of derision.

"Oh I wish I could say the pleasure is all mine, but that has become too common an expression. Unfortunately, I am not a clever man. So I do not have the words to say what I really mean."

"Gerald, you have words enough," replied Ms. Hatcher.

"Thank you Miss. You warm an old, lonesome man's heart."

“Can you stop with the silver tongue Gerald, we’re not dim-witted,” said Ms Bruce.

“Oh be nice to him. Occasionally, he does speak a little queer, but he does make such wonderful company.”

I hated debasing myself to such a level. To have this bovine speak down to me was one of the highest forms of disgrace. Still, I needed their support, so I directed the conversation to where I needed it to be.

“Well, the other day,” I said. “I was sitting on my park when the little Regime girl came up to me. She had the saddest face and I thought to myself, I should tell her a story to cheer her up. So that’s what I did; and in time that little face started to look positively happy.”

“Oh Gerald, that’s wonderful,” said Ms. Hatcher.

“Thank you Ms. Hatcher, you see—”

“Gerald! Call me Phillis, we’re not strangers you know.” At that, I saw Ms. Bruce roll her eyes.

“Yes, well, Ms. Phillis—”

“Oh stop it,” Ms. Bruce said with a smile. It was at this point I realized that a little jest at Ms. Hatcher’s expense might elicit a more favourable opinion of myself from Ms. Bruce; another practical example of feminine psychosis. Sorry Shakespeare, it was not frailty, but *queer, thy name is woman*.

I continued, “So I’ve come to you ladies seeking your advice on what kind of stories I should tell the girl.”

“Oh, how fun!” said Ms. Hatcher with a smile.

“Quite,” responded Ms. Bruce in a disparaged tone.

After casting a reproachful look at Ms. Bruce, Ms. Hatcher said, “Well I know Regime loves princesses. Of course I don’t know which one, but details don’t matter to children, a simple fairy tale should suffice anyway.”

“Thank you, that surely simplifies matters,” I said. Almost immediately I was struck with regret for the sarcastic remark. Luckily the old lady missed the mockery and looked pleased with herself. In fact, I was even able to derive a tiny chuckle from Ms. Bruce who obviously understood the comment.

Just then I saw the young little Regime come out of her house. Her house was only thirty or so feet from the park, and double that distance from where I stood. The little girl walked slowly, and she was rubbing her eyes. I caught myself staring, and then realized that I had to stop. My interest in the girl couldn’t become too obvious to the women. So I blinked my eyes with some force, rubbed them, and said, “Oh, my eyes, they just don’t

work like they used to.”

Replying to my action, Ms. Bruce said, “Oh, Gerald, you’re a delicate little man.”

“Oh, stop it!” exclaimed Ms Hatcher.

There was a short silence, in which I noticed the tension between the two ladies. I tried to interrupt this uncomfortable moment, by saying, “You don’t think that Regime’s mother would have any problem with me talking to her child do you? I just haven’t had the opportunity to meet her yet.”

“Heather? Not at all, she is a most agreeable woman,” said Ms. Hatcher.

“Yes, she is one of the best,” added Ms. Bruce.

“Well, that’s good to hear. I hope you understand I was just worried. You know, some parents these days...”

At that, both the ladies proceeded to elaborate how parents nowadays had no knowledge of parenting. I thought it was quite pathetic how easily the two women would follow my lead. With the ladies occupied, I watched Regime go to the sandbox near my bench. The girl was digging in the sand, keeping herself busy while she waited for her pied piper. If I could just get the two old women to help clear me of some suspicion with Heather, I could go sit with the little girl and continue our story. However, that meant I needed to bring the old crone’s conversation back to what was relevant. Luckily, Ms. Hatcher had told me some days ago that Heather was away this morning to get treatment, so I said, “Sorry to interrupt, I was just wondering if either of you knew if Heather was around this morning. I really should go and talk to her if I am going to be friends with her daughter.”

“She’s away this morning. Phillis is actually looking after Regime today,” said Ms. Bruce.

“Yes, that’s right. I left Regime up in her room. She’s reading or playing, I don’t remember which.”

Actually, Regime was perhaps thirty feet from Ms. Hatcher, or Phillis as she wanted me to call her.

Ms. Hatcher continued, “Anyway, let me tell you what I’ll do, Gerald. If Heather asks about you talking to Regime, and I doubt she will, I’ll tell her what a reputable gentleman you are. Nobody needs to have any worry at all.”

I smiled inwardly and then watched Regime as she moved from her spot by my bench. I hadn’t seen her look my way so I doubted that she’d seen me. The impatience of children is something to be admired. They don’t put their needs and desires into needless abeyance. Most people find this childish; I’ve always found this commendable.

“Gerald! Phillis was talking to you,” exclaimed Ms. Bruce.

“Oh, I’m so sorry Ms. Hatcher. I think my mind was slipping away there.”

“Don’t worry about it; we’re both at that age.”

Ms. Hatcher then proceeded to smile at me and I did my best to reciprocate.

“You two are like wrinkly teenagers,” interrupted Ms. Bruce. “But anyway, I’ve got to go. Phillis, please accompany me, I think we both need a walk.” She waited for Ms. Hatcher to nod her head in agreement, and said, “Goodbye.”

“Have a good day Gerald,” said Ms. Hatcher. “Anyway, I should be back shortly; I need to go and fetch Regime from her room. I guess I probably shouldn’t have been outside without her.”

I smiled, and then gave them both a warm farewell.

The two crones walked away and I turned towards the direction where I’d last seen Regime. She had moved to a little grassy patch. The girl was trying to plant a flower by the stem alone. In the near distance, I heard Ms. Bruce say, “Hey Phillis, Regime’s over there on the grass, not inside.”

Ms. Hatcher was the perfect babysitter for my purposes, I was so thankful.

As I watched Regime’s every movement, I realized my earlier problems had been at least partially solved. I popped a Werther’s caramel into my mouth. With every swallow, the sweet taste gave me a new sense of invigoration. I kept glancing at Regime. I wondered if someone that young could regret missing a grandfather. More importantly, I wondered how long it would take for me to gain her full trust. It was a pity, but once she had retrieved what I needed, the girl could be left alone. I saw Regime twist and bend as she skipped with flowers in her hand. I couldn’t help but muse, “Very soon my princess, we will dance, we will dance the Macabray”.

QUINEA HARDER

# Flounder

A fisherman once told me that no amount of  
fishing line can reach far enough into the  
cavity of the human soul. Lost is the way and  
scaly to the touch, only a true anchor ventures  
to its core. With great technique and craftiness  
of net you think you have secured the essence,  
but with a flick of a tail it's gone, abyss taken over,  
black. No scent will lead you to it, no system in  
this cavern though your hook be charming and  
trust your bait. Paint a paradise on the surface,  
floating above the left side of your chest, closest  
to your heart, surely it will come. But it's painful to  
swim upstream, and it will cost. The depths are  
cold and shadows secure with no one to answer to,  
easier. The father of lies has conjured up a current  
so vile no pair of fins can withdraw alone. Pursue it  
past its limits and it'll tail it to the ocean, every vein  
ends up there eventually. Reel in and put more  
on the line, trust isn't enough without proof. To  
reach it you'll need more than two hands and a  
purpose. You shouldn't expect writing on the wall.  
The constant variable of free will is that it, the soul,  
decides how the perfect storm will end. To what  
avail will you exhaust yourself in every human  
kindness? How come the depths in people's chests  
is so big? You can only draw it back drenched in  
love and willing to die, in the end to only one will it  
yield.

KATIE STOBART

## Still Burning

*“no business of yours.*

*You have soft feet.*

*You don’t know what it’s like*

*so close to bedrock.”*

– Owl Burning, Margaret Atwood

The back deck is brittle, pale  
in the frost as my stiff fingers.  
I can hear it from here, the digging  
in the wet grey field. The shovel  
flips the hard Earth inside  
out over the grass in the weak hours  
of the morning. A grunt and a thud,  
hard and cold and rasps, the old  
voice, crouched on its fours, says  
no business of yours.

I strain to see, but the bulb is out  
in the frigid dirt, the old womb  
lining barren, a wasteland  
on a postage stamp of space.  
Once, young and barefoot, I ran  
thoughtlessly, my soles a wild beat  
in summer soil. I think now of under,  
the stiff, stifled darkness swallows  
eyes, lungs, tears and silence breathes,  
you have soft feet.

A space was carved out of the skin  
for the body, it was lowered,  
graveless, but the Earth knows him,

nameless, and wraps him up.  
I know him too, his grass whispers  
to my garden, nothing grows right  
after hearing it. The winter was colder  
up in the alley black-fingered. He ranted  
and murmured and hunted the mice.  
You don't know what it's like.

One night, he was burning. The smell  
is still tattooed in my nose, long after  
he was put out and pushed out  
in a shopping cart. His pallbearer  
upended the cart, rolled him in  
to the hole. A grunt and a thud, talk  
of whiskey and sharp morning,  
upended. He is still cold, still burning  
ash I smell, so close I walk, and murmur  
so close to bedrock.



NICK ADAMS

## After Afterall

She's the kind of girl you write poetry for. Not free verse and not some perfect abab rhyme scheme; she's not perfect. You don't even have to follow any kind of meter; why would you? Neither of you followed the rules during your time together. Don't try to copy Blake, Cummings, Shakespeare or Donne because none of them would do her justice; she is too unique for any of that. You might take Hem's advice and "write drunk; edit sober" but it wouldn't be for the hope that you convey your true feelings; she knows exactly how you feel about her and that's the reason you drink. Don't be ambiguous, as poetry usually is; yes, you know the ambiguity's there to create depth, but, and it kills you, depth is not something you had the privilege of having with her (your time was too short). But, for the love of God, it does have to be a sonnet. One that tears your heart apart just like the break between the octave and the sestet because that's what she's done to you (you've done the same to her to be fair). You didn't spend long together but in the time that you did, you've never felt more perfectly fitted for anyone, like the circle to circle, square to square matching game you played when you were a kid. That's how she made you feel: like a kid again. Not in a child-like, throw-all-your-inhibitions-and-responsibilities-away kind of way, but in the way the right girl should make you feel: light, strong, fulfilled. With one look of her dangerous green eyes she made your heart stop; she would give a slight raise of her eyebrows as your eyes would lock, immediately after which you had to use all the strength you could muster not to kiss her, and make you feel like, as you once told her, she was some ethereal "creature" (that's one only she would get) that was too much of an idea (not a person) to be sitting in front of you. Her (heartbreakingly adorable) lisp is too much to write about; there are things too delicate and perfect in life to try and describe, this is one of them (you hope one day she truly knows that). You guess, if anything more than an unjustifiably broken heart, she's given you inspiration and hope. And so you hope, that just like the hands of a clock meet at 12, just like the moon will again eclipse the sun, just like a stubbornly retreating tide will rise, she and you will cross paths again. But until then, you put hope in your back pocket and squeeze out every bit of inspiration you can. She's the kind of girl you write poetry for; so you write.

SCOTT SPARROW

## Conversation: Tea Steam

Well... there's this cup of tea I suppose:  
a delicious paperweight for my thoughts.  
Yes, that's what it is.

It grounds me in something physical, isn't that good enough?  
What's wrong with living in my own head anyway?  
I have my conversations with *it*.

I can muse copiously on its spiralling steam.  
Steam doesn't mean a thing, but I give it meaning.  
That's a sort of conversation. Yes. It is.

After all, that's all you do in your conversations.  
A man's words are the lyrical counterparts of a Picasso:  
good for nothing but interpretation.

To think otherwise is a fallacy  
in this life of chaos theory.  
Fools. All fools.

So I'll stick with my tea.  
Its words are only ever my words.  
And I know my words.

KAREN ANEY

## Stranger Reactions

We fell in love when we uttered the same word at the same time -  
onomatopoeia -  
it was a jinx, a hex, so it must have been  
love.

How perfect!  
What a story!  
It makes me fucking sick.

It's Romeo and Juliet –  
without the sword fighting,  
but with much  
more familial pressure.

Oh, the romance!  
So inspiring!  
It makes me fucking sick.

We share a beer  
and hide our  
faces when we kiss too  
passionately for an audience.

They're role models!  
Quite admirable!  
It makes me fucking sick.

I love you, but I can't take it –  
the pressure screws us  
out of a really good fuck.  
Who *wouldn't* go elsewhere?

Lovely couple!  
Such a joy!  
It makes me fucking sick.

PAUL ESAU

## How To Be A Writer

Pick up a pen. Put down that pen. Scratch yourself. Wonder why you're not successful. Wonder why you'll never be successful. Pick up the pen. Use it to draw a lonely heart on the back of your left hand, and pretend it has some deeply symbolic meaning, when in fact "symbolism" is only your self-deceit.

Look at your fingernails, dramatically. Try to remember what it is you wanted to write in the first place, and fail. Fall into a prolonged daydream about the success and glamour you will receive after you sell your first manuscript. Feel confident. Let the wave of confidence flow through you into your pen and down onto the page. Realize that, on paper, it looks just like a big ink-stain. Try to remember what you wanted to write.

Put down your pen and look at the clock. Think about the hour you've just wasted, and how it is lost forever to the space-time vortex. Reminisce for a moment on the pleasant distraction of time-warp paradoxes, and construct a rough plot about a man becoming his own father. Realize it's been done.

Shiver a little, and scratch idly at your wrist. Wonder what happened to your confidence, your self-esteem, even your pride. Walk into the bathroom and look at yourself in the mirror. Be tempted to shatter it, just like in the movies, but don't, because unlike in the movies, you are the one who will have to buy the replacement. Ponder the body as a physical manifestation of the soul.

Go back to your desk and pick up your pen. Write down one word, then realize you're hungry. In the kitchen, find a bowl of molding tapioca and a handful of dried cranberries. Eat one, but not the other. Your pick.

Back at your desk pick up the pen. Think about the look on your mother's face on the day you said you wanted to be a writer. Think about your friends from high school, who now have flashy cars and lives built on corporation merges and fishing trips to Mexico, and feel a sharp, powerful envy. Know that you could never live that life, but feel that you are missing out on something integral to the human experience.

Suddenly despair, knowing you will never write anything meaningful. Crush the pen in your clammy fingers as you wonder how you ever became such a failure. Identify three key moments in your life...

And realize, that they give you an idea for a story



# Notes on Contributors

## **Amy Van Veen**

Amy writes, tweets, imagines her life to be a TV sitcom and has an irrational fear of her characters.

## **Dustin DeJong**

Dustin de Jong; English major, Mandarin studies;  
Motivation dwells beyond borders of complacency;  
Break from these borders and set your mind free!

## **Jayne Patrick**

Jayne Patrick is a BFA student in danger of bursting from the sheer delight of making and experiencing art!

## **Jennifer Colbourne**

Jennifer Colbourne is an English Honours student at UFV. She spends most of her time hanging out with the ghost of Robin Blaser. The rest of the time she can be found living happily in a tree drinking tea with her husband and cat.

## **Jenny Hamilton**

Jenny Hamilton, interest in digital photography, staff at UFV.

## **Jessica Warkentin**

Jessica loves empowering people even more than peppermint tea and sunrises. View more of her art at <http://jessicawarkentin.daportfolio.com>.

## **Josh Frede**

Josh Frede is a student in his last year at UFV, majoring in English Literature. He writes to challenge himself and to challenge others.

## **Karen Aney**

Karen is a UFV student. She began creative writing to escape essays, and started writing for The Cascade to escape creative writing. These measures were wildly ineffective, and so she spends her time trying to change the meaning of the term Puck Bunny.

**Katie Stobbart**

Katie Stobbart, aged 20 years, UFV English student, is a recovering anime addict and Scrabble enthusiast with six cats.

**Lacey Hall**

Lacey is in the Bachelor of Arts program as a Creative Writing major. Eventually, she plans on going to law school in the hopes of becoming a criminal lawyer, all the while writing as much as she can on the side.

**Lane Anderson**

Lane Anderson is a 3rd year English major at UFV. He currently lives in Maple Ridge with his wife and daughter.

**Leah Jacobsen**

Leah Jacobsen is both an aspiring writer and editor--which is a lot like having a split-personality disorder.

**Michael Arthur**

Michael Arthur is a student of English and Philosophy at UFV. He is inspired largely in his writing by the mysteries of science, especially time and space, as well as memory and the philosophy of mind.

**Nathan Williams**

Nathan Williams; History Major and English Minor; Student; I've never written a book I can't read.

**Nick Adams**

I want to die with a smile on my face.

**Nick Ubels**

Winner of four Emmys.

**Paul Esau**

Paul Esau gave up his NBA dreams to turn to writing (a profession where any wit can succeed).

**Quinea Harder**

Quinea is at UFV pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree. Events, people and stories most often inspire her written work. Flounder is dedicated to Samuel Renling.

**Renee Hartwig**

Renee Hartwig is a student at UFV, majoring in English with an extended minor in Visual Arts.

**Sarah Brown**

She is a writer-slash-musician-slash-starving lit major. Accordingly, she makes excellent Kraft Dinner.

**Scott Sparrow**

Scott Sparrow is an English Major. He sometimes writes poetry. He is happiest in his blue housecoat -- slippers and Chianti are optional.

**Shannon McConnell**

Shannon McConnell is an English major / Geography minor at UFV. She enjoys writing, shredding guitar, drinking slurpees and procrastinating.

**Sherylynn Niezen**

Sherylynn Niezen graduated from UFV in 2011 with her Bachelor of Arts Degree in History and English. She returned to UFV to complete her bookkeeping certificate while also maintaining involvement in the English department.

**Steve Thiessen**

Steve Thiessen is an avid fan of cinematic explosions, fine pastries, and domesticated foxes.





The Louden Singletree is UFV's literary and visual arts journal. Since its inception in 2009, the Louden Singletree has been a forum in which students, alumni, faculty and staff of the university can share their creative work.

