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We would like to acknowledge that Concordia University is located on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we gather. Tiohtià:ke/Montreal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other people. We respect the continued connections with the past, present and Wfuture in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other people within the Montreal community.

Written by Concordia Universtity's Indigenous Directions Leadership Group in 2017

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FOREWORD

At the beginning of the semester, we weren't even sure if we would be able to continue Soliloquies this year. Two of the hallmarks of Soliloquies are our biannual launches and our beautiful printed issues, two things that we would obviously need to adapt. Without in-person meetings, coffees at the Hive, or even having everyone in the same time zone, we didn't know if we could make it work.

Worried that the publication might have to take a hiatus for the first time in twenty-three years, we figured we would see if anyone was interested in joining the team and then we'd go from there. To our delight, we were able to gather together a truly amazing team of people.

We want to wholeheartedly thank our team for the hard work they have put in this semester (and the extra hours on Zoom). Thank you to everyone who was a part of putting this amazing issue together; your dedication, creativity and compassion shines through in every aspect of the publication. Thank you, as well, to all of those who filled our website with — in our opinion — some of the most exciting and dynamic work that Soliloquies has ever seen. We enjoyed working with you all so much this semester and can't wait to do it all over again in the new year.

What makes Soliloquies so great is that it is made by and for people who love and want to celebrate writing. No matter what happens, it's clear that won't change.

We really hoped for Soliloquies to be a source of joy for all involved in this otherwise dreary year. We know it was for us, and we hope it will be for you all, too.

Abigail Candelora
Editor-in-Chief

Clare Chodos-Irvine
Editor-in-Chief


SA
VS


Fiction.

USED TO IT

Chow pulls her left foot back under her shadow. The skin feels sharply dry. She wishes she hadn't exposed it by wearing flip flops, before remembering the swampy discomfort of her work boots. There are only a few minutes left before she'll have to put them back on, moist socks and all.

She is resting on a bench near Great Apes, halfway through a double shift. She pulls her zoo-logoed cap out of the pocket of her zoo-logoed overalls. Putting it on, her hand brushes against the heat which her hair has absorbed.

There's a red-faced white guy pushing a buggy up the hill towards her. He's in a thin grey T-shirt, damped and darkened by sweat. She smiles at him sympathetically.

'Too bloody hot,' he pants.

His toddler is quietly, rhythmically grizzling – red-eyed and gnawing on a bare lolly stick.

Chow nods.

'Of course, you'll be used to it,' he adds.

No. It's hardly ever like this in Grimsby. She's never been to China. She is not used to the heat and it doesn't suit her at all. Her throat has felt like a breeze block all day, her feet are being pan fried and her eyes microwaved. She would have spent her break in shade, if that shade hadn't smelled so ammonial.

She conserves her energy, can't be bothered replying, but doesn't feel sorry for him anymore. Her mother would tell her to be gracious and polite because he's only trying to be friendly. Chow prefers to be irritated.

She's not looking forward to standing up. Her balance will waver and her vision go red; she'll have to take small steps until it passes. She is going to have to walk all the way down to Big Cats.

She loved zoos and wildlife parks as a child, so she got the right GCSEs, did work experience and, finally, landed this job. Now that she's been working here for three years, though, it could almost be any job. The animals are less difficult than the visitors, but not by much, and the management, as anywhere else, is short-staffed, under pressure and demanding. With no money for slack in the system, when a nightshift keeper falls suddenly ill, as happened this afternoon, they have to ask for a volunteer to overwork themselves.

RUE BALDRY

She closes her eyes. Heat scorches the creases of her lids. Chow is impatient for the sunshine to ease off, but wishes she'd be on her way home when it happened. She wishes she could skip the next few hours of shovelling, bucket-carrying, and padlocking, that she could transport herself to the other side without experiencing them.

She won't leave here until dawn. She's done many nightshifts before; she knows what it will be like. She will be surrounded by unseen creatures who wake with the sun, but she won't have the energy to identify any of them. The background murmur of lowings and cheepings will sound clear when all the human voices have been stripped away. The rubbish bins will flap with empty refuse sacks, waiting for the day's wrappers and juice cartons. The zoo looks so clean at that time of the morning. She wishes there was any chance of her having enough focus left by then to appreciate it. The sun will be topping the huge, wrought iron gates as she approaches them. She will tug her lanyard out of her logoed fleece, arm muscles protesting, eyes closing against the orange light, feet walking their remembered way without her consciousness. She will press her card to the panel and the staff door will open to let her out.

She craves noodles. She wishes she'd be going home to her mother's cooking, but it'll just be to her own little flat where she lives alone. That's why she felt she had to step forward to work this shift. Her colleagues have families and plans.

The warmth and movement of the bus will make her feel sicker and sleepier. She might doze; she always seems to recognise the street next to hers far sooner than she expects to. Excremental scents will rise from her as she sways between the seats.

She'll have twelve hours off then. Within that time she will need to eat and she will need to sleep. She ought to shower. Inevitably, she'll be hungry, but the smells of musky hay and dung which always cling to her clothes will make her nauseous too. She fantasises about shampoo sluicing through her hair and over her skin, lifting a grey layer, un-dusting her eyes, and leaving mango scent all down her.

Noodles are quick and easy to cook. She's ashamed of being too lazy even for them. It will have to be toast. Or maybe peanut butter spooned straight out of the jar again. She tries to sharpen her mind enough to remember whether she has any bread at home. She can picture the cupboard, blurrily, but cannot envisage its contents. It doesn't really matter; it's not like there will be any shops open when she gets out of here anyway.

She must remember to set the alarm on her phone, otherwise there is a good chance that she will sleep and sleep and sleep until the world ends. Perhaps she should set it now. She gropes half-heartedly in her pocket, reluctant to open her eyes, putting off the moment when she will see the current time written across the screen and realise that her second shift is about to begin.

She gets a vision of her mother in a cloud of ginger-scented sizzle. She shouldn't have started thinking about noodles. It's been ages since she's seen her family. New Year. Sharp,

USED TO IT

salted wind and red envelopes. Chow misses her mum and the over-decorated little house by the coast where she lives with Chow's sisters. She should book a coach ticket home sometime soon. Tomorrow she'll check how her shifts fall for the next few months, see if there is a weekend free. Going home is exhausting though, more tiring than the zoo. She doesn't know where she is going to pull the energy from.

She could always tell her mother and sisters the truth of course. That would make it much easier. Where can she mine the strength needed for that, though?

She shades her eyes with her phone while she unpeels their lids. She blinks, blinks, blinks. The concrete paths and signposts look washed out, like 1970s television reruns, or the Halloween event posters left up round the central toilet block. She takes a minute to adjust, bracing for movement. It has to be done. This is the work which pays for her flat, meaning she can stay here for months at a time, growing her hair, lining her eyes, padding her bra.

She makes herself look at the time on her phone. Shit. She should have been at the tiger enclosure two minutes ago. In one swoop, she grabs her backpack, stands and begins to run. Red dots crowd her vision. The weight of the boots in the bag beats against her calf. The clack of flip flops against concrete echoes in waves. Sweat runs down her forehead to the sides of her nose.

The zoo fades back in. It's only taken a few seconds. Her knees strengthen. She swings her bag onto her back. The reptile house shoots past on her left. She veers round a Holiday Scheme outing dressed in matching orange baseball caps and high vis waistcoats. The angle of the slope eases. She realises how dry her mouth is, how wet her back. Her feet slap slower towards the back door to Big Cats. She pulls out her lanyard.

The photo on the key card stares straight at her as she presses it to the keypad. That's her as her colleagues see her, how she is here, with lipstick, foundation and all. It's too hot to wear all that today. Even without it, the staff and visitors see that woman when they look at Chow. So does she, most of the time. She gets more accustomed to being herself the longer she lives it.

She never gets the time to build the strength to find the words to tell her family who she is. It's not that they will reject or hate her. She doesn't doubt their love. It won't take long for them to get over the shock and start to understand. She just can't face the interim adjustment period full of questions and explanations.

She pulls the door open, steps through into darkness. Her eyes are soothed immediately; the sweat on her skin cools. She smells the blood of carnivore feed. The door falls closed behind her. She can't see anything.

'Sorry I'm a bit late,' she says, not sure whether there is anyone there to hear her. 'Wasn't expecting to work this second shift, had to sort some stuff out.' She blinks hard. It makes no difference.

RUE BALDRY

'There you are!' someone shouts. It comes from further away than she'd expected. 'You'd better get your boots on.'

'Yeah, yeah, sorry,' she replies, louder than before. She repeats what she'd said about sorting stuff. A shadow shifts. Pulling her bag round, she directs her speech towards that shadow. It takes on details. It becomes human.

She can see a plastic stool near the wall now, so she sinks down onto it. It would be nice to stay just here. Her colleague is watching her, though, so she changes back into stiffening socks and laces her boots. Tigers, she reminds herself.

KUDZU

Vine twills encircle trees and engulf telephone poles: kudzu creeps. In it, we feel the thump of blue, hurtling through dark pines and sometimes pausing on the sidelines of highways. Molly leans out the window, observing spattered towns.

Pitching our camp in a grove of conifers, I begin arranging understanding by picking up a rock. Underneath lies a damp hollow recess. The imprint shocks my system. I try replacing but the dirt has shifted. Molly calls me from inside, stirring. The tent flaps shift, breathing in a sanctity of limbs, of translucent light, of being.

Her drawings are of careful plants, leaves, varicose veins and starburst flower anthems. She adds color and later wraps me up in the crinkling fabric of her windbreaker.

Suspiciously delicate, ferns have consumed the forest floor. In the cool blue, they lap up beads of precipitation, hungry, growing beasts. Made up of marching spores, I become subsumed staring at each individual leaf, zooming in and out, regarding the plant, becoming dizzy. Molly is unfazed. She sits amongst them for hours, communing, I think, transcribing their commentary into contained drawings.

☼

I make Molly dinner. Only a can of baked beans heated over the fire, the tin can sooted up the sides, with some pulverized saltines, but we revel. We are both so hungry, her from a long day of drawing, me from saying nothing. The food tastes so good. We sparkle, content and warm towards each other. I hope this is enough.

Slice of her back, I run a finger along her spine and feel it across mine. I undress in the dark, or sleep in my clothes. In the forest I'm unaccustomed to my own body, surprised by the skin, bones and physique I've always had. In the forest the body, my body is an easier entity to carry, to forget. When Molly holds me I pretend her body is mine and mine is the forest floor, rhizomatic and endless, horizontal, like one of her drawings.

☼

I study Molly's biology book on plants, flipping through canonical diagrams. I stumble, tasting Latin on my tongue, *dryopteris fragrans, athyrium asplenoides, osmunda regalis, asplenium thelypterioides,* sounds that roll around my mouth like wood rot. I look up at the ferns. Speaking again their Latin names the fronds shiver and curl away. I sigh, repulsed, not sure of the accent, and affect, and where is Molly?

☼

EFFY MORRIS

I dream of her lithe in a saintly dress, teasing diaphanous layers between nip-slip and modesty. She becomes a confused figure: somewhere between admiration and embodiment. I've seen her before, or one of her kind before in the catholic cards my great aunt collects and adorns her assisted living apartment with. Tokens, some holographic with rounded edges that make them pass through the hands with ease, as if they're something to be traded, coveted, collected. My silence has paid off. I locate the sounds of a river. A definition, a heavy net, cast out over and over, tangled, spread out I see the individual loops and ties and it looks appealing, but then it's flung out into space again and I lose track of its shape. Molly lets me draw the river for her in her heavy sketchbook. Turning the clumsy line upside down, she draws out a long lonesome thread, plucking it from beneath my sternum, and carefully winds it around her hand. The way you would yarn or a lengthy electrical cord. Singing through movement, the forest is still.

☼

We hike into town to stock up on supplies. Molly is feeling festive and suggests getting a drink. I notice for the first time a thin film of dirt on my arms, legs and hands. I can pick out individual particles as if it had settled moments before. But when I rub, it doesn't move. My feet fumble on the rigidity of cement.

After weeks of drinking filtered spring water, the alcohol is aggressive, both stale and biting. Molly chats animatedly to the bartender. It's so dark indoors that objects and faces swim rapidly in and out of depth.

A brick clock tower sits somewhere in my imagination. Brick clock tower on a grey day, was it a part of a station, or a town? Like it was a beginning, a memory of shape pre-forest. The bartender is shouting at us, waving his arms back and forth across his body and over his head, he gets closer, but my vision wavers and he seems to dissipate, smudging. Something has turned sour. Molly's face is screwed up. His disgust points a fissure between our bodies. She grabs my arm and pulls me outside. Flung back into light, sunspots. Molly curses, spitting on the sidewalk.

☼

I forget how earlier our hands had accidentally brushed in a startling way. We hike back in silence. Eyes towards a shift, shifting on foot. Falling asleep that night, she holds me tightly in our sleeping bag.

☼

Nothing lingers! I shout angrily. I look over at Molly's hunched back. I haven't actually spoken and Molly doesn't know I'm disintegrating. In the city this will all wash away. Vacuums will move across office carpets and rectangles will again frame feeling. Molly is stationary, a statue I think, so I walk away. Into the forest on my own. My silence is the same silence as the forest and she won't notice my absence.

KUDZU

Time in compression, the ferns feel like proof. Reading the small print of Molly's books I learn their age, their existence extending backwards and forwards on a line so long it ceases to be lateral. My body feels invisible.

My great aunt too remains in stillness, silence. She holds her life loosely, between revolving fingertips. A slippery sort of grasp that requires the assistance of others. She bathes and dresses alone, still able to decide what earrings she wants to wear, beaded and dangling from each lobe. A soft way of living, padding through folded walls, a self-made forest.

How do you feel today? But it felt like Molly was asking, "what'll it be today?" from a great distance. I want it to be easy, like jelly pooling. I want my body to work. Searching for examples, I scatter myself, looking, but can't summon one fast enough. There are no quick impressions to mold myself after.

What about winter, she asks instead. Snow collecting, swept up into windowsill corners. Time passes rapidly, and suddenly, I too can feel the chill in the air. I look around; it is still deep spring. Parting my lips, I break the day's silence. Let's have sex, I say, my voice cracking.

Something is moving sideways through the forest. Not wind, but weather. Weather that is not of the forest. Reactive, the forest, layered damp decomposing, feels the static along its back. I think Molly is at the center of it all. I think the weather is coming for her drawings, for her way of seeing the forest. I'm suddenly fearful. The change my body has been craving now seems like it might strip me limb to limb.

The air smells heavy and purple.

Huddled in the tent, we thread our bodies together. The weather, impervious, cartwheeling, turning arabesques, right through. Where our skin presses urgently, the gusts still sidle through molecule sized separation. I whimper. I tell Molly of the kudzu mouth, green, gaping and insatiable. How within its belly, its body is suffocation, how inside my body the kudzu grows.

The meaning slithers past the two hemispheres of my brain, cleaving and evading clean understanding. Molly brushes the hair from my damp forehead and then passes her hand along the ceiling of the tent, backlit, watching the nylon ripple. Condensation forms. Laying my head on her lap, in hushed tones she reads the section on vascular systems.

BUTTER FINGERS

Your lights are always on. Like you don't give a shit about the earth. You keep them on in every room. Even when you go to bed, you leave them all on. I can see them shining in every corner of your four and a half. I have the same rooms. My apartment is identical to yours and only separated by an alley the size of a fat donkey. From outside, the difference between our apartments is that you never put blinds or curtains on your window. You never have.

I opened your electricity bill by mistake once. The postman probably saw your 8 as my 6. I opened the envelope, thinking it was mine, and then I saw your total for the two previous months. Your name and your address were on the letter. I didn't know your name before then. Your name is Sidney. Sidney, who doesn't give a shit about the earth. Sidney, who spends too much on electricity bills. But you make up for your exorbitant consumption of hydro-generated electricity by biking everywhere you go, even in winter. You take your bike upstairs, and then downstairs, and then up again. You climb up the two staircases, your bike on your shoulder. You have biker legs as a result. Strong. Hairless. Defined. I also shave my legs now. I read somewhere that it makes you a faster biker. I shave them on the same days as you. I open the window and let the breeze in. I can see your razor on the shelf next to the window. Dripping, dripping, dripping. And full of misplaced hair.

Before you leave for work, you always have the same breakfast. Butter and jam on toast. You spread the room-temperature butter on fresh bread and finish with the thick raspberry (or maybe cherry?) jam. You drink phosphorescent pink grapefruit juice. For the vitamins? On some weekend mornings, you get croissants and chocolatines. You bike down to the bakery for the passing lover lying in your bed. Sometimes they get it for you. To please you. They always want to please you so bad. I can hear it. The passing lover leaves and a new one comes over. They bring you wine and food and they leave after your lovemaking. You get bored easily from people, don't you? I do too. Except for you. I've been watching you live next to me for three years now. Your days and your nights have become my days and my nights. We've only met once, briefly. I doubt that you remember it. We nodded to each other as we were both getting in our buildings. Pure synchronicity. Maybe you thought I was the janitor.

I don't think you know I can see you. Or maybe you do? Our two buildings were designed by the same architect, built by the same contractor, within the same year, by the same men and the same tools. There's only a small space between our two windows. I can see inside your flat from my couch, from my dinner table, from my office. You're always bright naked. Parading. It would be hard not to see you. I can hear everything you say or do or listen to. You've never asked me if I think you make too much noise late at night. Or any other question neighbors politely ask one another even though they never care about the answer. You don't expect me (or anyone) to be affected by your day-to-day. But I am. I am bothered by your presence every single day. You're always up and going. Living loudly, proudly. I hear your toaster, your singing in the shower, your bell ringing. Your loud fucking.

BUTTER FINGERS

It's true. When you have company, I lie in my bed and pretend you are under the sheets with me. I pretend the noises you make are for me, a result of my dancing fingers. I pretend it's my name you're screaming. But when I finish, I never scream. I prefer to keep my pleasures to myself. But I like to follow the rhythm of your days. I wake up when your alarm rings and I start following your morning routine. Toast, soft butter, jam, shower, t-shirt. You go out, I stay in. By the time you get home, I've made dinner. You order in. You never cook, except when you want to impress a special lover. You cook them poached eggs on buttered toast. That's the extent of your culinary talent. In the three years I've observed you, this demonstration of affection only happened 4 times. They never stay for more than a month. They haven't even brought their toothbrush to your sink, where your eggs have been left to rot. But you're never sad, you always go back to the world and come home again with a new lover. Often a younger one. They are so young, they never care for your empty fridge or the damp cigarette butts on your bed.

As I am writing this, we're in the deep of summer. The AC stopped working, and my ceiling started leaking. I've told the landlord, but he'll never fix it. It's 38 degrees outside. I've taken up smoking to be on my balcony more often. You have not noticed my new habit, have you? You don't change. You still walk undressed in your apartment. Even more so, now that the city is melting down too. I can see your pores dilating from my window. Your butter melts even faster on your toasts. You take several showers a day, but you're still dripping, dripping, dripping with fresh sweat. You can never cool down. You're in heat.

I'm on my 21st pack of cigarettes, since I started a couple of weeks ago. Something happened this morning. You saw me and you waved and I waved back. You said "Hi, new neighbor," I said "Hi" back. You spoke with your mouth full and your fingers covered with melted butter. You probably think I just moved in, what with the 1st of July behind us, the time when everyone in Montreal moves in or out. I did not correct your assumption. I like that I'm new to you. I watched as you changed to put on a black top and a black hat. I had never seen you with a hat. I guess we both pick up new things. My fingers were smelling of smoke. As soon as you left the window, I dipped my fingers in the stick of butter in my fridge. It dripped all over my feet, and I had to wash them in the tub.

You have loud August sex. Always the same name. It's been three weeks. You made your poached eggs twice. You're really in love, aren't you? The AC keeps leaking on the aluminum as you leave the windows open to scream your love. I've grown uneasy. I stopped taking part in your love making. It's too hot. And it's no fun when you're always screaming the same name. Over and over and over. You even prepared dinner. Lasagna. You had never cooked dinner before for any of your lovers??? It took you hours to prepare it, but you drank enough wine that you forgot the passing hours. You listened to jazz (you never listened to jazz before???). I fell asleep on the balcony watching you kiss, a cigarette between my fingers. I woke up with my nail browned by the ember. You are still sleeping and it's Monday morning.

It's the downstairs neighbor who woke me up. She banged on my door and threw the eviction notice at me, still in her pajamas. It takes me a few minutes understanding what's happening (we are

all being evicted, not just me or just her. You are being evicted too). We have to leave before Sunday at midnight. In just a few months, there will be new condos here, an elevator, and a baby eating organic pumpkin purée in a non-toxic plastic chair where my couch is.

I need to prepare everything. I had never planned to leave in such a hurry. I don't like being rushed. I hate being rushed. The city's grown hostile. Prices are up and people like me, like you can't even afford to exist in this city anymore. Besides, I know I won't be moving to a new flat. I'd have to go to the East part of town where the rent's cheap and there's no you. Why go anywhere else if it's not with you? And I cannot stay here. I know that. So I start finishing everything that was left here. The pack of cigarettes first. Then I make two toasts with butter and jam. I also have a gallon of milk, which will fill my appetite for a few more hours. Now, I have to wrap everything. I only have Christmas-themed paper. In September, it's fucking depressing. I wrap everything for you. My CD's, my TV, my books, my clothes. I write your name on everything. It's all for you. From me.

I am ready now. I open the faucet and let the water fill the bathtub. I bring the knife and the butter and the last slice of bread in the bath with me. I light up the last cigarette I kept for this moment, the moment I leave you. I listen to you sing in your shower. "Only you, baby/Can put out this fire/ Burning in my soul/Only you, baby/Can put out this fire". I sing with you. Our grand finale. My skin is sweating. It does not take long for my body to melt in the tub, like a large stick of butter. My hair under the water. My arms dripping, dripping, dripping with cherry-colored jam. I can't hear you sing anymore.

JUDITH AND HOLOFERNES GO ON A ROAD TRIP

MONTRÉAL - 11 PM

It's not the city that Solange hates—it's the memories. Anna, who wakes up from a night of too many gin tonics that were mostly just gin, unaltered. Anna, who's been banned by all the bibliothèques because she always "forgets" to return the books she borrows. Anna, who met her parents for the first time, and kissed her papa's cheeks. Anna, deboning a roasted chicken listening to Skeeter Davis "The End Of The World" in their bare kitchen. Anna, leaving.

It's nice that her papa offered to move her—one less thing for her to worry about, she thinks. Although Solange confirmed with him: "10 heures, chez moi," she knows that he'll roll in silently at 7 AM and start waiting for her expectantly. She also knows that she won't greet him until 10 AM sharp to prove her point. They're similar in their stubbornness, people always point it out. Solange will never admit it though.

It's as if when you reach a certain age, your greatest fear isn't the dark or monsters frolicking under your bed, but the slow process of turning into your parents.

She zips up her bag and stares for a moment at the mountains of boxes towering over her. It feels like a fort. She gets up and launches herself onto her bare mattress. The exhaustion gets to her and she falls asleep in the bedroom she shared with Anna one last time.

Tomorrow she'll leave the city she came to as a small adult, and come out as a disillusioned, tall child.

MONTRÉAL - 10 AM

Solange opens her front door and there he is, sitting at the wheel, smiling. "Je suis ici depuis sept heures," he says.

André asks her something about how she is, she says something about her maman. They always dance around the real, half-listening to the music of small talk. Solange brings down the boxes to the front door and André packs them in his golden minivan. He's always been good at Tetris. After an hour of come and go, Solange's whole life is packed in his car. It's so full to the brim that it seems to hover above the ground. She looks down the street, then back to the front door, her eyes grazing the spiral staircase Anna used to fall down on all the time. Solange needs to leave; she can't be sinking, thinking about her all the time. It's funny how unexpected the weight of memory is.

DORVAL - 11:15 AM

It's been 15 minutes and they've run out of every topic of conversation she can possibly think of. They've talked about the weather, the recent election, how she's heard the traffic of Toronto is even worse than of Montreal's. It's not that they're boring people, it's just that they disagree on most things. Instead of arguing for hours, like they used to do when Solange was younger, they just retreat in silence. He'll say that he was ripped off by the people at the SAAQ and she'll say that they're just doing their jobs. It goes like that, both of them delving deeper into silence, each time risking less and less of themselves with each other.

She knows that he wants to be close to her. She knows that the only reason he agreed to drive her was so that he could spend six uninterrupted hours with his daughter. She knows that he loves her, but she also knows that there's a part of her that he'll never be able to see.

When she was twelve, Solange went to see the Klimt exhibit at the Musée des Beaux-Arts. Her maman had received a gift certificate from her sister on her 45th birthday and it was about to expire. No one in her family had heard of the Austrian painter before, but her mother had listened to some host talk about it on her morning shows and that was it. As they passed through the white threshold of painted steel that framed the entrance of the museum, Solange remembered feeling like she was someone else. Her family coagulating with each other, as if pressing their bodies together would make them as intimidating as the crowd of intellect swirling around them.

The exhibit was packed. It was as if everyone in town had waited until the last week to see it. She thought it would be easy to be someone else, to pretend that going to the museum was something her family and she always did. The truth was that she'd barely ever left her small town, her parents daunted by the prospect of driving in the big city.

The people were so different here, beautiful and overwhelming at the same time. By the time the queue had dissipated and they were about to enter, her family was barely holding it together. Her papa had wandered off, pissing her already anxious maman off, and her brother was crying because he'd been hungry ever since they had arrived. "Ça vaut pas la peine," her maman had said. "Veux-tu y aller, pareil? On peut t'attendre dehors." She nodded, curious about what lay behind the entrance.

The first painting she saw was "Judith II," and that's the only one she remembers. She stared at Judith's face for what seemed like hours. Her twisted hands clenching on to Holofernes' limp head. Her pale breasts exposed, flowers growing from her neck. It looked as if she was burying a part of herself, so sure of the necessity of what she was doing. In many ways, that was the first experience Solange had of womanhood.

When she walked out of the museum that day, she knew. As they crossed the green bridge onto the mainland, her parents rued the city in the front—she was at fault for making them feel small. Solange was in the backseat staring at the Fleuve, knowing that she'd always been Judith, not Holofernes. She wouldn't be the first woman to ever get tangled in the strokes of an oil painting.

ODESSA 1:15PM

To Solange's disappointment, the road had been smooth so far. No flaming car crashes or jaw-dropping scenery over which to find common awe. Instead, miles of dry asphalt surrounded by the rich green of late August. "J'ai envie d'pipi," she said. André dismissively agrees to stop at the next ONroute.

Solange always gets a little bit jealous when she sees families getting along. Where did she go so wrong? She saw this card at the Pharmaprix the other day. It read "Qu'est-ce que je ferais sans toi, papa?" What would she do without him? If Solange didn't have a father, would she be happier? Better even, would she have never met Anna?

The ONroute parking lot is full of sunburnt families with ripe bladders. They're mostly white, mostly cis. Probably collectively aggravated with how far they have to travel to their summer homes. A toddler is running away, his mother sprinting after him, arms extended. It's funny to

JUDITH AND HOLOFERNES GO ON A ROAD TRIP

look at a life you'll never live, even if you could. Her papa gets out of the car and Solange follows in silence.

Inside, they get to the hallway that leads to the bathroom. André takes a slight left into the men's entrance. Solange walks ahead, head leveled, darting for the women's. She doesn't have to turn around to know that her father stopped in his tracks, that he's looking at her disappear around the corner, stunned.

"J'le sais depuis longtemps, j'suis une fille, j'suis pas un garçon." Solange sat down her parents at fourteen years old to tell them. She'd known since that afternoon at the museum, of course. She had spent the last two years building the courage to say it and it was a hard feat. She'd almost let it slip a few times even. As far as she was concerned, whispers always wanted to creep into screams. That's what made them exciting.

No one said anything when she told them. Her mother went back to chopping onions, her dad's gaze drifting once again towards the TV screen. Solange wondered if she had even said anything. She got up to her bedroom, letting her back slide down against the door. Their silence spoke louder than words.

The dryer in the women's washroom is out of service. She wipes her hands onto her faded mom jeans and she spots André waiting for her outside. He pushes through the glass doors, Solange following in silence once again.

BELLEVILLE 2PM

It's André who brings it up first. "Est-ce que ça te rend contente de vivre de même?" he says. She doesn't know what he wants to hear, so she stares out the window.

Cisgender people always equate happiness with transitioning. As if when you laser all the hair off your body, when you start your day with a cocktail of t-blockers and estrogen, when you acquire your breasts and the vagina you always deserved, then life is finally joyful. If that was the case, everyone would transition. Solange is a woman with a broken heart; she doesn't give a fuck about the adversity of the trans experience right now.

"J'm'ennuie d'elle," she says. They'd been dating for two years. At the time Solange had come to the grim conclusion that no one would ever love her. That her happiness was repulsive to others. They'd met in a support group Solange had been attending on and off for a couple of months. Anna was the first person who'd ever told her she was beautiful. One look into her green eyes and Solange had fallen for her. It was the kind of early love that starts like a wildfire. The one you expect to ravage everything in its way, and then retreat into the black, scorched earth. Instead, their fire had kept burning strong. They stayed together longer than all their friends would ever guess. That is until Anna had decided to leave her. She needed to be with a girlfriend who talked about things. A girlfriend who didn't retreat into quietude when things got hard. The only person people ever described like that was her papa. So much, that for a moment, she didn't know which one of them Anna was talking about.

Solange tried everything she could to get her back. A thousand letters professing contrived feelings. A slew of unnecessary gifts that would have been cute when they were dating, but now just seemed terribly desperate. One voicemail away from a restraining order. It doesn't matter what the reason is when people want to leave—they just want to leave.

"C'est plate. J'te comprends," André says.

SCARBOROUGH 3:45PM

It's true that André doesn't have the words to speak to his daughter's gender, but he definitely knows about heartbreak. He'd been engaged to a young English-speaking woman before meeting Solange's maman. His parents, being the separatists they were, saw their future union as an act of abandonment. They'd spent their entire life in Rimouski, their worldview permanently unchallenged. The prospect of having their only son sleeping with the enemy was anything short of a disgrace. Things were different back then; you didn't get to justify treason with passion. And besides, hadn't he heard that love was supposed to be an easy thing?

As he listened to his daughter vent about this strange woman named Anna, he couldn't help but relate to how little she had told him about her life. After all, when was the last time he'd called his papa? His maman? Come to think of it, would they even recognize their own son if they passed him on the street?

The realization that the distance between him and his daughter was growing with every mile they passed was disheartening. Knowing that it was mostly due to his wrongdoing was even worse. Perhaps it was the high that you get when you almost reach your destination, or maybe just the apprehension of doing the journey back alone, but André decided that it wasn't worth it to nurture silence anymore. That facing the discomfort was easier than burying it alive in the depths of his psyche.

"C'est loin, Toronto. J'vais m'ennuyer de toi. J'le sais que, des fois, tu pourrais penser que, ben dans l'fond, que j'suis pas intéressé par ta vie. Euh, ou c'que tu fais—mais, j'le suis. J'en parles pas tout le temps, mais j'suis vraiment fière de la femme que, ben, tu deviens."

It's easier to say things when you're looking ahead. Sometimes, eye contact is more treacherous than black ice. In the 45 minutes that separate Scarborough from Solange's new apartment in Parkdale, André would tell his daughter that he loved her and that he was the one that ought to change, not her.

TORONTO 4PM

Perhaps it was the fact that for the first time in her life her father explicitly told her that he loved her, or maybe just the fact that he'd even strung more than a sentence together, but Solange felt deeply unsettled. What had gone through him? "Is he about to tell me he's dying of cancer?" she thought.

In the end, it didn't matter from where his sudden candor came from, their trip was coming to its end. She rolled down the window, the breeze from the lake knotting into her black hair. A smell she didn't recognize wafted through. Maybe the Tibetan restaurant, down her new block. Parkdale would make a fine home, she was certain of that.

In a few minutes, her and André would start unloading his minivan. They would lug the entirety of her life up to the second floor. Her papa would then say that he likes her new place, that he's happy for her, even. He would hug her like he'd never hugged anyone before. Solange would watch him leave from her kitchen window. For the first time in months, maybe years, she would feel a release. An emancipation from the crushing weight of the unsaid. No more ghosts, she thought.

DOWN BY THE LOCK

TIFFANY H. WHITE

"He's gone fishing," says Mam. "Dinner's getting cold."

My big brother Tony goes to fetch Dad home. I scurry behind trying to keep up as he slips through the dusk.

The canal is murky, smelly and I'm scared of ghosts; I try grabbing Tony's hand to be safe but he pulls away. Dad's down by the lock, almost invisible in the gloom. Almost, not quite. He knows we are here.

"The water stinks," says Tony.

"You get used to it," Dad reels in the line and Tony inspects the empty hook.

"And there's no fish. You never bring anything home."

"Don't mean there's no fish," Dad replies. Tony mumbles something I can't quite make out.

"Anyway, fishing isn't about fish," says Dad. "Come with me. Find out for yourself."

I'm not invited. Perhaps I'm a ghost.

"Dinner's ready. Mam wants us home," I whine. The men ignore me, standing a few feet apart; seemingly lost in the silent canal.

A scimitar blade of silver carves the air and the water fragments into splinters of moon.

"Pike?" My brother is scarcely breathing.

"Carp," my daddy whispers back.

At that moment they are more than father and son.

"Dad! Dinner!" I'm squirming around behind them, needing to pee.

Tony packs up the kit; takes my hand, Dad takes the other, keeping me safe between them. As we go home, Dad tells tales from his life on the canals. Mostly they're about the horses he led along narrow towpaths and locks.

Later that year, Tony is sent to serve at the Suez canal. He doesn't come home.

Sometimes Dad and I go fishing down by the lock, looking for carp, or perhaps ghosts.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LAKE

Eunice Louise Dupree sat in a porch chair, much as her mother and grandmother had done, and stared at the water beneath the pines and bald cypress. The muddy surge had reached the top front step and stayed there, taunting her as it always did. The bumpy nose and head of an alligator surfaced and glided toward Eunice. She raised the shotgun and fired. The roar echoed through the trees, causing herons and egrets to take flight. The gator disappeared into the mocha-colored swamp.

"Dem bastards betta stay 'way," she muttered.

"What the hell you shootin' at?" Remy, her youngest son, pushed open the screen and joined her on the porch.

"Big ole cocodril. Whatdaya thin'?"

"Yeah, they always come round after storms. Take it easy with that thing. Don' hurt yourself again."

"Ah, Cher, yo Mama jus' playin'."

Eunice had lived on the bayou most of her life. She'd married Cleophas, a Sergeant in the Army, just after she turned twenty-one and had two sons a year apart. Then her husband flew off to Iraq and got himself killed in a Desert Storm, some kind of bomb blowing up his Humvee just north of the oil fields.

She'd worked in Slidell as a laborer for the Public Works Department. Her sons grew up big and smart. She became a porch sitter at 54. Her oldest, Pierre, operated his own tour boat business out of New Orleans and Slidell, and Remy, still at home, worked as partners with him.

Remy sat cross-legged on the porch beside her, the smoke from his cigarette helped keep the bugs away. Filtered sunlight through the trees heated the air to tropical levels. Eunice felt content to sit and sweat, listen to the chatter of birds and other swamp sounds. She daydreamed about her girlhood days on the other side of Lake Pontchartrain, listening to music pour from French Quarter bars, the life of the street circus, and handsome men and their girls bouncing from club to club, enjoying each other's touch, even in the heat.

"So, do you think Pierre will come by so soon after the surge?" Remy asked, breaking the silence between them.

"He be here, Cher. Don' worry."

"I'm not worried, Mama. Jus' this last blow was bad. Slidell took a hit, trees down, buildings caved in. Power's out 'cross half the parish."

"He be here soon. I cun almost hear his pirogue now." Eunice smiled, closed her eyes, and waved a Japanese fan before her face, a gift from a boy that she'd loved long ago.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LAKE

Eunice Louise Dupree could hear everything. Her neighbors joked that she could crawl inside their heads and hear their words before they'd even spoken them. Remy smiled and took a long drag off his cigarette. He'd worked with his brother since turning eighteen. Both of them knew every patch of water in St. Tammany Parish and beyond. They had three canopied flat-bottomed boats and a few smaller pirogues for the adventurous who wanted to travel into the swamp's very *Heart of Darkness*, Remy's favorite story that he remembered from high school.

He stared through the trees to the mouth of the bayou, waiting for Pierre's pirogue to turn in, waiting to be taken away to town, away from the quiet backwater swamp and his dozing mama. He checked his watch and cell phone for the umpteenth time. *Two hours late . . . something's wrong . . . Pierre shoulda called . . . not like him*.

The low buzz of an outboard came from the direction of Slidell, not loud, sounding like the skipper was in no hurry. The familiar blue skiff turned in, cut its engine, and coasted toward them. Eunice seemed to be in a dream, a toothy smile splitting her face.

Remy stood and waved to his brother. Something felt different, felt wrong. Pierre didn't wave back, stood poling the boat through the quiet water toward the porch, his ebony face covered with a grayish cast, sort of how Remy pictured the sick Africans in Conrad's far-off Congo.

Pierre threw Remy the bowline and he tied it to a porch post and pulled the boat in close. His mama stirred.

"Hush now," Pierre whispered. "Don' wake her."

"Okay, okay. What's goin' on?"

Eunice opened her eyes and smiled. "I cun hear you fools. Cher, why so late?"

"Sorry, Mama," Pierre said. His hands trembled as he stood over her. His soaked jeans dribbled water onto the rough porch boards and he stank of something different than what the swamp had to yield.

"What's goin' on?" Remy demanded, his voice sounding too loud in the suffocating heat.

"I . . . I found somethin' on the way here." Pierre pointed to the front of the boat, to a canvas tarp that covered something.

"Wha' you got?" Eunice asked.

"Not sure I wanna show ya, Mama," Pierre said.

Remy knelt and gingerly lifted an edge of the tarp. He bolted to his feet, stumbled to the far end of the porch and vomited into the water.

Eunice heaved herself up from her chair and stared into the boat. "Show me, Cher, show me all."

TERRY SANVILLE

Pierre sucked in a deep breath and pulled back the tarp. Eunice gasped. The upper half of a young woman's body lay facing them, eyes open, mouth stretched into a scream. The remnants of a red party dress covered her front, everything below the waist gone, ripped away, leaving a ragged edge of bloody flesh.

Pierre lowered the tarp. Remy rejoined them and the brothers helped their mama into her chair, then sat on either side. Both men looked gray and worn. Swamp sounds closed in and the heat pressed down. Gradually their quivering bodies grew still.

Eunice asked, "Where'd ya find 'er?"

"Back in the trees, 'bout twenty minutes outsidea Slidell. Spotted that red dress tangled in the storm debris."

Eunice pulled a handkerchief from her cleavage and dabbed at her tears, rocked back-and-forth in her chair, moaning softly. Her sons studied their hands, stayed quiet, letting the bayou soak up their mama's grief. Finally, Remy rose, went into the house and returned with a bottle of Pernod and three glasses. Without asking he poured a drink for the trio.

Eunice sighed. "Her Mama came by las' week. Said Ange goin' ovah lake wid dat Broussard boy, have weddin' soon, if dey don' cut 'n' run."

"Yeah, I've seen 'em in New Orleans," Pierre said. "They're crazy for each other . . . I mean . . . they were."

"Did ya find the boy?" Eunice asked.

"Nah. Spent an hour lookin' 'round. Saw nothin' of their pirogue. But I found his jacket and cap floatin' close in."

"What the hell they doing out there, anyway?" Remy asked.

Pierre sucked in a deep breath. "Probably tried comin' home during the storm and got blown over on the lake. The surge pushed 'em into the swamp, and the . . . the gators did the rest."

The sun climbed overhead and the little breeze died quietly. They continued sipping their liquor, watching alligators come and go as the brown waters ever so slightly receded. Shadows from the cypress trees slowly grew long.

Eunice continued to rock back and forth in her chair, her eyes fixed on the bayou, lips moving but making no sound, as if memorizing something that she needed to say but wanted to get it just right.

Pierre pushed up and steadied himself against a porch post. "I'd . . . I'd better get on to the LaBlanc place. Remy, come with me. Don' know if I cun face Ange's folks by myself."

"Sid down, boy," Eunice said, her voice the serious hard-edged one. "We tellin' LaBlancs nothin'."

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LAKE

Her sons stared at her, open-mouthed. Remy poured himself another shot and downed it. Finally, he asked, "Why not, Mama?"

"Tink 'bout it. Would her Mama wanna see *that* as the last thin' she remembers of Ange?" Eunice pointed to the mound of tortured flesh under the tarp. "Let her tink Ange run off with that Broussard boy, that they be livin' somewheres high 'n' free."

"Is that how you would want it if it was Remy or me?" Pierre asked.

"Damn straight. Dead is dead, but dreams 'n' memories keeps us 'live."

Pierre shook his head. "But they'd never know, never get, ya know, what they call—closure."

"I's take hopin' 'n' dreamin' ovah dat ugly dead thin' any day."

The brothers stared at each other then shut up. The silence grew.

"So . . . so what do ya want us to do?" Pierre asked.

"You take Ange inta dat swamp, wheres folks neva go, neva wanna go, neva been. You leaves her with the birds, snakes and cocodril, say prayer fa her and her man. Forget how ya got there, forget what ya saw."

"Mama, we'll find a place for Ange," Pierre murmured, "but we cun neva forget."

Eunice Louise Dupree sat in her porch chair and sipped Pernod. The sound of an outboard slowly faded into the swamp and bird calls and the buzz of insects reclaimed their dominion. She closed her eyes and fanned herself, thought about her youthful time in New Orleans, living high and free, on the other side of the lake where dreams and the people in them still live.

THE EXHIBIT

Stuart lumbered down the hall of the Winter Valley Facility toward Francine with a wide tooth-baring smile that, if it were in a horror movie, might have been the manic grin of the cannibalistic monster about to chain-saw his young victim. He clomped into the well-manicured lobby, a lounge for the more presentable residents. The others, who were as ungainly as Stuart, were shepherded to the back of the building, except when they had visitors.

"There's my vife," he boomed across the room, in his familiar Yiddish accent.

His lack of restraint and untidy appearance were usually hidden from families of potential new arrivals, who might be touring the facility. But if Francine was waiting for him, he was called to the lobby to meet her.

The medical staff at the nurses' station glanced up, as did the elderly residents clustered in wing chairs near the entrance, biding their time, happy for the smallest break in the tedium, noticing it was just Francine visiting Stuart again. They observed his immoderation and her embarrassment as an unexceptional part of the nursing home routine.

Ever since Francine admitted her husband to Winter Valley, decidedly against his will, she took him on outings, as if to prove to him that he wasn't a prisoner, which he obviously was. This became her habit after the initial two weeks of hysterics and Yiddish cursing, when he realized she wasn't bringing him back home. Then he calmed down and seemed to forget he had a home.

Never before in their marriage had she felt such guilt. She had deprived him of his rights, becoming his Power of Attorney, convincing his doctor to declare him incompetent, conspiring with their sons, scheming with the nursing home social worker, and having him spirited away by ambulance without telling him beforehand. He was confined to his new residence, a "locked door facility," with no understanding of why she had done this to him.

During his time of adjustment, she visited every day, as she would continue to do. But as soon as he saw her, he screamed at her, demanding to go home. She refused as gently as she could.

She did not say, "I can't live with a man whose brain disorder makes him prone to violence."

Instead, she said, "I'm no longer strong enough to take care of you. If you fall again, I won't be able to get you up. You're twice my size."

Indeed, over the years, Stuart had gained as much weight as Francine had lost. And it was true that he reached for her whenever unsteadiness overtook him, risking bringing them both down, risking breaking her hip, risking both having to lie in their own filth for days if neither of them could get themselves up.

She would have endured that risk if his lifelong flashes of temper hadn't hardened into episodes of fury if she tried to deny him his many glasses of wine or urge him to take his blood pressure medicine or limit his online buying sprees. At such times, he would bang his fist on the table, spit out oaths, cruelly break the knick knacks she cherished, and swipe at her with his cane. But he hadn't hit her. Not yet.

Soon after Stuart's forced residence at Winter Valley, Francine did what she could to make his private room acceptable. She filled a bookcase with his favorite English-language volumes—*Hound of the Baskervilles, Animal Farm, Huckleberry Finn*, although he would never again read them. She brought in a TV and subscribed to a cable service so he could watch his favorite station—CNN, athough he never did turn it on. He may have forgotten how to use the remote. She festooned the walls with family photographs, although he would never again ask about anyone in the family or about the dogs. Possibly, he forgot he had family or dogs. He never forgot he was married to Francine, although he appeared to forget her name.

THE EXHIBIT

What used to excite him, after the first two weeks, about Francine's visits were the outings. She took him on her mundane errands to the drive-through at the bank or to the supermarket. It was a lengthy process. When she arrived at Winter Valley, she had to locate him. He was usually in the rear lounge, but sometimes he was in the craft room or the cafeteria, slopping down vanilla pudding. She would hustle him to his private room to change his slippers to shoes and thrust his arms into a sweater or coat, depending on the weather. If he let her, she might take a stab at combing his hair. He still had some, loosely stretched over his pink scalp.

Next she would borrow the house wheelchair to transport him to the Honda, after punching in the code on a keypad that unlocked the door. Guiding him from the wheelchair to the passenger seat was the most dangerous moment, when he stood on shaky legs and had to figure out how to pivot into the car. When he was safely seat-belted, she would return the wheelchair before driving off. He often said the same thing.

"The gate is open. Ve can go."

This increased her guilt.

If the errand took them to the supermarket or the library, the process would reverse. Unfasten his seat belt, borrow a wheelchair. The trip always ended with a stop at the McDonald's drive through for french fries. Stuart would busy himself eating and forget to ask to go home, if he was going to ask. They would arrive at the door of Winter Valley just as he was finishing the last fry. She would hop out of the car to fetch the wheelchair before he could object.

Francine found the process exhausting, but it was her brother-in-law Alex who worried.

"Vy take a chance? He's unpredictable. He might hurt you."

She had a rosier view of her husband than his brother did. Alex had always been supportive even before Stuart began to decline. They usually spoke by phone in the evening, after Francine's visit with her husband.

"Stuart has never hurt me and deep-down, I don't believe he would. That's why I feel so guilty. I must give him some sort of life, even if it's just the dry cleaners and french fries, to make up for taking his freedom—for the second time."

Alex, who was a year older than his brother, but who looked ten years younger, with his runner's body and greying beard, was her strongest support.

"He might attack you vile you're driving. A car crash is a big price to pay for putting your demented husband in a place vere you'll both be protected."

"Francine, since ven does love conquer all? Zis is brain shrinkage. Stuart's brain is dying. Zis is not the man you married."

"But he is the man I married. He's the man I married with a shrinking brain. Just like when someone is drunk or psychotic, they are themselves drunk or psychotic. They don't become someone else."

"He's a shell of the person he used to be. You can't depend on him for safety. He's too *meshugeh*. Crazy. "

CAROLYN GEDULD

Francine suspected that Alex was right. But what if he wasn't? What if the old Stuart was inside the dying-brain Stuart, alive in his soul, kicking to get out of the neck hold he was in? What if she were the only one who could reach him? Who better after fifty years of marriage?

It was while she was having these thoughts that she came across an advertisement in the local online newspaper for an exhibit of four World War II posters at the university art museum. Immediately she phoned to ask about handicap parking, accessibility, and loanable wheelchairs. When all her requirements were satisfied, she planned the trip.

Stuart was a survivor of World War II. He was eight years old when the Nazis occupied the Netherlands. The Resistance hid him and Alex in a water tower until a family could be found to provide shelter. A Catholic couple agreed to informally adopt the Jewish boys and raise them in their own faith. When Liberation came, Stuart, now fifteen, and Alex, sixteen, were placed in a refugee camp while waiting to emigrate to America and reclaim their Jewish heritage.

Although Alex embraced his future as an American, Stuart remained obsessed with the war. He became an historian specializing in the Holocaust. By the time Francine married him, he had an appointment in the History Department in a university in Indiana and an apartment full of books about the Nazis. Until he retired and succumbed to dementia, he didn't outgrow his passion for the past.

If there was any way to bring him back, Francine thought, it might be by rekindling his life-long interest. The old Stuart would have been enthusiastic about the exhibit. Would brain-shrinking Stuart step aside to allow the old Stuart to emerge?

The outing to the museum followed the established procedure for getting him from point A to point B. Find him, change slippers to shoes, borrow a wheelchair, transport him to the car, drive to the destination. He seemed to be in a pleasant mood, a good sign. He was less likely to make a scene in the museum if he started off calmly. The ride to the museum went smoothly, as did the steps necessary to bring him from the parking space to the exhibit.

She took him straight to the gallery. The four posters were arranged in a row. The first was a stylized illustration of Nazi troops goose-stepping into Amsterdam. The second was an advertisement for Anne Frank's diary, with a large photo of the doomed girl in the center. The third was an offensive antisemitic poster stereotyping a Jewish individual. The fourth was a depiction of victorious Nazi soldiers stomping on a map of Holland.

Francine parked the wheelchair in front of the posters and fixed the brakes. Stuart seemed to look in the general direction of the posters. To her astonishment, he neither showed any excitement nor made any comment. The old Stuart would have shared his impressions, gesticulating and commenting on details, expressing outrage at the antisemitic poster and glee that in the end, the Nazi's suffered their comeuppance. Now, he was silent and without visible emotion.

THE EXHIBIT

Perhaps he couldn't see properly from the wheelchair or he needed new glasses. Francine couldn't accept what looked like indifference. There had to be another explanation. If the posters didn't awaken the old Stuart, what would? She would have wept if she weren't so astonished.

"Have you seen enough?" The old Stuart would linger. She would have had to pull him away before the museum closed or drag him to the museum cafe if it was time for a meal.

"I vant to go back," he said.

Another astonishment. He missed Winter Valley. How could anyone miss a nursing home? A "locked door" facility?

Francine realized that, actually, it had been a while since he said outings were escaping from an unsecured gate. She guessed he referred to the refugee camp gate, but she didn't know if he thought Winter Valley was the camp or if he was making a comparison. Lately, he had gone on the outings with her mechanically, without making any remarks. What she was doing to please him might not please him after all.

There was a sound like a high whistle. It took Francine a moment to grasp that it was coming from Stuart. She pushed the wheelchair more rapidly. They would have to take the elevator to reach the exit nearest handicap parking. By the time she pressed the down button, he had fallen asleep in his seat with his head hanging over the left side.

A frightening thought buzzed in her mind. If she couldn't awaken him, how would she get him into the car? And if she did rouse him, he might be disoriented and uncooperative. Perhaps she could ask a guard for help, if one materialized. By the time they reached the parking lot, she knew what to do—call Alex.

"You took him to the museum? Vat vere you thinking?"

The sun erupted from a cloud cover, casting a harsh light on the handicap parking area while Alex scolded.

"I was thinking Stuart would want to see the World War II poster exhibit."

"*Shlog dein kup en valt*. Bang your head against a vall."

Alex arrived, wrestled his brother into his car, and drove off to get the french fries. Francine sat for a few minutes in her car, her hands draped loosely on the steering wheel.

Stuart had been raised by a Catholic family for seven years—Lent, Palm Sunday, Easter, Mass every Wednesday and Sunday. Yet, he had never forgotten who he was. A Jewish boy, orphaned. He resumed Jewish practice the moment he left his Catholic family and spent most of the rest of his life studying victims of the Nazis. Now, he appeared to have forgotten those years, or, if he remembered, was longer interested.

If he forgot his childhood, who was she to him? "My vife?" Or the one who showed up every day to get french fries?

And who was he to her? Her husband? Or the shell, no longer known to her, who might hurt her unaware of who he was hurting and who lived unseen in the back of a nursing home?

The sun retreated behind the clouds. It occurred to her that even among the very elderly Holocaust survivors, living memories might be shrinking, leaving those slightly younger, like herself, holding second-hand memories, until those, too, shrank away. Then all that would be left would be history books.

Francine started the Honda and drove to McDonalds, where she ordered a large portion of french fries. She didn't save any for Stuart. That was revenge. On what? Her brow wrinkled. Revenge on the speck of Stuartness that still existed in the shell of the human being she now drove to join, her husband, who was unlikely to be thinking of her at all.

NON-FICTION

The shaving cream lid was never on

Mila Gizli

Whenever you got home, it was during the evening, right as the walking turtle aired on our television. The theme song blared on the old speakers, with the volume turned up higher and higher and higher. My shrill voice called after you repeatedly, "Papa! Papa! Come quick, it's Franklin!" You would rush over, on your good days. Most of the time, there was no response. Our routine was simple – you arrived home, stripped from your dirty work clothes, and hurried upstairs to shower. I would wait for you outside the bathroom door, and once you finished, you'd let me in with a towel hung around your waist. I would prop myself up on the bathroom counter, and the barber supplies would already be lined up in a row, waiting for me. We both knew our roles: you, pulling out the shaving cream and squirting it onto the shaving brush, and me, taking the handle and grabbing one of your arms for security, then rubbing the cream all over your face, watching it cover your cheeks with foam. Sometimes, it would still extend over to your mouth, even if you curled your lips in. I'd laugh and call you Santa Claus. Then you'd grab your Gillette razor, and I'd watch you turn on the faucet to rinse the blade every few strokes. Your wrist flicked as you tapped it onto the side of the sink, went back to the line of demarcation where you'd press your index thumb on the handle, and slowly shaved against the grain. Once you finished, you'd wash your face and pat dry with a towel. My lips would wait for you to turn your cheek and point to your clean-shaven skin. "Now you can kiss me," you'd say. There was a surge of pride that would rush through me, from the pit of my stomach and out my ears. I felt important. And I knew that if I kissed you, it was like marking my job well done. And kissed you, I did. For it was the only intimate moments that we shared, as kin, father and daughter, flesh and blood. Every other time, I'd find you sleeping in the guest bedroom while mama was left in the master—you had been snoring too loud again. I crept far behind you, fearful that any sudden movement would startle you away. By then, I had noticed how the mattress lay on the floor by your old suitcase full of Pierce Brosnan DVDs, and the way you smoked out on the backyard porch with an empty Pepsi in minus twenty degrees. Just like that lonely day when I drank your empty soda can full of ashes, you were nowhere to be found in our equally vacant home. With soot-coated fingers, I was going to absorb all your energy, suck it through like a straw. Like my awareness of death, birthed at an early age and caused by your nicotine addiction, it was as if I knew that my life with you was limited. If only I could have imagined the pain, and then the peace that came with the emotional distance from our mutual silence, years into early adulthood. Physical distance always came between us, but today it divides us in two; amidst this long, humming radio silence radiating across provincial lines, from Quebec, to you in Ontario, now.

02/11/19 – Over three months since we last spoke.

Lanternfly

K. P. Taylor

There is no love for the lanternfly. The profligate planthopper, the habitual hitchhiker who arrived, unbidden, from across the *tempest-tossed* sea. A shipping container stowaway, the color of a dirty old newspaper. The spotted lanternfly has landed in Pennsylvania and hopped…skipped…flitted to this picturesque amusement park. The first one I encounter loiters brazenly on the notice board that instructs visitors—somewhat ironically—to keep an eye out for the invasive pests.

They are everywhere. These drab insects, gray and muted pink, dappled with black spots like the errant drips of a fountain pen. An old woman crushes one between her withered fingers. Children laugh as they trample droves beneath their feet. And I marvel at the lanternfly's steadfast passivity, its complete apathy for remaining alive. It is as confident as a hornet and as idle as a pufferfish but lacks either creature's defensive ordinance. One alights on the hem of a young girl's dress. This same girl who has casually stomped several of its brethren is brought to the verge of tears—until her father flicks off the interloper and a sudden draft of warm air sends it soaring into the sky. Up up up like a kite, its bright crimson underwings blazing in the sunlight–as if it were lit from within. And I finally understand how the lanternfly earned its name.

The late summer breezes sweep up the dead like fallen leaves. The children trudge toward the park's exit, stooped and weary from their savagery, and when they travel home, rocked to sleep by the rhythm of the road, they dream of funnel cakes and roller coasters and lanternflies.
Lanternflies littering the ground like crumpled flags and broken kites. So much *wretched refuse*. So much destruction wrought. All the carnage we unleash when we are only granted permission.


Poetry.

The River and the Chalice

Joshua Sterlin

Here, we live on the rim
of the bowl of the world.
Parting the surface by day
and returning to the skirt for
summer sleep.

Though we use the sun-turned flesh
of these waters for homebound motion,
sliding ripples over its skin in skimming,
we crawl back to its lips, ever nightly,
sitting always with our own
pressed to the grail.

Pont D'Avignon

Dominique Ammendolea

Sweet brown eyes
Tanned luxurious skin
When I hear your name,
I think of a bridge
We used to dance in circles
Sur le pont
Gently, you twirled me
With your fragile, crumbling hands
As if we were on the D'Avignon
I wonder where the rest of it is
Perhaps you would know,
Or shall we ask Saint Antoine
To uncover its remains?
I see the dark bags beneath your eyes
And your tanned skin
Is beautifully wrinkled
I fear the bridge is no longer there,
Broken in bits,
Deep in its pond,
Forgotten
Where will we dance now?

Her Taste

Laura Mota

I pour myself some whiskey
but in my mouth the liquid becomes
peppermint tea.
won't you apologize?
I miss the bitterness and she can tell,
she can tell I will not ask for forgiveness
and she is chained since forgiveness is for who gives.

I'm in a disappearing process without due date.
if we had court members they would proclaim
it's a disgrace! it's a disgrace!
but we're alone, so she has to insure herself
that my every breath feels like a trial.
she transforms my drink into tea,
she doesn't allow me to flee her question
won't you apologize?

the dust against the sun
tells me it's always winter inside the house.
won't you apologize?
I sip the last drops from the glass.
outside, the trucks recall each hole of the street,
I want to see every lack of cement
but when I stand, my body is dizzy,
and my numb tongue tastes like peppermint.

I sit again. isn't it time for you to leave?
without due date
some things go both ways,
but it doesn't mean they are even.
she is the sun on a foggy day,
burning without admonishment
and without due date
what a lovely disgrace to meet you here.

Apples in September

Nadia Willard

Sometimes it's as simple as the juice of an apple
Dripping in the soft of your elbow, the chapel
Of the erotic nature of the forbidden fruit
The bite still in your jaw, taking root
And your teeth now wiped clean and young
Go on. Lick it with the tip of your tongue
The same polished feeling after a coke
It's the sugar consuming the enzymes.
Now, you have to get rid of the core
It's started to rot in your hand just in time
For the fruit flies already swimming in the can,
Waiting for another open wound of crisp white flesh
Peel off the white linen of the medusas' last repose
You are led to an elf-like orchard of pommes guarded by crows
And see, the greatest treasure of a short-lived spree
As you walk you hear the buzzing of the mourning bee,
You watch the deers on the lookout for close-reaching
sweets as the ogres are luring them to their traps for poaching
You want to save them, you really do
You are stuck knee deep in the mud like glue
And you can't move for the deers and you can't move for you
The ogres and the elves are eyeing your thighs and your chew
Of the apple. Within your reach only the branch of a tree
But every fruit is rotten to the core and there is nowhere now to be

Separate Stanzas

Louise Carson

Last night in sleep I pissed a chair
and it felt so sweet
I had to wake myself up
in case I pissed the bed.

I prayed for a death.
Her heart her heart her heart
wouldn't stop – then – mystery – did.
Murder – to give then take.

I have clever hands.
I see them in the mirror turning, turning.
And clever wrists. In fact
the whole machine is quite the thing.

I should really get outside,
walk the dog or run,
trim those branches away from the roof –
they'll rub all winter.

i hate kingston

simon tjh-banderob

i love winter
but this is the wrong kind of winter
some turncoat has guided the slush
through the passes and into my boots
my 10 peeling toes are the crew of a struck u-boat
for my feet, the war is finally over
lake ontario
drinks deeply from snowmelt pouring from the cobblestone
this inland sea is getting taller by the hour
antique capital
iron port
fortress prison
take my traitor's boots and isaac brock
to the bottom of
this 21st century ocean

My Childhood

Dmitry Blizniuk

My childhood was enormous: bigger than whales.
A huge underwater creature, a whole sunken Amsterdam,
with lots of sweets and toy shops.
Grown-ups looked at me and
only saw the periscope
with brown expressive eyes
on the surface of shirts, breakfasts, school copy-books.
Oh, my books, I could sink in them like in a dream,
a dream you could re-read, chewing sandwiches.
My childhood, love grown out of your magic castles,
and the giant is unable to squeeze into the house
where he used to storm in,
his eyes searching the kitchen for sweets.
A scorching wind of time
has swept through the dinosaur skeleton of what has passed,
and the arches of curved ribs are still ringing.
Something big used to live with me,
but it either got extinct or escaped to the deep ocean.
I can sometimes hear the voice of a sea angel –
it's heavy and polished like a rail,
it's unparalleled, beyond compare...

ABOVE AND BELOW

John Grey

The moon
is pitiless.

Why else
would the car
strike the curb?

Or the contractions
be a false alarm?

Her radiance
belittles me,
glowing, gloating,
on a panic of a drive
to the hospital,
a slow embarrassed crawl home.

Am I subjected
to the jealous whims
of barren satellites?

Or have I just caught
the sky
at a bad time?

The Cook

Immanuel Mifsud

Translated by Ruth Ward

While roasting lamb the cook mumbles,
his face flecked with grease.
He's been here roasting meat for some forty-five years;
and chopping onions in this tiny place
where those for whom Saturday might as well not exist,
at least from time to time, do come to eat this.
In the background, sounds of the muezzin praising God,
mingle with drum & bass and
a false falsetto voice trying hard to seduce instincts
the omnipotent has warned off.
Not even the heavy rain takes pity on us;
the sky is all cracked. Even the streets
echo the emptiness and dark of Saturday evenings
and of this particular September — closing a chapter,
only to start one anew.
But the new one, it seems, will look like last year's did too.
The cook with his face all greasy still grumbles.
If no one stops by today, he's sure tomorrow
someone will get hungry and call over,
asking him for the cheapest plate and a pint.
"Ah, the wheel goes round 'cause that's the only thing it does,
like those snow-white horses on the merry-go-round —
those with eyes wide open who've never seen a thing.
So, we go on and on, too ... just like we always did."
While roasting lamb the cook again grumbles.
Rain falls heavily still, and Saturday is soon over.

The Street Cleaner At Skopje's Main Square

Immanuel Mifsud

Translated by Ruth Ward

For the cleaner dressed in orange, this square
never changes. For him it will die like it was born,
permanent, ageless; just like it's been since the very first day
he took up broom and barrow; began sweeping away.
And he has never noticed that it grows old and sickly.
When he finally lifts his head, and goes home for some rest,
he thinks everything stays in place, just how it's been left.
He's never even noticed that as soon as he's finished,
the square's relieved, too, and moves toward the river
to forget faces of intruders who've approached it so rudely.
And with it, it carries all of the Republic's banners,
rinsing them clean in eddies and currents,
before immersing the monuments, one by one,
briskly purging them of history — a residue stubborn.

And the next day, the cleaner returns to his rounds,
dressed all in tangerine;
face nailed to the ground; carrying his broom again —
today like tomorrow.

Footloose on the Elk River

E. Samples

Butterfly gold coffee cups and saucers,
clear glass ashtrays on the green formica table.
We duck under secondhand smoke,
past Grandpa's red rocker and out the backdoor;
Fearlessly slide down the steep rocky bank,
skip barefoot over sun-warmed, coal-dotted sand;
Dive into the cold current, re-emerge breathless;
Shimmering with wild mountain mystic.

Watered Love

Yash Seyedbagheri

They play chaos on a loop
guns and alleged greatness growl from
nasal TVs, heads and mouths
caught in crossfire
a hibiscus hangs its head
its leafy flesh crinkly
buds linger in a linoleum graveyard
black with betrayal

someone forgot to water it
too busy buying Red Bulls and Diet Coke
paying bills and forgetting ghosts
who perished unmasked,
while the TV plays another loop
and someone dreams of greatness
still doesn't water
another hibiscus crinkles

someone laughs at the word love
he didn't water that either

Takotsubo

Daniel Tehrani

Arrhythmia
In the end, all that remains
Are three hearts and nine brains
Blood colour of the sea
Invisible to you but felt by me
Shortness of breath
A shelter approaches, no longer alone
My hearts press against their bars
I seek refuge in my new home
Brought to the surface with the stars
Angina
You expect a fight
But I trust you
The tunnel and the light
I never thought I'd get to
Fainting
Little did I know
You would come to show
Cardiogenic shock
That the world can't be trusted
That you

Heart failure


SA
VS

CONTRIBUTORS

Rue Baldry lives in Yorkshire, Great Britain. Her previous short stories have been published in journals such as Crossways, Litro, MIR Online, Ambit, Postbox, The Nottingham Review, Pif, The Incubator, The Mighty Line, The First Line, Mslexia, The Honest Ulsterman and The Broken City and shortlisted for the Reader Berlin and Odd Voice Out competitions. She has an MA in Creative Writing from Leeds University, was a 2015 Jerwood/Arvon mentee and the 2017 Bridge Awards Emerging Writer. Her novels have come second in the Yeovil, been long-listed for the Caledonian, Bridport and First Page prizes and shortlisted for the Flash 500 competition.

Effy Morris is a queer, gender-fluid person straddled somewhere between the rims of Canada and the United States. Currently a PhD student in the English department at Concordia, s/he/y is making, writing, breathing and walking.

Nadia Willard is a student and freelance writer living in Montreal. She was never the lead singer in a punk-band, so no need to inquire about that.

Merlin Simard is a bilingual (French/English), disabled, queer, trans-feminine performer, playwright, dramaturge and filmmaker originally from Tiohtiá:ke (Montreal) now based in Tkarón:to (Toronto). They are a graduate of Dawson College's Professional Theatre Program and are currently pursuing a BA in Liberal Arts from Queens University.

Based in Swansea, Wales, 57-year-old **Tiffany H. White** (LGBTQ) began writing fiction to combat lockdown dementia. Her work "Field Post 37560" received 2nd place in the International Festival of Human Rights Art of Creative Unity Award 2020.

Terry Sanville lives in San Luis Obispo, California with his artist-poet wife (his in-house editor) and two plump cats (his in-house critics). He writes full time, producing short stories, essays, and novels. His short stories have been accepted more than 400 times by journals, magazines, and anthologies including The Potomac Review, The Bryant Literary Review, and Shenandoah. He was nominated twice for Pushcart Prizes and once for inclusion in Best of the Net anthology. Terry is a retired urban planner and an accomplished jazz and blues guitarist – who once played with a symphony orchestra backing up jazz legend George Shearing.

Carolyn Geduld is a mental health professional in Bloomington, Indiana. Her fiction has appeared in numerous literary journals and anthologies. Her novel *Take Me Out The Back* has been published by Black Rose Writers in August, 2020.

Mila Gizli is a writer, poet and artist based in Montreal. Her words are a voice of expression for what she cannot frame in speech. She studies English Literature at Concordia University and spends her free time watching independent films, painting the nude form and listening to Sade.

CONTRIBUTORS

Born and raised in South Africa, **K.P. Taylor** came to the US at 29 to work at an amusement park for the summer and never left. His work has appeared in Gargoyle, Ginosko, The Blue Nib, Running Wild Anthology of Stories, Hobart, and others.

Joshua Sterlin is a PhD student at McGill University studying in the Leadership for the Ecozoic program. Previously, in his perpetual Israelite struggle with the academy, he found himself at various times at a wilderness school, managing property, and even running an antiques and collectibles business. In some way he has come to that necessary compromise, weaving in his love of the land, the skills and religion of the ancestors, and the poesis of the more-than-human. Since 2006 his poetry has been mixing the spirit and the flesh. When he's not doing all that, he's canoeing across the Quebec wilderness. His most recent publication is the chapbook "We, the Unextinct" published by Alfred Gustav Press.

Dominique Ammendolea is a Montreal writer working towards her Bachelors in English Literature at Concordia University. She manages her own book account (@how2book) on Instagram, where she has over 1.9k followers.

Laura Mota is a Brazilian writer, portrait photographer, and shameless experimentalist in other mediums based in Tiohtiá:ke/Montreal. She never owned an umbrella and often laughs out of nervousness. Her poems were published by High Shelf, Portal Magazine, and Dreamers Magazine. She is part of the 2020-21 curatorial team of Concordia University's Reading Series, Writers Read. Find her on Instagram @imnofiction

Louise Carson has published eleven books, two in 2020: *Dog Poems* (Aeolus House) her second poetry collection; and *The Cat Possessed* (Signature Editions) her fifth mystery. She also writes historical fiction. One such, *In Which: Book One of The Chronicles of Deasil Widdy*, was shortlisted by the Quebec Writers' Federation in 2019. With her daughter and pets, Louise lives in the countryside near Montreal.

simon tjh-banderob is a writer and performer from Nogojiawanong/Peterborough and an alumnus of Concordia University. He is a former poetry editor of Soliloquies Anthology and a former team member of Montreal's own Throw! Poetry Slam Team. simon has been inflicting his work on readers and audiences across Canada, Germany and the United States since 2011. He lives in Hemel Hempstead, UK, where he teaches Drama and English.

Dmitry Blizniuk is an author from Ukraine. His most recent poems have appeared in Poet Lore, The Pinch, Salamander, Willow Springs, Grub Street, Magma Poetry and many others. A Pushcart Prize nominee, he is also the author of *The Red Forest* (Fowlpox Press, 2018). He lives in Kharkov, Ukraine. Member of PEN America.

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John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in Soundings East, Dalhousie Review and Connecticut River Review. His latest book, *Leaves On Pages* is available through Amazon.

Immanuel Mifsud is a European Union Prize for Literature recipient whose work has been published throughout the UK, Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. Novelist, poet, playwright, and translator, Mifsud lectures in Maltese literature and literary theory at the University of Malta.

Ruth Ward is a writer and translator in the arts and literature. Her work has been read, performed, published, and further translated in the UK, Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. Her ties to Malta span more than a decade.

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E. Samples is an Appalachian native living in Southern Indiana, USA. Her writing has appeared in Lucent Dreaming, The Stillwater Review, Abridged, Variant Lit, Feral, Black Bough Poetry, Crêpe & Penn, Twist in Time Mag, and elsewhere. She is on twitter @ emilysamples

Yash Seyedbagheri is a graduate of Colorado State University's MFA program in fiction. His stories, "Soon," and "How To Be A Good Episcopalian," have been nominated for Pushcarts. Yash has also had work nominated for Best of the Net and The Best Small Fictions. A native of Idaho, Yash's work is forthcoming or has been published in The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts, Write City Magazine, and Ariel Chart, among others.

Daniel Tehrani is a Concordia student who enjoys writing, acting and directing in his spare time. When he's not busy entering in a screaming match with himself to scare the neighbours, he likes to play with his rubber ducky Lucifer in the sink.