

SUBMISSIONS

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PROSE: Stories should be under 2000 words

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- *Include a brief bio as you would like it to appear and in the third person. Include this both in body and in attachment.*
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NORTHERN SPRING

MARINA BLOKKER

Blue bowl turned over white blanket,
I walk high on the surface of a frozen flood,
underbrush submerged,
maze forgotten.

Dense forest now an open wood,
altered state before
shedding,
remembering.

Sunball radiates my head, red sweater,
frigid air creeps up my legs
as I walk,
caught between.

Soft lamps of glacial aqua glow,
deep in melted holes
of hard snow banks.

Scooped crystals, glass beads
flow over my fingers,
memories wash away.

Fir branches shift, shed soft sighs,
fan flutter of midnight blue jays
drip of icicles, hidden trickles,
faint music begins.

Wooden triangles peak through crust,
a seam of picket fences I follow
in blinding light
to find my way back.

LANGUAGE LAWS

KATHY MAGHER

When I first heard the word ‘separatist’ I was perfectly content, sitting on the gallery, sucking on a cherry Popsicle, gazing at the red/orange/yellow/green/blue/indigo and violet of a rainbow. Ma was reading out loud from the Quebec Chronicle Telegraph and the look on Da’s face as he said “Jaysus, them separatists” told me it wasn’t good.

Ma kept up on all the news. She read the Chronicle and snippets of stories from Le Soleil, the French newspaper. She listened to French radio and the television dial was set on channel 5 for the night news with Lloyd Robertson of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. During election returns, she could barely get supper ready. When John F. Kennedy was shot she kept running from the kitchen to the TV room, crying, wringing her hands and twisting the Kleenex she kept tucked in the cuff of her sleeve. She sat close to the TV, leaning in to it, her ear to the speaker, wiping her eyes and twirling her Kleenex into tissue people. The volume was more than I could stand, but I stayed nearby, trying to get some sense of what she was going through. The potatoes burnt, stuck to the bottom of the pot, and trails of her Kleenex people scattered the floor where shreds of her sorrow could be found for days to come.

We lived in the village that was tucked in a valley carved between the Chaudière and Etchemin rivers of Quebec. Frampton had been the chosen new township for many Irish immigrants and they spread out here, settling down, my great-great grandparents among them. That they came all the way from the emerald isle to the deep woods of Dorchester County, clearing tracks of land on which to live seems crazy to me. But here I am. Irish in a French Canadian town.

Other than that one October and how they called it a Crisis¹, the conflict we were caught up in escaped me. When I went to buy a pound of sandwich ham at the butcher shop, my mother would instruct, “ask for *une livre de jambon cuit*.” But what invariably came out was “*un livre de jambon cuit, s’il vous plaît*,” which, I learned later, meant ‘one book of cooked ham’.

Books and pounds were used interchangeably and no one seemed to care. It

was only after I met Alfred that I came to understand something entirely new about language.

Alfred was about the same age as me. He lived at the end of a long dirt road at the far edge of the village. His father refused to pay the taxes so they didn't bother paving the road and they didn't bother with street lamps either. I knew this because Pa talked about it at supper one night, "Naful thing that. Robbin' the Municipality blind, he'd be, if they kept up that road though." As a result, the field in front of Alfred's house was the absolute best place to see shooting stars, the Big and Little Dippers and all the other constellations for which I didn't have a name. Lying on my back, in the tall grass beside the road, I took it all in, and although Alfred's house was set way in from where I lay, I hadn't counted on the moon. One night, when the moon hung full and large and the light was clear, Alfred saw me. He watched me from his front gallery, then he walked down the road and met me halfway.

"*Que c'est que tu fais là ?*" he shouted, thinking out loud at what I was doing there.

"*Rien,*" nothing, I said under my breath.

"*Ab, une Irlandaise. Tu-parles-tu Français?*" he walked closer to me.

"*Oui,*" I spoke French in my head but rarely out loud. My accent revealed and exposed me like a deer found snacking on an apple pile in the middle of the woods. As I got up to go, Alfred said "*Grouille pas*" then he sat down beside me and put his head back and said "*Chris c'est beau.*" I almost thought for a second that he said "*Chris t'es beau,*" referring to me, but if that were so I should have heard '*belle*' for my being feminine. But it was the sky he stared at when he said those words, not me, so I relaxed a little, enough to stay.

"*C'est de valeur qu'on est ici,*" he said with a sadness that seemed to overwhelm. Too bad we're here is what that meant, but at the time, I really didn't know what he meant by it.

Alfred kept on talking and that's when I discovered I couldn't understand French without being in eye-shot of the person's lips. I knew how to read lips because of Ma. For my Ma sometimes hearing alone wasn't enough. She told me that hearing was all about seeing, listening and feeling. She looked straight at my lips when I spoke. It gave her that bit of extra information she needed to fill in

the gaps of my speech and I found myself doing it also whenever someone spoke to me.

“You have brother?” Alfred asked, turning his attention away from the heavens to me.

“*Oui*,” I said, hoping he’d continue in English.

“*C’est qui ton frère ?*”

“Bernard,” I said with my best French accent. And then Alfred went on and on about something. Something about Bernard. Bernard and his car.

“*Bernard, Lui y’a un beau char.*”

Bernard had a red Dodge Demon that was slick and mean, complete with a rear spoiler and a hood scoop. He was friends with everyone, so it was always a big boost to my self-image when I revealed him as my brother. But Alfred had lost me. I had no idea what he was talking about after he said ‘*char*’. He got wrapped up in his language and the speed at which he could reveal himself to me was beyond my ability and it was dark and I couldn’t see his lips moving and I was a big idiot for ever thinking I could carry on this way with Alfred. He had curly black hair that was long and wild and his body was slender and sleek. That summer I returned daily to that starry field and one night, as I stood to go and was slapping my ass of the grass and dirt left there, Alfred took my hand and slowly walked with me to the privacy of his shed. There, he ran his hands along the sides of me and when they got to my face, his hands held me, light and steady. My heart started pounding and my breathing got faster and I couldn’t believe I could be this close to someone and liking it somehow. I closed in on Alfred’s lips and took in all of their movements in one fell swoop. Alfred smelled of straw and smoke and Irish Spring soap. Our touching and breathing filled the shed like it was a universe unto itself. When it was over I turned and ran. He watched me as I picked up my bike and rode away. I spun around to get a last look at him. He stood there with his arms crossed over his chest, muscles bulging, his hair twirling in the wind. Neither of us said a word.

I went back to Alfred’s every night until Labour Day weekend but he never came out to see me again. Summer came to an end. Seeing him at school was impossible. French kids took school recess at different times than English kids. My best friend Joanie said that she heard he had quit school. “It takes guts to quit

school and count on yourself that way. Takes guts to grow your hair long the way he did,” she said to me.

On Christmas Eve I saw Alfred at Midnight Mass, and I know he saw me, but he didn't let on. I started to imagine what it would be like if he invited me to his *réveillon*. It would be fun to stay up all night eating *tourtière*, singing and dancing and opening gifts. Going to someone's *réveillon* meant something. It meant that you were serious.

On Saint Patrick's Day I wore a green ribbon and a 'Kiss Me I'm Irish' button to church. I was still wearing it in the evening when we'd all gathered in the school basement for the annual Saint Patrick's Day euchre party. I saw Alfred sitting with three other boys. Euchre is a four-player game with teams of two. Euchre is all about tricks and trumps and discarding suits, but I don't know what those words are in French. Joanie and I were partners and we won a mix-master. All through the game she kept telling me to stop gawking at Alfred so I told her she could keep it.

“Vive le Québec libre !”

I heard this the same night that Alfred's house went on fire. The FLQ manifesto² was being read over the TV when the siren blew. I watched with the others as Alfred's gallery split and burned, the fire truck arriving just before it spread to the inside. I looked for Alfred and saw him with a bunch of boys and girls I didn't know. It seemed they'd been smoking and fooling around. I was jealous. I tried listening in on them but couldn't understand a single word they said. Not one.

Alfred hung himself the year I turned sixteen. Suspended himself in his shed. My heart fell when I heard it was him. At least I think that's what my heart did, because that's exactly how it felt - heaviness where once there was lightness. At Alfred's funeral the priest spoke slowly and deliberately and to my surprise I could understand. He said that God works in mysterious ways and that no matter what, the people in Alfred's life, the people he touched, would remain connected to Alfred and that should give us strength. We are all connected, he said, *“par l'amour de Dieu”*.

The day after the funeral, Alfred's mother began deconstructing the shed. She planted a garden in its place and put a life-size statue of the Virgin Mary right in

the middle of it. In the wintertime, the snow comes up to Mary's neck.

"Why do you think he killed himself?" I asked Ma.

"He had a nervous breakdown," she said, returning to her ironing.

A nervous breakdown. I wondered if that meant all the nerves in your body broke or if it meant you lost your nerve. "Over what?" I persisted.

"Disconnected somehow." She paused. "The isolation; the winter; no prospects of work. God only knows," Ma said solemnly, "may be a whole slew of reasons. Ah, it's a sad thing, young lads doing away with themselves like that."

"Where's there's life there's hope," I said, wondering aloud about the meaning of life. Ma looked at me and said, "Where's the lavender soap? The lavender soap is in the medicine cabinet, Dear," steam rising from the iron as she made perfect pleats.

Life went on. For a while I still looked for Alfred. I imagined him appearing to me to tell me something of his reasons for killing himself, maybe something that had to do with us, but that would have been a bit much.

The politics of independence and language still captivated my mother's attention as much as it did before Alfred killed himself, but the fury it incited was a mystery to me. Like lip reading - seeing, listening and feeling - language is complex. But I figure, for that one moment when Alfred and I kissed - when it was all chemistry - we both, in some good way, counted less on words and more on *sentiment*. Like rainbows and valleys, and like the night sky and the dirt road to Alfred's house, there is no language for that kind of togetherness.

1. The October Crisis: October, 1970 British Trade Commissioner, James Cross, was kidnapped and Quebec Minister of Labour, Pierre Laporte, was killed by a group calling themselves the Front de Liberation du Québec.

2. The FLQ Manifesto was a set of demands issued by the Front de Liberation du Québec.

there are too many blue cars in this province.
too often beer commercials on television

are the last stop of wisdom. at the hands of the swarm,
came thus but another swarm. a plethora of bees.

if a murder of crows, why not just a pint, then, of poets?

most contemporary horror films
are but scenes of sudden surprise.

emus run wild through the streets of Edmonton.
someone just let them go.

if this is sinful excess, then let it be sinful.
let it be everything it need be then multiplied.

there were my fingers in that elevator on Whyte
that went nowhere until

we pushed back the button.

this is a true story.

love is a fading photograph
with newer pictures laid overtop.

there are too many blue cars in this province.
cars you can count on the fingers of one hand

coloured peach, lime, orange. the cupboards are bare.

I am caught up with the smooth skin
of an impossible country.

SNOW-WOMAN

MARY ROSE CALLAN

She slips her fingers into winter
hedgerows, each time her children offer
potted plants. Invisible under snow,
the brittle twigs can't pierce her skin
or fail to blossom when she enters
a laneway, barefoot, in younger sun,

far from hands that ease her
into a dressing gown. Sheltering
in hedgerows her children cannot see,
she melts in the glare of a red geranium.

FISHBOWL

CELESTE AUGÉ

I learnt to swim today.
Lived 82 years beside the lake,
82 years old and I never learnt
to swim before.
Never needed to.

Left the hospital, kicked my feet out behind.
Four days and four nights I watched
the water rise, tickle my corns,
my arthritis, my bad kidney.
Couldn't leave my streets.

I stayed when the kidney trays
started to float.
Submerged my head, got my hair wet,
so the water couldn't wet me first.
Swam back the way I started,
my home close and flesh again.

I learnt to swim today.
Counted the boats on my way out the bay.
Counted the friends I'd made.

A SHOUT FROM DOWNSTAIRS

SANDRA BUNTING

(A Year in Canada)

More often than not the call
was about something I'd done wrong,
the burning pot left on the stove
or wet snow tracked though the overheated
kitchen from the great outdoors.

It came at times from what I'd
neglected to do to get though winter:
shovel a path, chop ice from the steps,
buy red wine, make reservations
for a sunshine holiday in February.

Or, in summer, it could be an expression
of desperation at not finding insect repellent,
ravenous mosquitoes waiting to devour.
Clean socks, keys and glasses always missing,
and my mind that was here a minute ago.

The middle of last winter the call was a whisper,
a crow's warning, when you told me your bad news
and the world shrunk away from us.
On the city sidewalk we fought back tears,
passing people invisible, traffic noise blotted out.

But, in Spring, the call was a baby moose
stopping in our yard to enjoy the morning dew,
gangly yet proud in its own particular beauty
before it ambled towards woods to wade in water
in the gradual lightening of the day.

PARAPLUIE

STEPHEN SHIELDS

This gale blew all week, hurtling
rain between the old beech trunks,
at the slates of the abandoned lodge.
Now its bequest, sullen clouds.

She swings through the debris, pitched
upon the path. Bright crushed denims,
pink corduroy coat, a baby blue umbrella
tilted to the final drops.

Beneath, she hooks a barometer
switched to Change,
a sun that waxes in December.
I'll sit on her shoulder till May.

RETURN TO CROW LAKE

LOUISA HOWEROW

The sun's too thin to dry the beach,
efface the paw prints of the village dogs

left free to run. My brother who once believed
the lake was his, bounced an old Civic

across the frozen Crow, while I screamed
and drummed on the dashboard.

Now the ice has all but melted
into a sober afterthought of darkened water.

I pull my jacket drawstrings tighter,
head toward a scattering of shells, to find

the one small, perfect shape,
not to be tucked into a pocket, but flung

back to the Crow, past the remaining bergs,
that clog the shore like sand-crusting scows,

under a sky more white than blue,
unburdened by the migratory call of birds.

KOOTENAY LAKE

GREG SIMISON

This lake seldom surrenders its dead—
glacier fed, as cold in pockets as the North Atlantic,
only mild surprise would greet the arrival of an iceberg
in the bay at Kaslo one morning.

Clumsy fishermen, broken prospectors,
deck hands blown from sternwheelers, drift
perfectly preserved, between thousand-year old trees,
slowly sinking as they turn to stone,

eventually joining other legends—
trout, as long as liar can spread his arms,
sturgeon that swam with dinosaurs, and drowned mammoths;
prehistoric deadheads as fresh

as any lifted from permafrost.
Accept these as possible, then anything is possible—
living dragons, sasquatch roaming the steep shoreline,
ghost ships plying night waters.

“The stuff of poets and barflies,”
some scoff, insisting a sudden glimmer in the depths
is simply a lost fishing lure, or play of light on broken glass,
anything but a watch chain dangling

from an old-fashioned vest,
or the glint in a frozen eye. But no matter on which side
of the argument they fall, cold or superstition restrict swimmers
to the warmer shallows,

keep old, wiser fishermen
trolling only the lake’s thin skin—the deeps the preserve
of foolhardy night-lampers, unaware of what grim catches rise
to their small, bobbing moons.

BURNT SUGAR

JOHN S. BARKER

For as many years as he could remember, Eliot came here, to the Reifel Bird Sanctuary, in October, usually, sometimes in November, less often in the summer when it was dry. His mother had started him on those trips, taking him and his sister through the wandering, damp trails, in the quiet of a Sunday morning. Eliot imagined it was church for her. He didn't feel the same way about it. But he doubted two people ever felt the same way about things like this.

He walked, this particular day, towards a blind beside a pond. Hundreds of ducks waddled along, beside, behind, in front of his every step, and snow geese, too, who had learned that humans sometimes brought little bags of feed with them. But food was plentiful for all of them at this time of year, and none of them were particularly aggressive.

Today, like most days when he visited, the air was thick with cool, misty moisture, not a fog, but close to it, and the heavy clouds that sat over the river rolled along slowly, sometimes releasing a light shower. He walked along the path, as he had done hundreds of times before, and stepped inside, closing the door behind him, and sliding open the viewing slat. A heron stood on the pond's edge, staring across the water, then spread its wings, and with what seemed like impossible strokes, one, two, three, slow, powerful strokes, was airborne, barely above the surface of the water, then rose up, turned, and was gone from his view.

Ducks moved in. And snow geese. And bird after bird, species after species, coming and going as if in a parade, even more like a parade with the noise they made. This was a celebration. This was joy. This was life.

Burnt sugar.

He recognized the odour immediately, sniffed more deeply, but the scent eluded him. He was sure he'd smelled it, but it passed quickly. Quietly, he shut the viewing slat, and left the blind, and continued following the trail.

During the second world war, this river island sanctuary had been the home to an enormous sugar beet farm, and he imagined, fancifully, he knew, that what he'd registered in the blind was an echo from its past.

But he let that thought go as he walked the path, scanning the trees around

him, noticing a bald eagle perched in bare branches overhead, a barn owl, chickadees by the hundreds, and really, wasn't that the point? Wasn't that the impact of the whole thing? The astounding variety. Places like this were ecological lenses where we could glimpse, as if through a microscope, at a concentration of life, and reveal, to our otherwise blind macrovision, the intricate lacework of our own connection to it.

His mother died about twenty years earlier, but he thought of her every day still, because of the gifts she'd given him. But of those, the tender humility he possessed when he was in this place was the greatest. "This is what we are," she would say to him. "Not concrete, or technology. We are part of this great river's flow. What we do to it, we do to ourselves."

He sat on a bench, and looked across the wetlands, could hear the activity of the port not far south of him, could see, as he faced west, ships in the strait, could hear jets preparing to land at the airport, not far north of him, and knew, even if he could not feel it, there was something akin to hope in the mid-morning sun behind his back.

Burnt sugar.

He smelled it again. Where is that coming from? He even looked around, to see if there was something, somewhere, that could have created those faint waves of odour that stood out so distinctly from the mossy, damp earth at his feet. But there was nothing. Maybe, he thought, I'm having a stroke. Well, if that was what it was, he could accept it.

He felt a presence beside him, on the bench, and turned. There she was. He knew it couldn't be her, that she couldn't be there, but she was, as clearly as if he could touch her, hold her hand, kiss her cheek. She turned, too, and looked at him. "I know," she said. "We'd best be getting back. Daddy will want his lunch."

"What are you going to make?" he asked her.

"What would you like?"

The breeze picked up. He turned at the sound of the snow geese, to look at them, like hundreds of bobbing marshmallows. "Hot chocolate," he said, but she was gone.

She looked younger than he. But that wasn't possible, either, now was it? What would Norma say when he got back? Would he even tell her about it? Yes, he supposed he would, and he supposed she'd go on about how he'd better start

taking care of himself better, you don't want to end up like Dick – an old friend who suffered a heart attack last year and died a month later – because, after all, where would that leave her? So, he would have to choose his words wisely.

He stood up, and thought he heard a sound, which he was sure was coming from the river. Something small, and sad, and he thought he knew what it was. No, he knew what it was.

When he returned home, Norma said, "I was starting to wonder where you got to. Were you out looking for some new young woman to replace me?"

"No," he said. "Just window shopping."

She gave a knowing nod, and changed the subject. "The kids are coming by after lunch." The kids meant Samantha and her husband, Len, and the baby – Jean – who was just a few months old. "Don't go wandering off."

"I thought I might take a drive up to Grouse."

"Now why would you want to do that at this time of year?"

"It's not so bad. I think the sun is going to come out later."

"Well, save it for some other time."

He acquiesced, and sat at the kitchen table, picking up the Saturday edition of the local paper, turning pages, skimming headlines. Port expansion threatens estuary. Power lines threaten EMF radiation. Traffic and greenhouse gasses. Expansion of hothouses. Loss of farm land. All good news. Without looking up, he said, "I saw my mother today."

"What do you mean?" Norma said.

He described how he had been sitting on the bench, and how she appeared, clear as day, as she had been fifty years earlier. "I wasn't hallucinating," he added. But he knew she wouldn't believe him, and wished he'd kept his mouth shut. He'd never been able to do that around Norma, though. Well, now it was out. And she'd want him to get himself to the doctor on Monday, who would book some appointment at some specialist six months down the road, followed by a battery of tests that would only tell him they had to do more tests. And where was the sense in any of that? Besides, he was quite comfortable with seeing his mother there, because it made him feel that she was okay. That was a place she loved being.

Norma made him a tuna salad sandwich on whole wheat boring bread. Healthy. Not that he hadn't appreciated her effort and all, but sometimes, the

result just didn't seem worth the energy expended.

By mid-afternoon, the clouds were starting to break up a bit, and he could see that the sun was already starting its western descent. "I'm going for a walk," he said. "You want to come along?" Norma declined, and told him to be quick, because the kids were coming. I know about the damn kids, he felt like saying. I'm not an imbecile.

Outside, he could hear the whisper of the breeze through the high boughs of the pines and cedars overhead, and the cawing of the crows. The wind picked up a bit, and he felt a bit of a shiver as he picked up the pace, starting to feel his legs loosen up again. Within a couple of minutes, he was striding pretty hard (Norma would have added "for someone his age") and was starting to really enjoy the sensation of breathing the cool, moist air.

He heard his name being called. He stopped, turned, listened, heard only the breeze through the high boughs overhead, resumed his walk, heard his name again. Up ahead, he saw the shape of a person, standing close to a hedge, and walked closer. I should have worn my glasses, he thought. No, not a person. Just the light playing tricks on the foliage.

By the time he finished his walk, Sam and Len were there with Jean. He smiled at them his best big, fatherly smile, and took the baby from Sam, cradled her in his arms, the way he had done with Sam, and fawned over her shamelessly. Jean smiled back at him. Months old, bright eyed, trusting. She reached up to touch his face, tugged at his lip with tiny fingers. "The river is dying," she said. That startled him. But he could swear the words came straight from the baby's mouth. He told no one.

At night, finally in bed, the kids and baby gone, he lay there for a good long time in the dark, listening to the easy sounds of Norma's breathing beside him. The river dies, we die. We are part of this great river's flow. Maybe going to the doctor's not such a bad idea, he thought. In the morning, he would have to tell someone about the river. That was important.

He closed his eyes, and fell asleep, dreaming of his mother, and of birds, and of strong rivers laid to waste.

WOMAN RESISTING WIND

RONDA BROATCH

One more page left and the wind
presses her with questions, takes

an impression so as not to forget –
The wind always forgets.

She is a still-wet shell,
an expanding planet,

a child of three in this moment.
She stamps her foot,

sand scatters.
She flings fistfuls

of silica and fine stones.
New stars appear.

There are no wrong words
this afternoon, only brittle ones,

and words that sear, icy.
She breathes fire.

She imagines a week of silence,
remembers being held by God

in the palm of Her hand.
The wind wants to know

what was said.
The wind never forgets.

She cried this morning. I heard her. We were alone in the house — he had left for work by then — and I heard the scrape of wood on wood; a sound I'd know anywhere. And saw that she'd pulled out a kitchen chair to sit down. When I heard the sobs. True sobbing. Enough to sober up any *eavesdropping peeping-Tom*, even one unwitting as myself — ensconced beneath her kitchen sink. And for who knows how long! With only a J-pipe, to lean into, for comfort.

At the sound of those wretched cries of hers, I had lowered my eyes; for there is a reverence to such sorrow. I'd leaned back against the pipe, folding my arms to my chest in order to make myself as small as possible. It's getting tighter and tighter under here. This morning I woke up and counted five(!) yes, make that *five* bottles of dishwashing liquid sharing my limited quarters. Not to mention other things that get stuffed in here with impunity! Seemingly forgotten. Indefinitely, perhaps. The finite versus the infinite — is what I struggle with. More than dishwashing liquids. Or that jar of pink jewellery cleaner under here, the box of SOS soap pads, a glue-trap folded in a pyramid shape, three Yahrzeit candles in jelly glasses, some wooden kitchen matches stacked behind the pipe like firewood. Not that I'm overly thrilled about that glue-trap; it being so close by. The other day a mouse poked its head through the pipe hole in the floor. I don't feature living under here with anything remotely alive. Even for a little while.

I'm praying she won't phone the plumber today. After one of her crying bouts I have known her to clean feverishly, the vacuum noise running hours on end, the spraying of harsh chemicals — DRAIN-O down the pipe — *those* deadly fumes. Once I spent a good part of an afternoon wheezing, and not a tissue at hand! As for the plumber, well, frankly I don't like the guy. He drinks. Even wedged back behind the pipe, I've been able to smell it on his breath. She must like him well enough. Ralph. Using him time and again. Those beefy hands. The way he bangs on the pipe with his giant wrench! Cripes! Talk about a racket! I thought my head would split wide open. One of these days he's going to break the pipe, then what?

Not that he's any great shakes with her garbage disposal. Last time it clogged he advised her to remove it! Like that! Just have the disposal removed and disposed of. I wanted to talk so badly that day. I wanted to tell him: You know what, Mister, it's just not that simple.

She is certain her husband doesn't love her. *He has stopped loving me* is how I've heard her phrase it. Talking her stuff into the air. Honey, I long to tell her, you should only know. Lonely, she is. Whenever she comes in the kitchen, I get to see her. I peer through a hairline opening between the under-the-sink doors. Nice doors. Though not the type that shut air-tight. More by simply butting up against the frame. For this style cabinet door there can be advantages and disadvantages. No concerns about warping. Dust gets in, though. No matter how hard you keep things clean — dust. Trust me. My sinuses have been a whole lot worse since taking up residence under here.

She's exquisite, a blonde, natural. I have seen her naked and can vouch for this. Why just this morning she comes to the kitchen wearing absolutely nothing. My eyes, trained on the sliver of space between the doors feel extended out of their sockets! Right now from this vantage point I am able to see her feet quite easily, as well as up her legs to her tummy. Her legs both white *and* creamy. If I were her husband I would want to eat those legs for breakfast. It would be like eating boneless white vegetable stalks. Dammit! She's putting on a robe! But her toenails glisten a bright shiny red. So cheery! Above the sink a window creaks as she cranks it open. Birds are singing. A warm, balmy draft filters in, and down; finds its way to me. *Notice all this Spring loveliness* I'm trying to convey to her. She just starts crying again. *Find a better man to love you* I go on wishing her. She cries harder, leaving the kitchen. I have never felt so useless.

When I first came to this house I thought it would be a piece of cake. Tight quarters, sure. But I'd been in the navy. Months and months at sea, sharing a submarine with thousands of unwashed sailor-boys. The stench! Under this sink was supposed to be my *Re&R* (my rest and recuperation). Ha! Most nights he comes home around nine. Sometimes a lot later. The cuckoo strikes on the hour; even so I've always been fastidious about time. And she's nobody's fool! By the way, her given name is Fanny. Imagine, for these times, to be named Fanny! He calls her *Franny*. Guess he can't deal. If she were mine, I would call her Fanny with

pride. I would worship her.

She's sweet. Not overly so; not so much that you'd notice, more from deep inside. Once I watched her make the snow plow guy a cup of coffee. First I heard her filling the pot with water, then pouring fresh beans from a crackling bag into the coffee mill on the counter, grinding them. Soon enough the kitchen had gotten that real nice hot coffee smell. Feeling drowsy, I had leaned back into the pipe, licking my lips, remembering. My coffee reverie rudely interrupted by this pair of snowy jean legs and snow-crustrated boots that had taken the kitchen chair usually reserved for him: *Mr. Comes Home Late Every Night*. The snowy jean legs and snow-crustrated boots acting real polite, calling her Ma'am or something; maybe Miss. She was very polite back, asking how his snow plowing was coming along. I had held my breath. I heard him gulp down that hot black coffee (he'd refused milk and sugar) and I felt it going down, hot down the back of my own throat. Then the chair legs had scraped the wood floor. The rest of that week, Fanny didn't cry once.

I've had my share of women *and* men. Women are easier. Men are *lock and load*. These days it's a cliché to say men make wars. But men make wars. Her husband being a prime candidate, a true warrior. The sailor-boys weren't a whole lot better. When we finally dropped anchor off some island paradise, you had your basic rape, pillage and plunder; even if the majority of them paid for what they took. In the overall scheme, I'm still unsure of what I'm doing here. What I'm supposed to *accomplish* while in residence under this sink. One thing I do know. A woman named Fanny has appeared to me, her kitchen like the sky. Where everyone knows the angels live above everyone else.

To even think this causes a heaviness to settle in my chest, a heaving similar to tears. *Stop this baloney!* I tell myself. *Stop it at once! Two of you crying will never cut the mustard.*

Cuckoo Cuckoo Cuckoo Cuckoo Cuckoo Cuckoo Cuckoo Cuckoo Cuckoo Cuckoo — on the stroke of eleven Fanny comes into the kitchen. Her steps are labored. She has on thick sweat socks that droop around her ankles; socks too heavy for those delicate white feet. Shifting my position, attempting to elevate my own legs (they've been cramping lately) I rest them across two bottles of fallen dishwashing liquid. His socks! She has on his socks. A pathetic gesture.

An illusion, it will not make him closer I try conveying to Fanny. Her legs in red tights sort of collapse into a chair. His chair. Only taken up by *him*. Once by the snow plow guy; but that was like a mistake, a while ago, during winter. By February it had stopped snowing and we never saw him again. Fanny seems to get lonelier by the minute. *Put a little music on* I'm trying to tell her. *A little night music would do us both a world of good.* The only music in this house, the occasional sigh that comes out of Fanny. Another thing about this house: the phone seldom rings. I know they use those computers to communicate, but Jesus! Where's the harm in a little voice-to-voice now and again? If I could, I would rise up and sing to the skies! — if ever I am given the opportunity.

Surprise! Surprise! It's the man of the hour! She has actually called him that. Though I think I detect a hint of spunk behind all that sweetness and light. A bit of edge there. *Good for you, darling* I egg her on.

He's not particularly happy on this late evening. He talks and talks and talks about nothing. He says it's been raining hard for hours. He says he's very tired. The bottoms of his fancy suit pants have gotten wet; one has lost its sharp crease. He tells Fanny it will have to go into the cleaners first thing tomorrow. Why isn't he telling her how wonderful she is? How gorgeous? How he'd rather die in her arms than face another day? I settle back against the pipe, chilly myself, uncomfortable. *Please run the hot water* I'm begging Fanny. At least when the pipe is hot I can feel a little warmth, a small measure of comfort. Tonight is shaping up like my marriage to Helen of Troy — that being Troy, New York. Achtung! What winters! Rather than giving me her arms to settle into, some warm skin, Helen used to hand me a hot rock before snuffing out the candle. Small comfort indeed!

He wants meat. Red meat, rare. Steak. Or chops. Fanny says nothing in return. I can only imagine. Pushing up on my elbows, I stick my face closer to the space between the doors. Hoping against hope. Wishing my darndest for her. That I will hear the refrigerator opening, and before long the sizzle of broiling meat. She has nothing that will please him. Saying she hasn't shopped yet this week.

What the hell? he's saying. I hate using his name. I hate thinking he even has a name. *He'd eat your flesh if you offered it* I'm warning her. Here's the saddest thing. She'd let him. Fanny would offer herself on a plate. And he would take.

It's been like that, always, everywhere. *Now* being no worse than ever before.

Just looks worse. Certainly more crowded! There were sinks I've been under that were totally empty. Just me and the pipe. It wasn't a dream, either. It just wasn't the torture chamber it's evolved into today. *Take your beautiful wife out to dinner, you fuck!* my mind is screaming. Then Fanny at last might be happy. So goddamned unabashed happy. I'd be happy, too. I could finally get out of here! Run through a dripping forest. Touch leaves. Taste rain on my tongue.

It ain't gonna happen. He smacks her twice. Fanny dropping to the floor in a heap, crying worse than ever, that halo of yellow hair spread out around her. The cuckoo letting out twelve. And, me. Stuck here under this sink. Forever, maybe. While above the clouds, midnight passes.

FIRST TRAIN

PAT JOURDAN

Up early to catch that first train -
before light has entered the house
all is grey.

The blue-painted chest is colourless
even the entire pot of bright blue paint
doing its best in curtained gloom
cannot resurrect itself.

Nothing in the house has colour.

I reach out to the alarm clock,
slip out of the unlit house,
down drab pre-dawn streets.

By midday the haul of light draws everything in;
I stand in a distant gallery
soaking in Vermeer's glowing colours
harnessed by light's trim schedules
into the same world,
painted between sunrise and sunset.

THE LAST CORNCRAKE

LIAM AUNGIER

My mother still recalls the night your song
Held me from my sleep. That evening
You hid your plumage in the un-mowed grass
Of the high meadow just behind our house
Waiting for night to fall. Once in its dark
You called and called

and knew no answer, except

My cries, I in my first summer, taking fright
At your rough music. Everything else was silence.
No there can be no offspring of yours
To break my sleep, or to repeat your call.
So let me take it as a gift, as recompense
For that lost night of rest you wrestled from me:
Your corncrake music. I would ventriloquise
In hoarse iambic feet repeat your plaint
Speak your tongue, let your song live again.

WHERE THEY RESTED

SILE ENGLERT

Beside your old house:

A willow bathed in butterflies

Burning with the orange of a thousand migrating monarchs.

Right there in a little slice of memory

Nestled between your dog bloodied by the family car

And a man who called you sexy when you were twelve

That's you.

Right there.

You can feel it.

The boundless repetition

Wings now spread like thighs

Now pressed in prayer together

You know, if you dig,

Down

Under the lists of pretty names you kept

Deeper

Under the pictures you drew on rock with the charcoal of ruined bonfires

There you are.

The tree that stopped its weeping

Adorned with fluttering jewels

Your green smothered in black-speckled fire

SAMHAIN IN THE ISLANDS

PATRICIA BURKE BROGAN

At Ura-bon-e in the East
Mika's mother lights shrine-lanterns
of Mukae-bi fire
to guide her dead ancestors.
She prepares a feast,
toy-horses of aubergine and cucumber,
sings welcome-back songs.

As Samhain in the West,
Oisín and Niamh Cinn Óir
ride across time-oceans
from Tir na nÓg.

Drowned sailors return
from Higan
to celebrate Halloween
with the living.
Past and present merge,
chiaroscuro in charcoal.

When Ura-bon-e has passed,
Mika's mother burns her toy-horses,
lights Okuri-bi fire of farewell.
Niamh Cinn Óir rides eastwards,
Oisín remains with the dead.

According to Mika Funabashi's notes, Higan means Nirvana in Buddhist terminology, but has also a wider meaning, 'the other world' or 'the place to go'.

THE BOAT IN GALWAY CITY MUSEUM

SUE FAHY

She hangs from the second-floor ceiling by cable,
my Galway Hooker, made for the race.

Her sails lie slack in this windless place,
spars poised, gaff peak tipped to the sky.

What need has she now for tumblehome,
for weatherboards fashioned to serve,

to take the wave and toss it back
in snow-white spray where rainbows dash?

She speaks only now of wood gone dry,
of splintering cracks that open her sides.

Don't ask her for tales of the surge and swell,
she does not touch the water.

There would be less people in the last carriage because there'd be further to walk at the station. The top carriage would be packed. If he was late, or in a serious hurry, he'd take the top carriage. But he could see the breath going in up there. The windows would be all steamed up; on wet mornings it was impossible to know whether the streaming water was rain on the outside pane or condensation on the inside, without actually touching. Naturally he was always in a hurry. But a serious hurry he would have to be in before he'd take that top carriage. He was never late.

From the top door of the last carriage it would take him seventy-five to eighty strides along the platform to reach the turn, then eight more to the slope. He found walking closest to the train to be the path of least resistance, generally. Since he would be coming from the last carriage, everyone was usually out before he reached them. But they tended to be more fearful of falling down on the tracks than he was. Silly cowards; there was but a negligible gap between the edge of the platform and the plastic shell of the train. Also, he had calculated that he could walk that seventy-five to eighty paces faster than the station-master could clear the train for egress. So the gap would never widen, not during the critical moments at least. If he was to be unbalanced, bumped by some shoulder, he could jump and meet the outside surface of the train, or maybe an open door. His worst fate would be being taken on to the next station, five minutes up the line.

Once he got to the slope, his progress was, almost always, out of his control: he'd be surrendered to the confluence of exiting workers, always almost failing to not touch each other. He would hold his head high – people tend to sneeze towards the floor – and aim for an outside wall.

At the end of the slope stood a large brown pillar which was covered in small, uniform, peaked tiles. A mosaic depicting nothing. Tending to the inside of this, which would often be possible, he could move away from the dry-cleaners and key-cutting stall, into the hands of the first ticket-inspector, then out and away. That would be the idea, at least.

Despite these problems, he loved the train station. Not with a love such as train-spotters cultivate, knowing the names of engines and such, not that microscopic love. He loved its high ceilings and open plan, and the way the roof beams crossed each other an almost uncountable number of times. He loved to look up and imagine those other people weren't there, touching him. He loved it because it gave him the illusion of space.

All the people there were in the world! He, personally, had lost count. He liked to take to a corner of the station, when he had time, and monitor those passing, watching the inclines of their respective jaws and the angles of their aimless gazes. When he was certain that all were shuffling along, pondering their shoe-laces or merely leering straight ahead, he would seize himself, forcing his body into a rigid posture, allowing only his neck to loll, backwards, while he'd widen his eyelids and force his eyes to apprehend upwards towards the almost uncountable, utterly unreachable beams and lattices, thirty feet above his head, looking up as others looked away. This way he could provide himself with one free and individual action on which he could count; one which he knew was being performed by him and him alone. This way he could know he was unique.

Of course this action would not be open to him every morning, for it would be impossible to monitor all those around him during peak travel time. An unattainable goal. He would then walk along with the other workers.

As a child, so convinced was he of his own sanctity, he would stand for hours on his back porch door, calling birds, enticing cats, inviting foxes. From early dusk to night, he would stand doing impressions of sounds just heard from the bushes beyond the back step, images of Saint Francis in his mind, his ululations sung in the hope the creatures of the air and earth would eat from his palms and talk about God. But the birds never landed; the animals never came. He would never forgive himself this failure.

Still, the very fact of his having tried, or maybe more, his sense of guilt at having failed, was that not success enough? Each morning's trawl through the DART and its stations; were not the dreams he had of rising up, or looking up, were not these proof of his difference? Having conceived of a unique plan to enact a unique action, had he really to carry it out, or was the uniqueness of the concept proof enough? Proof of what? Of his own uniqueness.

All the people there were in the world, in the station! And yet, they could be grouped easily into increasingly incestuous categories: those in trousers – nowadays, that would be practically all possible elements; those still tired – half the set; those who believed commuting to be a form of exercise – half it again; those whose interest would be sparked by the offer to ‘borrow a wine critic’s taste-buds’ and would thus be set thinking about the weekend at least two days (Tuesday) than they had meant to (Thursday) – a quarter of the remainder; those who prefer to defecate at work – third it; those who change their shoes within five minutes of arrival – three-quarters the rest; those who pray, in some form, on their commute-work-out-to-work journey – unchanged.

Just shy of one-point-six percent of the total then are people wearing trousers, on their way to work briskly, despite fatigue, dreaming about wine at the weekend while in mild bowel discomfort, trying to decide whether they should change shoes and then shit, or vice-versa. How many people at rush hour? Hundreds. How many individuals then? None.

Or just the one perhaps; he who would observe; the man with the saint’s gaze, who knew all this without asking, who despite his location, unmoving and unmoved, would be set apart by the things he knew.

Set apart by whom? It was true, he could no longer be said to be a religious man, not in the strict sense. Like many, he believed in *something*, though for him, of course, it would have to be a *certain* something. A grand levelling force perhaps, a divine scorn of excess. He would look around his beloved station and in every corner of its illusion of floor space, would stand a pair of shoes, filled by a person whose job it was to provide resources to the company employing the person filling the next pair of shoes, and so on, without ever having recourse to fundamentals. It was true, he did not understand economics, but intuitively he would feel the absurdity of service. Where was the efficiency? The clarity of purpose?

Of course, levelling forces are not always divine. Indeed, one area in which humanity could be said to have surpassed even the most precise of deities is the self-grooming of the species. He would see it as the application of a kind of moral Ockham’s razor, cutting away all that was unnecessary about humanity. While implicitly against barbarism, he would have to admit, if only to himself, that

the ends of such cleansing often shone brightly in spite of the mess of the means, although, through tact, he would stop short of citing examples.

Still, on days when side-stepping and ceiling-gazing were beyond him, when the flood from that woman's umbrella had wet through to his thin business socks, or the shoulder of that man had presented its flakes of dry scalp into his face, and so on, he liked to imagine himself to be a kind of spy, a collaborator on-the-ground, compiling dossiers, narrating justifications, sending off lists of names via the Lamson-tubes of his mind, ciphering his bulletins in smiles and 'excuse-me's. He wore a grand disguise: they would never suspect a things as they were loaded back on the trains, or just under them; perhaps chloroformed or poisoned through noxious hair-products, or struck down with a mysterious, yet crucially non-contagious disease. Of course their families would weep, as families must. But there'd be nothing unique about the mourners: without individuals, there can be no individual loss.

He would think about the most recent of catastrophes: London, Madrid, New York. Thousands killed, thousands more tributes to the heroes that perished. But what heroes? How many? Surely there were no more heroes than there were child-molesters, adulterers, odorous women, odious bores? And if Dublin were to be added to that list? The gross loss of life would almost certainly be converted into a net gain when the gravitas of having suffered (not to mention tourism of the tragic) is factored into the equation. If every worker plodding wet and disrespectfully through his most beloved of train stations were to be wiped out, the losses would nullify themselves, since all these passengers were nothing but a law and service industry unto themselves. All these obstructions, these occupiers of space, could be removed, and all that would remain would be a picture of efficiency and room.

And yet, not all. For him to be removed also? Impossible. An unthinkable thought. Clearly he couldn't be one of those who deserved to go. Despite being amongst them at any given time, you'd give him that much. He may work, but he was no mere worker. He may take the train, but he could counter any suggestion that he was a passenger. He knew different. Walking did not make him pedestrian; he loathed the idea of such a misunderstanding. He wore the disguise, not the costume of others, and if he was in the way, he was only in the way of another,

never of himself.

He could feel his logic slip, but this he would attribute to the choler rising in him, brought on by the unspeakable offence of the suggestion that he was, in any way, run of the mill. His was a special case. This would have been proved earlier, although the particulars of this proof would of course evade him in this, his time of high passion and indignation. He would think about the arrogance of the bombster who would deign to blow up any station, any building that contained *him*. The thought of it! Such an act would merely betray a lack of precision in reconnaissance: a failure to adequately research a given target on the off-chance he might be inside. He would sneer at the irony of fundamentalists being incapable of fundamental reasoning, proud and sure that he was the first to notice the paradox.

He would find it incredible that feeble rationalities could be used as justification for anything; despicable that such grand gestures would be undone for want of eyes open to detail. This thought would hurry him faster through the teeming masses and rain, away from rubbing shoulders with a species capable of allowing any power to dribble down to such dullards. He would speed along the footpath towards work, uncomfortable in his wet trainers, change of shoes in his bag, encouraged by the knowledge that he alone was exempt from a fall into such stupidity.

LONDON RECORDS

TODD SWIFT

All day, transferring recordings
In their cumbersome new format,
From disc to the thin silver thing,

Made our rainy-day lover's flat
Madhouse but in a better way,
Scatter-brained across the kitchen –

Astral Weeks and the Ting Tings, too,
Making us fall in love, again,
With those albums that, far back, then

Had meaning, before getting lost,
As all sounds and languages do,
In the thick duties of silence –

What passes for silence outdoors,
Out in the world no one befriends,
Of work, and earning, endlessly,

Nothing as useless as dancing
To knock the cases to the floor,
Sending shining circles elsewhere –

No matter, in our heads we hear
Our songs, having a Bank Monday
Worth more than all Chelsea or Ken.

AN IDEAL PLACE

DERK WYNAND

In this cave, no one needs to drag
his shadow up the wall toward
an elusive sun, no allegorical marker
marks how far we keep falling
short of it.

Slow water dissolves
slow limestone and crystallizes
where once shellfish had worked
on their shells.

Time, wherever it was, has dropped out
of the space-time continuum.

Inconsolable bats flap their wings and vanish
back into the stalactite mysteries,
of which, in this timelessness,
we think we know a thing or two.

Faces. Men. Women. Totemic animals.
Armies marching on cities. Trumpets
raised. Towers rising. Walls collapsing.
The angelic. The earth. The imagined
taking root even as real roots drop
through nothing down to clear water.

We have forgotten almost everything
we have read of Plato and here
that does not trouble us. The small light
far ahead guides us well enough.

Up there, the protected species endure.
Snakes with their innocent poisons fall
from the palms onto the necks
of innocent creatures, in a natural cycle
into which we must easily fit.

WHERE DID YOU COME FROM?

GILLIAN SZE

I bloomed like jasmine blossoms
just beneath the thin blue skin of your forearms;

I am the word that you rub between two fingers
like how one rubs a penny:
to polish,
for luck,
to pocket and save for later;

I follow the semi-colon
just to emphasize you;

I am that splinter you've caught
locked in the skin of your palm;

I've plucked myself out
only to throw myself in those blinking Australian waters;

I glow in the dark;

I am that flush on your face
that flowers from your neck,
mapping out what I didn't say.

The perverse nature of some of the art in here annoys me. It's not that I'm anti-flesh – I love bare skin – but some of the nudes in this gallery are deliberately ugly. Take this one with the distended bum. Why did he (it's always a 'he') do that to her? It looks like half of her innards have become her outtards. There's no way the artist knew a woman with a bum like that, I just don't believe it.

I read a slogan once that went something like: 'Do women have to be naked to get into this gallery?'. Around here, the answer might be yes. Naked and nude are two different things, you know. Naked means unprotected or bare, stripped or destitute. Nude means unclothed, or being without the usual coverings. Think about it. There are a lot of nude ladies in this gallery, but are they really naked? I mean, are they actually *naked*, as opposed to nude? Being nude is a beautiful thing (supposedly), but to be naked is to be exposed. I said this to Cam but he said, 'Shut your face and give your arse a chance', which sounds rude, but you'd have to know him. He says things like that.

I don't look especially beautiful with no clothes on; I have a wodgey belly and I'm not pretty, but because I'm tall and a tadge overweight, I have shape: I look like a woman. That makes me happier than you could know. It makes Cam happy too – he likes to ponder my curves. I have friends (women) who have no boobs or hips, and they look as flat and boring as a Dutch landscape; I feel sorry for them.

The smells in this gallery – like most – are intoxicating: fresh paint, cedarwoody aftershave, washing powder, hot skin. Galleries turn me on – they are the perfect environment for tension of a sexual nature to erupt between lovers. Cam and I go to a gallery any time we need a little pep and then we run home and devour each other, good and proper. While we make love, I imagine one of the marble statue-men coming to life – Bacchus, for instance, with his grapey hair – and Cam thinks of one of those glow-skinned, reclining nudes. His nude throws off her shy shackles and opens herself to him. We talk openly about these things because we are that little bit *avant garde*.

We have come to the gallery today as part of The Art Experiment; we are tricky-tricksters, let loose on unsuspecting art lovers. We're going to enjoy this, oh yes we are. Cam and I are a team – just like in life – and his job is to watch my back in case any of the punters 'get physical', as Rodi puts it. Rodi's the organiser of The Art Experiment and she is striking to look at: very blonde and poised.

All the paintings we use have to be famous, that's the deal. Our first painting is *Pisces* by Man Ray, though I've always preferred its French title: *La Femme et son Poisson*. The woman and her fish are equals in the French version, just as they are in the painting, being the same size.

And so we begin.

I stand in front of *Pisces* and glance at the man beside me. He seems a perfect Art Experimentee: older, conservative, with maybe a renegade's heart pumping his blood.

'It's great, isn't it?' I say.

The man rocks his body. 'Mmmn.'

'Man Ray was a bit of a genius.'

'He was certainly versatile,' says The Man.

'I think this painting would look better over there, beside that one, don't you?' I point at de Chirico's *The Uncertainty of the Poet* – a portrait of a female bust with a bunch of bananas.

'Maybe. But I'm sure the curators placed it here for a reason.'

The Man is about to walk away, so I pull *Pisces* from the wall. (It's a replica, of course, I should state that, in case anyone is getting antsy.)

'Here, hold this,' I say. 'I'm going to put them together. See if I'm right.'

The Man steps back from me and looks around him. Cam is hovering nearby (my protector!) but there's no one else in this part of the gallery. I shove the Man Ray into The Man's hands and walk over to the de Chirico.

'Fuck,' says The Man, looking from Cam to me. 'Hey, you're not allowed to *do* this.'

It surprises me that he uses the F word so readily – he doesn't look the type.

'You're helping me,' I say. 'I want to see them together.'

The Man looks all around him again; he goes to lean the painting against the wall and dash off, but doesn't. I take the (pretend) Dali that hangs next to *The*

Uncertainty of the Poet off the wall and walk back towards him. Cam has disappeared all of a sudden and that makes my throat tighten.

‘Miss, this is not right. It’s unlawful. You’ll get into trouble,’ The Man says.

‘Take this.’ I grab *Pisces* and shove the Dali into his hands.

‘Miss, I...’

Where the hell is Cam gone? Why has he upped and left me here with this old geezer, who could be a rapist? I hang the Man Ray beside the de Chirico and draw a quick, fizzing breath. Well, what do you know? They look bloody perfect together. Super. The blue sky above the bust in *Poet* is a mirror of the curve of water under the fish in *Pisces*; the two nudes twist coyly away from one another; the mad combi of the bananas and the fish seems somehow to fit: it’s all sensuality and food and phallic-ness. The symmetry is uncanny and I suddenly understand that both paintings are about sex.

‘Amazing,’ The Man says, turning to smile at me. ‘You were right.’

‘You’re my accomplice now,’ I say.

The Man puts one arm around me and we stand gazing at the paintings. I can feel the heat of his hand on my waist; between my legs begins to swell. My face lifts to his – all on its own it feels like – and his face leans down to mine. We kiss: his tongue is liquid, firm. He pulls away and smiles again.

‘I’m surprised the alarms didn’t go off,’ The Man says.

‘We’d better go.’

‘Surrealism is all about the hidden self,’ The Man whispers, as we rush hand in hand through the connecting rooms to the exit. ‘It’s about obsession.’

‘I know.’

We pass a girl who drops a metallic stone on the floor; another girl flicking a yo-yo; a girl wearing red velour pumps; a girl with a pink scarf tied around her waist. We pass Cam, his long front flush to Rodi’s front; his hands tangled into her hair and his lips hovering over her head.

We make the front door before they see us, The Man and me, the *faux* Dali still in his fist.

**WHEN YOU RETURN, FIND ME
UNDER THE APPLE TREE**

ERIN RECCA

You will be put to the music
of thunder and sweeping grass,
the silent sky

and milk and honey.

Your eyes are deep and cold,
but the seasons move quickly.

The songs change with the wheel of the year,
and the sun will put fire
back into your eyes.

Graves are overcome by the hungry grass
and fences are uprooted.

Rider on the wheel

it is time to turn sun-wise.

Pumpkins are planted on rooftops
and roots demolished,
take the doors down

and smash the windows.

Wind and jasmine are at the threshold.

The robin is brooding
and giving birth in the rotted walls.

There is wine in the bathtub,
milk in the teapots.

When the sun shines,
honey flows free.

When there is laughter,
the dust germinates.

The day is done,
apples are red in the bedroom
and there is moss on the mattress.
We are lit by a pink moon
 and sheltered by outstretched branches.
When the rain comes
our clothes will be washed away
 and our hair will grow.

Wrapped in the dream of seeding you,
once I found on the ruffled sheets
the imprint of your menses

which lingered, mysteriously,
washing after washing...
But then how could I have known

you'd be so quickly taken
that I'd never clear your traces,
never staunch the flow?

CLEAR OUT

KEVIN HIGGINS

Today it all goes to the dumpster,
my old political furniture:
the broken bookcase called
nationalisation of the banks;
the three legged dining chair called
critical support for the P.L.O;
the fringed, pink lampshade called
theory of the permanent revolution;
the collapsed sofa-bed called
excuses we made for Robert Mugabe;
the retired toilet seat called
the trade union movement.
And the man who spent
twenty five years sitting on it?
At three thirty six pm
in the stripped living room
I forget him. As of now
he never existed.
I'm too busy watching
the delivery man unload
frightening, new furniture
from that van pulled up outside.

BEING ILL

KEVIN DONNELLY

The world is different when you are ill.
Things need effort, simple things:
Getting out of bed and everything
That flows from that: brushing
Your teeth; brushing your hair
If the illness hasn't claimed it.

And the ever insurmountable breakfast
Cereal, cooked or dry.
And death with tea or death without.
And dishes to do or not, the shame.
Distracted by all this bother,
I got up and dressed.
Went out for a coffee and a muffin.

Cranberry.

POETIC JUSTICE

MOYA RODDY

Fuckin' mad, Stacey thought, staring at the crowd gathered in front of the building opposite. Imagine goin' to hear fuckin' poetry this hour of the morning. A red banner blazed across the entrance: *Cuirt International Festival of Poetry and Literature*. 'Cuirt' had a fada. What did it mean? Something to do with courting? Isn't that what her granny told her they used to call kissing? Having a good court, except she pronounced it *curt*. Not that Stacey could imagine her granny kissing anyone. Or anyone kissing her granny. No one with eyesight anyway. Still she must have and more, otherwise her ma wouldn't be here. And if her ma wasn't here she wouldn't be standing outside a poxy courthouse waiting for her case to be called. Her granny shoulda kept her tongue to herself.

Stacey shook out a cigarette, lit up. Across the road it was mostly women, one girl her own age chatting up a gink with glasses. What kind of poetry do you like? Up me hole! Cunts, the lot of them. Going to a fuckin' poetry reading and she was up for stealing a bloody hair straightener. Top of the range though, she'd been hoping to sell it to her sister-in-law whose hair frizzed just from people sneezing. Would ye look at them, gab, gab, gab. No one this side was talkin. Except the barristers and solicitors and they were only talking to themselves.

I could be over there, I used to like poetry at school. When I went. Shite! I'll be feeling sorry for myself in a minute. Where the fuck is- She looked round, saw him coming, like a giant bat. Hair and spit flying.

'Stacey, sorry, I got caught up in Court 2. You won't be called before 12.30. I had a word with the magistrate.'

'Fuck! What am I supposed to do? Hang round this dump for another couple hours?'

'You could go into town, I suppose.' He looked at her sharply. 'If you do any shopping, remember to pay for it!'

Stacey gave him the finger. Not that she minded. Dennis was alright. Mostly.

'Fuck off.'

'Sorry. Better go. 12. 30. Here. Don't be late.'

'You sound like my mother.'

Stubbing out her fag, Stacey watched him rush back in, gown ballooning, documents slipping from his arms.

Asshole, she thought, going down the steps.

Opposite, people had begun to drift in. Stacey crossed the road towards them, sure everyone was watching her.

Relax, I'm not coming to steal your bags. Not today anyway.

Stupid cows, she liked the thought of putting them on edge.

From inside the building a buzzer sounded. Stacey hovered at the bottom of the steps, awkward.

'It'll be starting soon,' a woman nudged her.

'I'm not going in.'

'Might be good. It's free.'

Stacey shrugged.

The woman smiled, pushed in a door, disappeared. Stacey stared after her, stared back at the court, at the traffic lights changing to red.

Cheaper than a cup of coffee, Stacey decided, attaching herself to the tail end of the crowd, her eyes pinned to the ground. Besides, she might bump into Ryan up town. Cunt. Didn't even turn up this morning and she'd asked him. Told him anyway. Just as well. Great impression he'd make on the judge.

The warmth hit her as she slid into a seat near the exit. She could always do a runner if it was bollix. Around her, mouths opened and shut like the goldfish in her granny's flat. She heard a crackling then a voice erupted from a speaker. Stacey listened to the usual warnings about exits and entrances, about taking photos, turning off mobiles. When the announcement finished there was silence, a feeling of expectation. A man ambled onto the stage.

'You're welcome,' he beamed, 'to this years twenty-second annual Cuirt Festival ...'

Stacey's fingers tapped her thigh, the armrest. She felt trapped. Like in a cell.

She watched others clapping, the sound increasing as a woman appeared, slight, nervous looking. Like the woman that time. The one she'd robbed. Shook all over she had, handing over the purse. Stacey hadn't meant to scream at her. The way the woman reacted made her.

The woman on stage bowed, smiled. 'Thank you. Thank you. I'm delighted to be here.' The papers in her hand trembled.

Stacey wondered what it must be like to walk out on stage, have people clap you. All those eyes. She'd die. Like being in the school play, only worse. Not that she'd ever been in it. Never been asked.

The woman fumbled, began to read.

Fuck, she hasn't even learned it. Stacey checked to see if anyone minded but no one seemed to notice. Signs on, she hadn't gone to her school. Sister Agnes wouldn't stand for that. The poem was over in a flash. Only a few people clapped and Stacey felt sorry for the woman. When she began another poem Stacey realised she hadn't heard a word of the first. She couldn't listen. She wasn't in the mood.

Stacey closed her eyes, heavy from the heat. The woman's voice had a kind of rhythm or maybe the words had: Stacey felt her body relax, settle, the rush of blood slow. God, she was tired. Tired, fucking, tired. The voice grew fainter, vanished.

Stacey woke with a start. People were standing, putting on coats. Fuck, what time was it? She pulled out her mobile. Twelve twenty-five, she was alright.

Dennis was on the steps. He screwed up his eyebrows seeing her come out of the theatre.

'I didn't know you liked poetry?'

'Don't. It's crap. Are we going in?'

'We've got ten minutes. So it wasn't any good, the reading?'

'I fell asleep.'

He looked at her, the way guards did when they want you to incriminate yourself.

'OK, I used like it at school. One poem anyway. Can't remember, something about going into a wood.' She knew the words off by heart - Sister Agnes had

make sure of that - but she wasn't going to tell him.

'Was it Yeats? Song of the Wandering Aengus?'

'Dunno.'

"I went into a hazel wood, because a fire was in my head - "

'That's it,' Stacey interrupted. She didn't want him knowing it.

'What did you like about it?'

'Dunno. How I feel sometimes. There a fuckin' like fire in me head.'

She shouldn't be telling him this. Told him too much, already.

'What do you mean?'

'Nothin' just mouthin'. Listen, you gotta get me off. I can't go down. It'll kill my mother. You won't see me here again. Promise.'

'You said that last time. And there's your previous.'

'I didn't mean it before. I do, now. I got a boyfriend Ryan, we're gonna like, get a place together.'

'Tell me about the poem? The fire in your head.'

'What for? It's like nothin', like seeing red ..' She picked at the skin round her thumb.

'Is that what happens,' he pursued, 'before you take something, you see red?'

'Dunno. Sometimes. You'll get me off, won't ye?'

'I'll try. Behave yourself in there, no temper.'

Stacey listened to the proceedings, trying not to catch the judge's eye. Fuckin' woman magistrate, the worst. Feel they have to punish you.

Dennis sat down at the end of his plea, glanced over at her, stood up again.

'Might I request that this case be adjourned for reports?'

The magistrate sniffed. 'I don't see any need for reports. Young lady, you are a disgrace.'

'Your honour. I think ... My client gave me some new information .. which may have some bearing.

'What sort of information?'

'I wonder if we could adjourn for a psychiatric report. You see my client told me that before she commits a crime, that, as she put it, her head goes on fire, she sees red -'

‘What the fuck -’ Stacey screamed.

‘Young lady, one more sound out of you -’

‘That was fuckin’ private, dickhead! What you doing telling the whole fucking world!’ Stacey stared, her heart thumping, the room already turning.

The magistrate banged the table. ‘I warned you.’

‘I’m not fuckin’ mad, I’d rather go to fuckin’ prison.’

‘That’s precisely where you are going. I sentence Stacey O’Connor to one month. Leave to appeal is withheld.’

‘Bastard,’ Stacey shouted at Dennis as they led her away, ‘fuckin’ bastard.’

I'm sitting, as is now my custom, taking tea with the other woman. I don't like it, but there's nothing I can do. It's either that or howling at the moon, and the moon doesn't answer back and the black rain is too cold, so civil tea it is, with the other woman politely by my side and gentle conversations gradually weaving a new history that none of us could ever have anticipated.

There is a scene in the television programme *The lost world of Frieze-Green* when two 1920s girls are waltzing down the main street towards a fancy car. Peter and I always recorded programmes and watched them together at the weekend because he worked away in the week. We were watching it that Friday when I felt him turn rigid. I looked at him and he appeared to be in a daze.

"You alright?" I said. We'd already had a bottle of wine, which was usually enough to start relaxing him after the stresses of the week. I always saw it as my role to help him wind down.

"That's me," he said.

"What is?"

"That woman on the left." He paused the frame. A woman, very pretty, vaguely familiar, filled the screen. She had a shapeless hat and choppy hair. Her nose was big and her smile was broad.

"That's me," he repeated.

"What are you talking about?" He had turned completely white. His hand was gripping mine. He couldn't take his eyes from the frozen image of a long-dead woman.

"Marjory Compton," he said. "My name is Marjory Compton. I'm nineteen and this is my friend Valerie. We're going into town to buy stockings. There's a dance in the Town Hall later."

"Very funny."

"My God, Julie, it's like a door's opened and I've found everything I'd completely forgotten." He was starting to shake now. He gabbled a load of

nonsense about his 'family' – mother dead, father a drunk, servant called Emily – and their house in the country and how he was going to marry John de Coursey.

“Peter, stop it, you’re freaking me out.” The pause button’s five minute cut-out kicked in and the programme started up again. Dan Cruikshank’s breathy voice filled the room.

“The girl on the left is called Marjory Compton. Frieze-Green recorded in his diaries later that they were on their way to buy stockings to go to a dance that night.”

“Is this a fucking joke? Did you watch this in the week?”

“I didn’t need to. I’m telling you, Julie, this is me.”

I switched the video off and flounced into the kitchen.

The programme became one of those elephants in the room that start to destroy most relationships. Peter tried to talk about it but I wouldn’t let him. I thought silence cured, not cursed. It had been a symptom of stress, he was working too hard. We took a holiday in the Seychelles and he was fun, like the Peter I used to know ten years ago. I thought, when he stopped mentioning Marjory Compton, he had forgotten her. I forgot her, too.

I found him watching it one night when I was supposed to be out with the girls but I came home early because I had a headache. I’d taped over it straight after that night, so he must have found a copy from somewhere else. He was watching it in slow-motion, smiling. He had an expression of such serenity I almost felt tenderness for him, until the anger kicked in.

“Not this again!” I shouted.

“You don’t understand.”

“Too bloody right, I don’t.” It was a DVD he’d bought. I pulled it from the machine and waved it at him. “Peter, you are Peter Jenkins. You are not Marjory whatever her bloody name is. Do – you – understand?” I was aware that my anger was excessive, and ashamed that partly it was caused by jealousy of the dead woman in the film. It didn’t make any difference. “I never want to see this shit again, okay?”

He nodded but I knew he was lying.

I looked at his history in Internet Explorer. He had been searching for Marjory Compton everywhere. Family tree sites, local history groups in

Shropshire, chatrooms for family historians. I started to cry as I waded through it all. I felt Peter's hand on my shoulder. He handed me a portfolio.

"This is me," he said. "You have to understand." I opened it up and found pages and pages of notes, the history of Marjory Compton. There were pictures of her, one aged about three in a long, flowing gown, seated in a massive chair, and one from her teens, when she was smiling coyly at the camera. I had to admit, she did look like Peter.

"I don't like this any more than you do," he said. "But it's there." I nodded and left the room.

A few weeks later I brought him a cup of tea as he trawled the internet for more information. I left it by his side.

"Who are you?" he said. His voice was different, lilting. I looked into his eyes but he wasn't there. I started to cry.

"I'm your wife, but I don't think you know me yet," I said.

It was me who bought him his first dress. I knew he wanted it but couldn't ask. I took him into London and found a fancy dress shop a friend had recommended. We took a fine Edwardian dress, white, bustled, down to his feet. There were three linen blouses and we took those too. It was a month before we could find a suitable corset. His shoes were bespoke.

When he comes home on Fridays I take his hand silently and lead him to the bedroom. I undress him and wash him, clear away the grime of modern life. I help him into his corset and stockings and blouse and skirt. I sit him on the bed and slip his feet into his shoes. I hold his hand and kiss it.

"Thank you, Emily," he says. "Do you think Mr de Coursey will call today?"

"I'm sure he will, ma'am," I reply.

I go downstairs and prepare to make tea. The other woman follows me in her finery.

Biographical details

Biographical details

Celeste Augé has lived in Ireland since she was twelve years old. Her poems have appeared in a wide variety of Irish literary journals. Her first full collection, *The Essential Guide to Flight*, is forthcoming in 2009 from Salmon Poetry.

Liam Aungier's poems have appeared in *The Irish Times*, *Poetry Ireland Review* and *The SHOp*. His first book, *Apples in Winter* is published by Doghouse.

John Barker has been a freelance editor, a contributing editor to *Cross-Canada Writers Quarterly* (1980-1984) and a technical writer

Marina Blokker has a degree from the University of British Columbia, Canada and lives on the coast of B.C. She has poetry published in *Ascent: Aspirations* and has publications forthcoming in *Tale Spinners*, as well as *Tapestries* and *Shemom*, USA.

Ronda Broatch is the author of *Shedding Our Skins*, (Finishing Line Press, 2008), and *Some Other Eden*, (2005). Four-times Pushcart nominee, she is the recipient of a 2007 Artist Trust GAP Grant. Her work has appeared in numerous journals, in print and online, including *iota*, *Rain Dog*, *Versal*, *The Atlanta Review* and *Blackbird*.

Sandra Bunting grew up in Canada and now lives in Galway. Her poetry collection *Identified in Trees* was published in 2006 by Marram Press. Besides poetry, she writes fiction, works in journalism and is involved in printmaking, batik and silkpainting.

Patricia Burke Brogan is the author of the internationally acclaimed plays *Eclipsed* and *Stained Glass at Samhain*. Her collection of poems and etchings *Above the Waves Calligraphy* was published by Salmon. She received a 2005 Arts Council Bursary in Drama. Her monologue *Requiem of Love* had its World Premiere at the Town Hall Theatre, Galway in November 2005 prior to moving to the Pavilion Theatre, Dun Laoghaire. It was staged as part of Galway's Project '06 in July 2006. The script of the play is published by Wordsonthestreet and a poetry collection is forthcoming. www.wordsonthestreet.com.

Mary Rose Callan lives in Dublin. Her two collections of poetry are *The Mermaid's Head* (2001) and *Footfalls of Snow* (2005) both published by Bradshaw Books, Cork. Her work is included in a recent anthology of new Irish and Canadian poetry, *The Echoing Years*, and in *Thornfield*, an anthology of poems by The Thornfield Poets. Her third collection, *Learning to Swim*, is forthcoming by Bradshaw Books.

Tom Conoboy has been published in a variety of journals and ezines, including *Reflection's Edge*, *The Harrow* and *Transmission*.

Kevin Donnelly lives in Galway and is completing the novel, *Ash Wednesday*.

Sile Englert is a freelance writer, poet and artist from Southern Ontario, Canada. Her work has been published in several Canadian and American literary journals, including: *Room of One's Own*, *The Beltaine Papers* and *Misunderstandings Magazine*.

Sue Fahy is a writer and musician living in Ballinlerreen, Co Galway. She has been published in *An Dóirín* and *The Set Dancer* and been broadcast on RTE's *Sunday Miscellany*.

Kevin Higgins's first collection of poems *The Boy With No Face* was published by Salmon in February 2005. It was short-listed for the 2006 Strong Award for Best First Collection by an Irish Poet. His second collection, *Time Gentlemen, Please*, was published in March by Salmon. He won the 2003 Cúirt Festival Poetry Grand Slam; and was awarded a literary bursary by the Arts Council in 2005. His work is discussed in poet-critic Justin Quinn's Cambridge Introduction to Modern Irish Poetry, which was published in April.

Louisa Howerow has published short stories, creative non-fiction and poetry. Her poems have recently appeared in the Canadian journals, *FreeFall*, *Other Voices* and *Querty* and in the anthology, *Letters to the World* (Red Hen Press, Los Angeles, 2008). She has been nominated for two Canadian awards: *National Magazine* award for poetry and the *Journey Prize* for short story.

Pat Jourdan's latest collection of short stories is *Rainy Pavements*. This year she has also had a poetry collection, *The Cast-Iron Shore* published by Erbacce Press, and is included in their anthology *Liverpool Poets '08*.

Véronique La Perrière M. is a visual artist who works and lives in Montréal. She completed an MFA in 2006 at Université du Québec à Montréal. Her multidisciplinary practice includes photography, video, installation, prints and drawing. Her work has been shown in Canada, USA, Europe and Australia.

Rob McLennan lives in Ottawa, Canada. He is editor/publisher of Chaudiere Books, *Poetics.ca* (with Stephen Brockwell, *poetics.ca*) and *ottawater* (*ottawater.com*). He recently spent the 2007-8 academic year in Edmonton as Writer-In-Residence at the University of Alberta. A new poetry collection, *A Compact Of Words*, is forthcoming from Salmon Publishing. His blog is: robmcclennan.blogspot.com

Kathy Magher lives in Toronto. Her stories have been published in the *Writing Space Journal*, *ink magazine* and *Outskirts*, an anthology of short fiction. She studied at the Humber School for Writers and is currently working on a short-story collection.

Patrick Moran has been published in *The Irish Times*, *Cyphers*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *The Shop*, *Cork Literary Review*, *The Cúirt Journal*, the inaugural *Forward Anthology* (UK: 1993) and *Best of Irish Poetry 2007* (Ed. Maurice Riordan). In 1990 he was short-listed for the Hennessy/Sunday Tribune Poetry Award. His first collection, *The Stubble Fields*, was published by The Dedalus Press in 2001. A second collection is forthcoming from Salmon in 2008.

Nuala Ní Chonchúir was born in Dublin in 1970 and now lives in Co Galway. Two fiction collections *The Wind Across the Grass* (2004) and *To The World of Men, Welcome* (2005), were published by Arlen House. Her poetry collection, *Tattoo:Tatú* (Arlen House, 2007) was shortlisted for the 2008 Strong Award. www.nualanichonchuir.com

John Eamon O'Donovan is from Clarecastle, Ireland, but has lived less time there than elsewhere. He writes drama, prose-fiction and poetry

Erin Recca lives in Dublin and is attending University College Dublin. She is studying horticulture.

Stephen Shields lives in Athenry, Co Galway. His poetry has appeared in many journals in Ireland and the UK, including *The SHop*, *West 47/Cúirt Annual*, *Crannóg* and *AGENDA*.

Moya Roddy lives in Galway. Her work has been published by *Penguin*, *Serpents Tail*, *Attic Press*, *Arlen House*, *Irish Times*, *Ropes* and *Cúirt Journal* among others. She has written for TV, film, radio and stage and recently completed an MA in Writing at NUIG.

Greg Simison is a poet and playwright living in Vernon, British Columbia. He has published three volumes of poetry: *Disturbances*, Thistle-down Press, 1982; *The Possibilities Of Chinese Trout*, Okanagan College Press, 1986; and *What The Wound Remembers*, Borealis Press, 1993. He is currently working on a fourth collection of poems titled *Pickle Crow*.

Todd Swift is a Canadian poet, critic and lecturer, who now lives and works in London, England. He is a Visiting Writer at Kingston University, and Poet In Residence for Oxfam GB. His recent critical study of Anglo-Quebec poetry, *Language Acts*, co-edited with Jason Camlot, was a Finalist for the Gabrielle Roy Prize. His poems have appeared in *The Guardian*, *Magma*, *Poetry London*, *The Shop*, among others, and in the Canadian anthologies *The New Canon and Open Field*. He has had four collections of poems published by DC Books in Montreal, Canada. His New and Selected poems is due from Salmon, autumn 2008.

Gillian Sze was born and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She is the author of two previous collections of poetry, *This is the Colour I Love You Best* (2007) and *A Tender Invention* (2008). She resides in Montreal.

Susan Tepper's fiction, poetry and essays appear or are forthcoming in *American Letters & Commentary*, *Salt Hill*, *Boston Review*, *New Millennium Writings*, *Poetry Salzburg*, *Orbis* and numerous other journals. She has received four Pushcart Nominations. This winter CERVENA BARVA PRESS will publish her story collection. A chapbook of her poems *Blue Edge* was published in 2006 by that same press.

Derk Wynand is Professor Emeritus in the Dept. of Writing at the University of Victoria, B.C., and a former editor of *The Malahat Review*, has published ten collections of poetry, including *Dead Man's Float*, one of fiction, and five books translated from the German of H.C. Artmann and others. *Glass Voices lasinüinet*, his translation of poems by the German-Finnish poet, Dorothea Grünzweig, is due from by Buschek Books in the fall of 2008.

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